



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF DALIT STUDIES

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Status of Dalit Women in India

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Foreword

Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) has been amongst the first research organizations in India to focus exclusively on development concerns of the marginalized groups and socially excluded communities. Over the last six years, IIDS has carried out several studies on different aspects of social exclusion and discrimination of the historically marginalized social groups such as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Religious Minorities in India and other parts of the sub-continent. The Working Paper Series disseminates empirical findings of the ongoing research and conceptual development on issues pertaining to the forms and nature of social exclusion and discrimination. Some of our papers also critically examine inclusive policies for the marginalized social groups.

The working paper “Status of Dalit Women in India” draws insights on the status of Dalit women in India from a socio-economic perspective. This work is based on the meta-analysis of secondary data and literature. It provides a short overview of the caste structure of India and the status of women in a caste-embedded patriarchy. Demography data provides an insight into the Dalit population of India and their transition. Economic, Education and Political Participation data provides an understanding into the gap that exists between SC and upper caste women as well as SC men in terms of literacy, employment, educational attainment and access to jobs. The last chapter reveals how the Dalit women’s voice is being suppressed in the society through organised crimes and atrocities against the Dalit community where women are often used as the soft target.

The main aim of the work is to ignite questions regarding caste-embedded patriarchy in India and to show gender-caste intersectionality through socio-economic point of view. Finally, we hope that our Working Papers will be helpful to academics, students, activists, civil society organisations and policymaking bodies.

Sanghmitra S. Acharya
Director

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Introduction—Objectives and Focus

In all states across the globe, there are communities which continue to be marginalised and deprived of their rights due to their location within the society determined by class, race, ethnicity, gender and skin colour. In India, caste determines one's social status and Dalit or untouchables remain as one of the most oppressed and exploited community in the country. Though the constitution of India has enshrined several provisions for Dalit communities to safeguard and promote their socio-economic status in order to bring them back in the mainstream of population, the exclusionary mechanism of entrenched hierarchical social relations have brought differential outcome for the Dalit, especially the women. They have to bear the triple burden of deprivation in terms of caste, gender and poverty. Dalit women are forced to enter the labour market at a very early age in order to sustain their families. Traditionally allocated menial and stigmatised works are generally assigned to them. Better paid and dignified jobs continue to be out of reach for them through a systematic denial of rights to higher education, skill training, assets and other productive resources. This process of systematic denial further ensures their exclusion from socio-political scenario and keeps them restricted to the bottom of the society as invisible citizens.

In between societal hierarchy and patriarchy, Dalit women stand at the lower most strata of the society and bear multiple deprivations not only in terms of poverty and lack of autonomy, but also untouchability which keeps them miles away from the mainstream population. As a result of untouchability and caste hierarchy, Dalit women stand as the lowest achievers in the socio-economic development process of the country. 'Progress of any society should be measured in terms of the degree of progress which women have achieved' as once said by Dr.Ambedkar, will not be attained unless and until

the status of Dalit women improves in the society.

In India, women cannot be treated as a 'single' unit. Caste-gender intersectionality plays a crucial role in determining one's status in the society, and the status is maintained for the life-time through the process of 'caste-endogamy'.

In this backdrop, the work aims to provide a systematic understanding of the status of Dalit women in India through a comprehensive review of theoretical and empirical literature, analysis of secondary data and content from various relevant documents to depict the multiple deprivations of Dalit women in the broad framework of caste-gender intersectionality.

Focus of the Study:

1. The objectives of the paper are to present the economic and social status of Dalit women, to study the changes in their status with respect to important indicators of human development and to provide a policy direction for their empowerment.
2. This analysis also includes the demographic profile of Dalit women in terms of population growth, sex ratio, rural and urban percentage and concentration of Dalit in various Indian states. The socio-economic status of Dalit women has been examined in terms of work participation rate, unemployment rate, occupational pattern, wage earning, literacy level, educational level and enrolment in various types of institutions and the dropout rates and reasons for drop out.
3. An analysis of health status has been done in terms of maternal and child mortality, access to health care systems and so on. While comprehensively bringing out the evidence of atrocities on SCs and the prevalence of discrimination against them in various spheres of public life, the study suggests measures for their all-round uplift.

Based on the aim and focus of the study, the paper deals with the following objectives:

- To find out the main challenges or barriers of development for Dalit Women in India
- To identify the position of Dalit women in India in terms of caste-gender intersectionality

- To analyse the scope and effectiveness of present policies and legal safeguards

The first section of the paper provides a systematic review of literature which explains the concept of caste and gender in the Indian context. The next part of the literature review provides the history of Dalit movement and women movement in India with a special focus on systematic extermination of women issues from Dalit movement and caste issue from the Women movement. It creates a separate platform for Dalit women where caste-gender intersectionality got importance.

The second section depicts the status of the Dalit women in terms of demographic, socio-economic and health indicators. Data have been segregated into gender and social group-wise. It not only highlights the gender gap within Dalit community, but also analyses the gap between Dalit and upper caste women in terms of various socio-economic and health indicators. Demographic data helps in understanding the composition of Dalit community and their distribution across various Indian states. Thematic mapping with the help of ARC-GIS helps in understanding the regional disparity in terms of the status of Dalit women in India.

The third section reviews Dalit women's participation in politics and provides a data analysis on crimes and atrocities on Dalit women. The fourth section provides a review of government policies for the Dalit women and their effectiveness in the contemporary society.

Background Literature

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes are the two historically disadvantaged population groups recognised in the Indian Constitution. During the colonial time (since 1885), they were known as Depressed Classes who faced multiple deprivations on account of their low position in the hierarchy of the Hindu caste system. Since time immemorial, Indian society is divided into four castes. In this hierarchical system, Brahmin or priestly castes and Kshatriyas or warrior caste occupied two top most positions followed by Vaishyas or business community and Shudras or the service caste. Shudra or the service caste occupies the lower most position in the Indian caste hierarchy. Even among the Shudras, there are divisions and those who practise unclean

menial occupations like cleaning and scavenging were often considered as 'untouchables' by the upper castes. Untouchability was practised in India for a long time and due to untouchability, Dalit community emerged as socio-economically deprived community.

This degrading practice became the major target for the 19th and 20th century social reformers and they firmly declared that Caste system in India is a classic example of sacrilege of humanity under the veil of religion, malpractices in the name of scriptures and profligacy under the garb of rituals and convention. It not only exhibits a cruel stupidity of wicked discrimination parading as religion, but also pollutes the society with mutual hatred, violence and degenerates humanity at every step (Ambedkar, B.R.1951). This issue received strong political overtone during the 1930s and the depressed classes as well as religious minorities demanded separate electorates. This event led to Mahatma Gandhi's fast unto death and Poona Pact (1932) between Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Pundit Madan Mahon Malviya. According to the agreement, the demand of separate electorate was replaced by reserved constituency for the depressed classes and in this way, the scheduling of castes took place. In 1936, The Government of India, Scheduled Caste Order (Article 26 (i) describes the Scheduled Caste - "such castes, races or tribes, or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes, being castes, races, or tribes, or parts or groups which appear to His Majesty in Council, to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as 'the depressed classes', as His Majesty in Council may specify." Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief crusader against untouchability as well as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, moved two important resolutions. The first one was the prohibition of untouchability and the second was the proper scheduling of castes as well as tribes. Two statutory commissions (National Commission for Scheduled Castes and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes) were set up for successfully implementing the protective measures against SC and ST communities. In 2011, the Scheduled Caste population comprises 16.6 percent of the total Indian population and 1208 castes are included in the Scheduled Caste list (The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2012).

1 Scheduled Communities: A social Development profile of SC/ST's (Bihar, Jharkhand & W.B), cited in Chatterjee, S.K. Scheduled Castes in India Vol.1, New Delhi, GyanPrakashan, 1996. available at http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/serreport/ser/stdy_scmnty.pdf

Dalit and Scheduled Caste: Scheduled castes are often termed as Dalit. The term Dalit is extensively used in North India and its etymological root is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Dal’ which means broken or downtrodden. Punjabi dictionary “The Mahan Kosh” defines “Dalit as one who belongs to the lowest caste (HiniJati) and has been trampled down by or broken under the feet of the upper castes (UchiJati).”

The term was first used by Jotiba Phule in nineteenth century and Ambedkar defined the word in Bahiskrit Bharat: Dalithood is a kind of life condition which characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalit by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper caste Brahminical order²(Gopal Guru, 1998). In 1973, Dalit Panthar Movement incorporated the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Neo-Buddhists, working people, landless and poor peasantry, women and other socially, politically and marginalised people into the term ‘Dalit’ (Gopal Guru, 1998).

Caste-Patriarchy Nexus:

Dr. Ambedkar was the first social reformer who identified caste issue from a gender point of view and propagated that annihilation of caste is only possible through women empowerment. The tradition of caste endogamy maintains caste hierarchy in the society. Therefore, he encouraged women’s participation in political as well as social movements (Singariya, M.R 2014; Dhanvijay Vaishali; 2012; Gunjal 2012)). He was the chief architect of the Hindu Code Bill (1956), which legitimised divorce, inter-caste marriages and adaptation in the Indian society

Dalit Women Movement in India:

Though Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, has encouraged women across all social groups to be educated, mobilized and participate in public life to put an end of caste hierarchy (Zelliot, 2005), after the Independence, neither the women organisations nor Dalit activists addressed the caste and gender intersectionality (Vimal Thorat, 2001). Dalit movement became ‘masculinised’ and women activists started treating women as a homogenous group (Sharmila Rege, 1998, page: 42). “Women’s lives in India and the

2 Gopal Guru, ‘The Politics of Naming’ Seminar, No.471, Nov. 1998, p.16.

world over are circumscribed by what can be termed as five ‘P’s: Patriarchy, Productive resources access inadequacy, Poverty, Promotion advancement insufficiency and Powerlessness.” (HemaLataSwarup, 1993).

Since 1980 onwards, caste identity started playing a significant role in political arena, social sciences and feminist discourse. Two distinct paths of feminism were identified, the first one is upper caste or SAVARNA and the second one is Bahujanwadi or ASAVARNA feminism. The second one is also known as Phule-Ambedkarite feminism which believed in getting social justice through “Education, Organisation and Agitation” (Rege, Sharmila, 2010). In 1980s, young Dalit feminist formed Mahila Sansad in Mumbai and in mid-1990s, Dalit feminist literary movement was started by Samvadini Dalit StreeSahityaMaanch. In 1995’s, Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women accepted that indigenous women face some specific problems due to their social status. After 1995, many organisations like National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW), All India Dalit Women Forum and Maharashtra Dalit MahilaSangasthan etc. came up and started addressing the issues of women empowerment from socially marginalised communities. In 2003, Dalit Bahujan Mahila Vicharmanch publicly set aflame the Manu Smriti at the historic Chaitya bhumi (Rege, Sharmila, 2006) and revived Ambedkarite movement for women empowerment.

The Report entitled as ‘Human Rights and dignity of Dalit Women (2006)’ identifies specific issues regarding Dalit women which are neither addressed by Women activists nor addressed by the Dalit activists. These issues are the following:

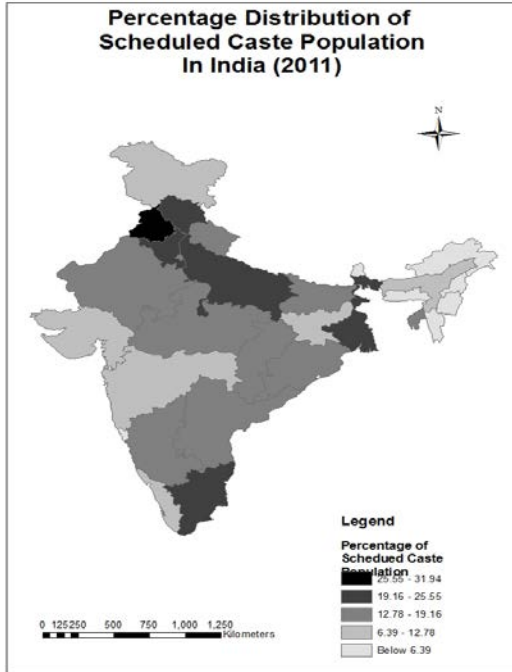
- a) Dalit women in South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) face systematic and structural discrimination thrice over as Dalit, as women and as poor.
- b) Caste system declares Dalit women as impure and untouchables. Most of them work as manual scavengers, landless agricultural labourers, domestic helpers and casual labourers. They are ill paid, illiterate and chronically suffer from various health problems.

- c) Dalit women earn for their families, but they have no control over their earnings. They have to do household chores along with other menial works and also face domestic violence.
- d) Due to the patriarchal notion of community honour residing within women, the dominant castes often abuse or punish Dalit women to teach the entire Dalit community a good lesson.
- e) Dalit women face abuses like verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape.
- f) Dalit women are vulnerable everywhere, both in public as well as private places. Violence against Dalit women not only take place within their households, but also in public places like temples, streets, fields, work place, schools and so on. Violence against Dalit women in public places is used as a means of social control.
- g) Dalit women are poorly represented in the Parliament. (Peter Jay Smith, 2008)

Demographic Profile

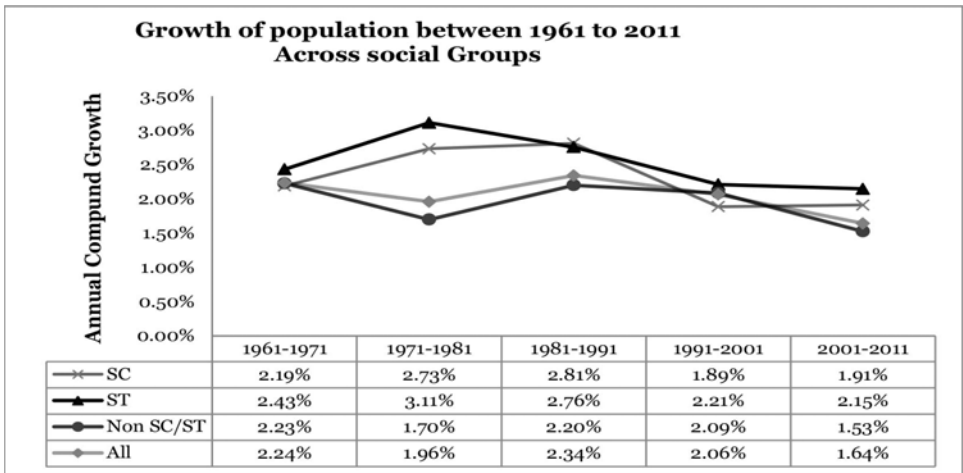
According to the 2011 Census, SC population constitutes 16.6 percent of the total Indian population. Punjab ranks first in the concentration of SC population (31.9%), followed by Himachal Pradesh (25.2%) and West Bengal (23.5%). Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have nearly 20 percent SC population to their total population. States which have SC population above 15 to 20 percent are Chandigarh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Delhi, Tripura, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Puducherry. Very low concentration of SC population is found in Goa, Lakshadweep, Andaman-Nicobar, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, North Eastern states except Assam and Tripura. Two major western states like Maharashtra and Gujarat record 11.8 and 6.7 percent SC population in 2011.

Map 1- Regional Distribution of SC Population in India (2011)



Source: Computed from Census 2011 data and created by the author

Graph1- Growth Rate.



Overall population of India records a steady decline over time. During 1961-71, it was 2.24 percent which slightly declined to 1.96 percent in 1971-81 and

again increased to 2.34 percent in 1981-91. After 1991, the overall population growth records a sharp decline. It has declined from 2.06 percent in 1991-2001 to 1.64 percent in 2001-11.

In 2011, SC population records a very high growth (1.91%) compared to the non-SC/ST population (1.53), and the highest growth is found among the STs (2.15%). Growth of SC population overtime shows that the population growth was always higher than the non-SC/ST population. During 1971-81 and 1981-91, the growth of SC was 2.73 and 2.81 percent, and it recorded a steady increase up to 1981-91 periods. Population growth of SC has declined after 1981-1991. It became 1.89 percent in 1991-2001 and now it is 1.91 percent (2001-2011). There is a slight increase in SC population in 2001-11.

Non-SC/ST population records a steady decline over period, and it remains always lower than the SC, ST and overall population. During 1961-71, non-SC/ST population had a growth rate of 2.23 percent. It declined to 1.70 percent in 1971-81, and slightly increased over two percent during 1981-1991 and again recorded a declining trend. Recently in 2001-11, it is 1.53 percent (0.38% lower than the SC population).

Population Pyramid

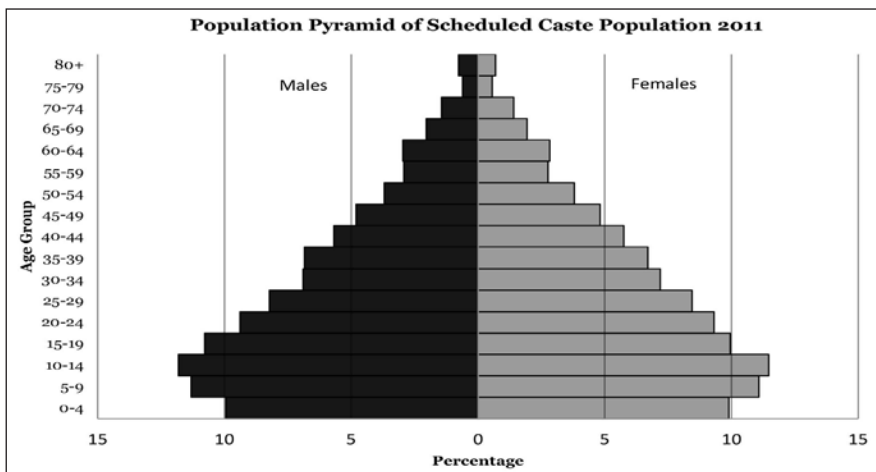
Population pyramids provide information on birth rate, death rate for each age-group, life expectancy and future growth of a community. Both Scheduled caste and Non-SC/ST population show a triangular shaped population pyramids with huge base and declining summit, but SC population pyramid records steep sides between 10-14 and 15-19 years of age group, denoting high death rates in between these two age groups. Sides are steeper in case of SC population pyramid as compared to the Non-SC/ST one.

Largest number of population is found in the age group of 10-14 years. Birth rate is declining for both the social groups because 0-4 year population is shrinking. However, in case of Non-SC/ST population, younger age groups (0-4; 10-14; 15-19 years) record more males than that of the females.

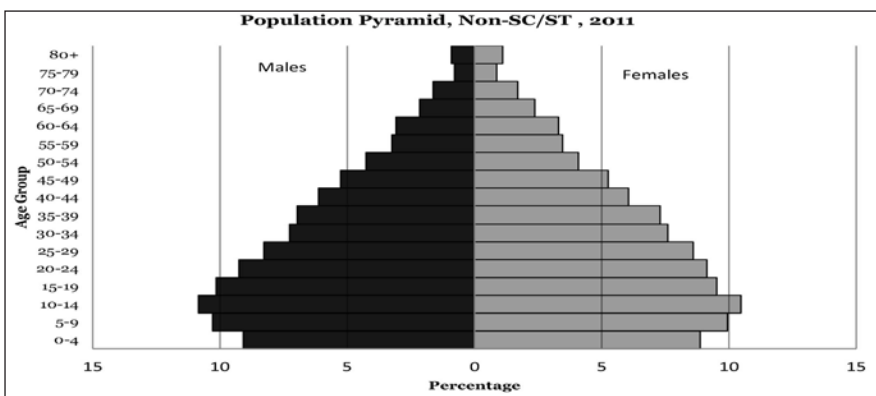
With the increasing height, the SC population pyramids become narrower at the top than the Non-SC/ST population pyramid. SC population records lower life expectancy, especially the women. More than 80 years old SC women are less than 1%, but the percentage is higher for Non-SC/ST population.

Therefore, the birth rate is declining for both SC and non-SC/ST groups, but in case of SC community, death rate is still higher in all age groups, especially in the age group of 10-14 years and the life expectancy is lower than the Non-SC/ST counterpart. Life expectancy is lower in case of SC women than non-SC/ST women. Thus, in spite of fall in fertility, demographic dividend is not applicable for SC population. This social group is still experiencing higher death rate in all age-sex groups.

Graph2- SC Population Pyramid



Graph 3 Non-SC/ST Population Pyramid



Sex Ratio

India records 943 overall sex ratio. The highest sex ratio is recorded among ST population (990), followed by SC (945) and non-SC/ST (937). Therefore, SC/ST population always records a better sex ratio than the non-SC/ST population.

The child sex ratio always remains very high among the SC population compared to the national average as well as Non-SC/ST population. It has increased steadily over time. In 1991, the child sex ratio of SC population was 921 compared to 927 in national average and 923 for Non-SC/ST population. It raised to 936 in 2001 which is higher than the national average (929) as well as Non-SC/ST population (923). It further increased to 945 in 2011 which is much higher than Non-SC/ST population (937) and national average (943).

In all age groups, SC/ST population always records better sex ratio than the non-SC/ST social group. However, the sex ratio of youth and adolescent population exhibits that the age group of 15-19 years records the lowest sex ratio for SC population (872) compared to the other social groups.

Table 1- Changes in Child Sex Ratio (1961-2011)

Years	SC	ST	Non SC/ST	All
1961	957	987	934	941
1971	966	989	960	963
1981	932	983	930	934
1991	921	972	923	927
2001	936	978	923	929
2011	945	990	937	943

Census of India: 1961 to 2011

Table 2- Sex Ratio of Adolescent and Youth Population (2011)

	SC	ST	Non-SC/ST	All
All Ages	945	990	937	943
10-14	917	957	905	912
15-19	872	957	878	884
20-24	937	1030	924	935
Adolescent (10-19)	895	957	892	898
Youth (15-24)	902	991	900	908

Source: Census of India 2011

Fertility:

Table 3- Changes in Fertility Rate (1992-93, 1998-99, and 2005-06)

	1992-93	1998-99	2005-06
SC	3.92	3.15	2.92
ST	3.55	3.06	3.12
OBC	NA	2.83	2.73
Others	3.30	2.66	2.35
Total	3.39	2.85	2.68

(Source: NFHS-1, NFHS-2, NFHS-3 Reports)

In 2005-06, SC population records a TFR of 2.92 which is very high compared to the Non-SC/ST/OBC population (2.35), but lower than the ST (3.12). TFR of SC population has been slightly decreased over time. It was 3.92 in 1992-93, and became 3.15 in 1998-99 and 2.92 in 2005-06. The Non-SC/ST/OBC population records a sharp decline. It was 3.30 in 1992-93, and became 2.66 in 1998-99 and 2.35 in 2005-06. Therefore, SC population has a very high TFR. It is higher than the national average (2.68) which indicates that the fertility rate is still very high among the SCs.

Mortality:

Table 4- Infant Mortality Rate (1992-93 to 2005-06):

	1992-93	1998-99	2005-06	Changes from 1992-93 to 1998-99	Changes from 1998-99 to 2005-06	Changes from 1992-93 to 2005-06
Scheduled Caste	107.3	83	66	-4.19%	-3.14%	-6.63%
Scheduled Tribe	90.5	84	62	-1.20%	-4.26%	-5.24%
OBC		76	57		-4.12%	
Others		61.8	49		-3.29%	
OBC+ Others	82.2	68.9	53	-2.90%	-3.74%	-6.14%
All India	86.3	73	57	-2.75%	-3.47%	-5.75%

source: NFHS1,2,3)

NFHS 1,2 and 3 data reveals that infant mortality rate (IMR) has declined for all social groups across the years. However, SC population always records the highest IMR compared to the other social groups. In 2005-06, IMR for SC population is 66 whereas others or Non-SC/ST/Obc record 49.

Child Mortality:

Table 5- Child Mortality Rate (1992-93 to 2005-06):

	1992-93	1998-99	2005-06	Changes from 1992-93 to 1998-99	Changes from 1998-99 to 2005-06	Changes from 1992-93 to 2005-06
Scheduled Caste	149.1	119.3	88.1	-3.65%	-4.24%	-7.24%
Scheduled Tribe	135.2	126.6	95.7	-1.09%	-3.92%	-4.82%
OBC		103.1	72.8		-4.85%	
Others		82.6	59.2		-4.65%	
OBC+ Others	111.5	92.9	66	-3.00%	-4.77%	-7.22%
All India	118.8	101.4	74.3	-2.60%	-4.35%	-6.48%

Child mortality always remains higher for SC social group compared to others.

In 2005-06, SC records 88.1 child mortality rate, and others (Non-SC/ST/OBC) records 59.2. Therefore, In India, demographic transition varies social group wise. SC population is still experiencing high fertility and mortality rates, especially for lower and upper most age groups. Life expectancy at birth is lower than the non-SC/ST social group and female life expectancy is lower than the male life expectancy. However, non-SC/ST social group records greater female life expectancy at birth. Sex ratio of SC population records high female deficit, especially in adolescent age group. Both SC and non-SC/ST population records low sex ratio for female population, and only ST social group records a balanced sex ratio for both male and female population.

Table 6 Child and Infant Mortality (2005-06)

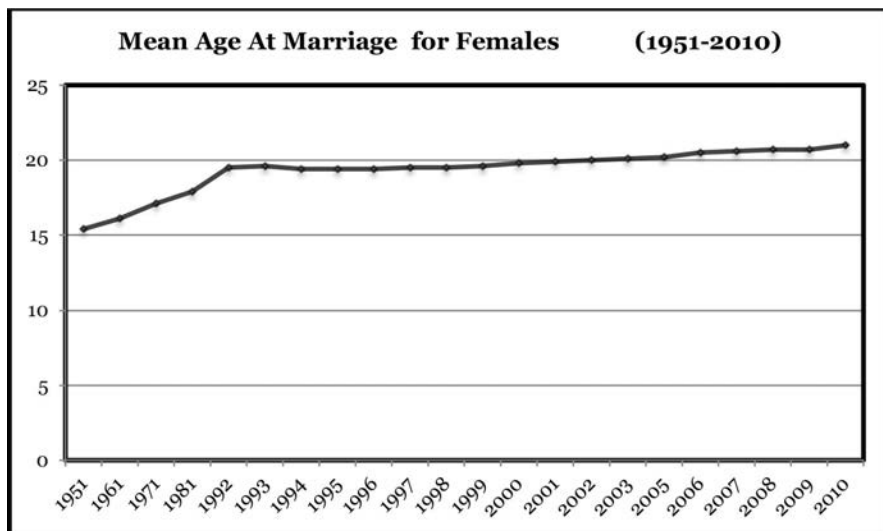
	SC	ST	OBC	Others	Total
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)	66.4	62.1	61.1	55.7	57.0
Neo-Natal Mortality Rate (NMR)	46.3	39.9	42.1	38.1	39.0
Child Mortality Rate (CMR)	23.2	35.8	18.7	13.3	18.4
Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR)	88.1	95.7	78.7	68.2	74.3

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2005-06

According to NFHS-3 data, SC records the highest IMR (66.4) followed by ST (62.1), OBC (61.1) and others (55.7). Neo-natal Mortality is also highest among SCs (46.3) and second highest for OBC (42.1). Child mortality and under five mortality rates are the highest among STs. All these rates are lowest for others (even lower than the total). Thus, marginalised communities not only record high fertility, but also record high infant and child mortality.

Marriage: In India, marriage is an important indicator to understand fertility due to the universality of marriage and social acceptance to marital fertility. Thus, marriage is a demographic as well as social indicator. The Mean Age at Marriage in 2010 is 21 for females and the legal minimum age for marriage is 18 years. However, a considerable number of women get married before 18 years and it varies across states. Over the year, India has recorded a slow but steady rise of Mean Age at Marriage. It was 15.4 years in 1951 and now it is 21.0 years.

Graph 4- Mean age at Marriage for Females (1951-2010)



Source: Cebus 1951, 61, 71, 81 and SRS data, 2014)

Census 2011 exhibits that 14 percent women and 4 percent men get married before the legal minimum age. This percentage varies across social groups and it has been found that SC/ST women are more prone to marriage before the legal age. In all social groups, 3 or 4 percent men get married before 18 years; but 14 to 16 percent women get married before this age.

Table 7- Percentage of Currently married Men and Women Under 18 years

India	Age Group	Male	Female
ALL	15	2.7	7.0
	16	3.2	8.6
	17	3.8	14.0
SC	15	2.6	6.8
	16	3.0	8.8
	17	3.6	15.0
ST	15	2.6	6.9
	16	3.4	9.3
	17	4.7	16.1

Source: Census 2011)

Regional Variation: Mean Age of Marriage is lowest in Rajasthan (17 years), Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh (17.5), but Mean age of Marriage is above 20 in Jammu and Kashmir (23), Kerala (22), Karnataka, Delhi, north-eastern states (Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland). In North India, the Mean age at Marriage is low for all women.

Social group wise segregation reveals that higher percentage of women from SC/ST social group get married before 18 years. Rajasthan, where lowest Mean age at marriage is recorded, reveals that 23 percent SC and 24 percent ST women get married before the age of 18. In Bihar, SC population records the highest number of currently married women under 18 year age group, and more than 30 percent SC women are married before the legal age of marriage. Some states with high mean age at marriage also record higher incidence of underage marriage for SC population. Mizoram records 33 percent currently married SC women in the age group of 17 years. North-Eastern states may have lower number of SC women, but underage marriage is higher among them. West Bengal and Jharkhand record 25 percent currently married women in the age group of 17 years. In terms of underage marriage, West Bengal stands next to Rajasthan, but in case of West Bengal, under age marriage is acute among SC women. Jammu and Kashmir records the highest Mean Age at Marriage (23), but ST population records 11 percent currently married women under the age group of 17 years.

Table 8 Percentage of currently married women below 18 years

	All	SC	ST
Jammu & Kashmir	6.2	6.4	11.7
Himachal Pradesh	5.4	6.6	6.1
Punjab	6.8	6.8	6.3
Chandigarh	5.5	5.0	0.0
Uttarakhand	6.2	7.3	0.0
Haryana	11.3	10.3	0.0
NCT Of Delhi	6.1	6.3	0.0
Rajasthan	22.7	23.0	23.7
Uttar Pradesh	11.9	12.9	19.7
Bihar	19.1	30.8	18.2
Sikkim	13.6	18.9	12.9
Arunachal Pradesh	11.5	0.0	10.6
Nagaland	7.9	0.0	7.2
Manipur	8.3	8.8	6.8

Mizoram	8.7	33.3	8.5
Tripura	19.7	20.4	19.0
Meghalaya	13.8	17.9	13.2
Assam	16.0	13.5	13.2
West Bengal	21.0	23.8	21.5
Jharkhand	18.9	25.3	16.3
Odisha	9.7	10.3	13.8
Chhattisgarh	7.9	8.4	8.4
Madhya Pradesh	14.5	16.5	18.2
Gujarat	15.1	10.3	17.6
Daman & Diu	9.8	9.3	8.2
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	16.9	6.9	18.4
Maharashtra	13.5	14.4	16.4
Andhra Pradesh	13.8	13.5	19.3
Karnataka	14.1	14.7	17.3
Goa	10.4	10.6	9.1
Lakshadweep	6.8	0.0	6.9
Kerala	8.8	6.9	8.6
Tamil Nadu	10.8	10.4	17.7
Puducherry	7.8	7.6	0.0
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	10.5	0.0	6.0

Source: Computed from Census 2011 data on currently married women in the age group of 15, 16 and 17 years)

Therefore, the overall Mean Age at Marriage cannot express the picture of child marriage or underage marriage properly. It not only varies across region, but also varies across social groups. States with high Mean Age at Marriage record the highest number of underage currently married women in SC community.

Health

Health condition of a social group is intricately interlinked with socio-economic condition. Thus, health condition differs across regions depending on the economic and social development of a place. In a caste-divided society like India, health condition varies across social groups, and this section provides a comparative analysis of Dalit and non-Dalit women's health outcomes and access to healthcare services. The previous section on demographic indicators has already highlighted the fact that Dalit population

is lagging behind in demographic transition. This social group records higher fertility and higher mortality in all age groups compared to the non-SC/ST population. Infant and child mortality rates are also very high, and the child and adolescent sex ratio of SC population is showing gradual reduction of female population in each age group. At the same time, a considerable number of SC women are facing underage marriage leading to adolescent pregnancy.

On the basis of these observations, Dalit women's health status has been analysed here.

Table 9: Body Mass Index, 1998-99, 2005-06

Caste	Underweight / Thin (> 18.5)	Normal (18.5- 24.9)	Overweight (25.0 & above)
BMI of Women across Social Groups in 1998-99			
Scheduled Caste	41.24	53.08	5.67
Scheduled Tribe	44.94	51.94	3.12
Other Backward Class	34.98	55.73	9.29
Others	30.28	54.73	14.99
All India	35.18	54.51	10.31
BMI of Women across Social Groups in 2005-06			
Scheduled Caste	39.79	51.47	8.75
Scheduled Tribe	45.52	51.30	3.18
Other Backward Class	34.94	53.54	11.52
Others	29.08	53.22	17.69
All India	34.76	52.86	12.37

Source: NFHS-2&3

ST records the worst BMI for women. Here, 45.52 percent women are underweight or thin and 39.79 percent SC women are thin or underweight. OBC records 34.94 percent and the general or upper castes have only 29.08 percent women under underweight. More than 50 percent women are of normal weight in each category, but OBC has 53.54 percent normal weight women. More than 17 percent women of others or higher caste group are overweight.

Prevalence of anaemia is also high among Indian women. More than 55.3 percent women have anaemia and among them, 38.6 percent have mild and 15 percent have moderate anaemia. Though anaemia is prevalent across all social groups, it is highest among the STs.

Table 10- Prevalence of anaemia in women (figures in percent)

	Anaemia status by haemoglobin level			
	Severe Anaemia	Mild (10.0 - 11.9 g/dl)	Moderate (7.0-9.9 g/ dl)	Any anaemia (< 12.0 g/ dl)
ST	2.4	44.8	21.3	68.5
SC	2.1	39.3	16.8	58.3
OBC	1.7	38.2	14.5	54.4
Others	1.5	37.0	12.9	51.3
Total	1.8	38.6	15.0	55.3

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2005-06) Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2010, Ministry of Tribal Affairs Statistics Division Government of India www.tribal.nic.in

Access to Health care Facilities:

Providing basic minimum healthcare facilities to all the citizens is one of the important aims of governance since 2000 when India signed the Millennium Development Goal to combat against poverty, hunger, gender inequality, illiteracy, malnutrition, maternal and child mortality. The United Nations Millennium Development Goal incorporates eight goals which all 191 UN member states have agreed to attempt to reach by the year 2015. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000, commits the world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. The main hurdle for India in achieving Millennium Development Goal is social group wise disparity in the access to healthcare facilities.

Dalit women's access to Maternal Health:

Table11- Change in Utilisation rate of ANC care across social groups for period 1992-93, 1998-99 and 2005-06 (Percentage visits less than 3 ANC visits):

	1992-93	1998-99	2005-06	1992-93 to 1998-99	1998-99 to 2005-06
Scheduled Caste	63.55	61.70	54.12	1.84	7.58
Scheduled Tribe	71.48	71.63	59.28	-0.15	12.35
Others	52.66	50.24	36.41	2.42	13.82
All India	55.87	55.49	47.61	0.38	7.87

Source: ALL INDIA: nfhs-1 (1992-93) NFHS - 2 (1998-99) and NFHS-3 (2005-06) IIPS, Mumbai

Percentage of women having less than 3 ANC visits has declined over time across all social groups. Among the SC population, the percentage was 63.55 percent in 1992-93, and it became 61.70 percent in 1998-99 and came down to 54.12 percent in 2005-06. The figure shows dramatic decrease in the last period at 7.58 percent. Among the STs, the percentage was 71.48 percent which remained almost unchanged or slightly increased in 1998-99 (71.63%) and declined in 2005-06, but the figure is still higher than any other social groups. More than 59 percent ST women have less than 3 ANC visits. Among the others or upper castes, this percentage has decreased drastically in the last period. Only 36.41 percent women take less than 3 ANC services. Therefore, ST and SC women are still lagging behind in the access to ANC services. Though in the last period, the rate of change is very high for ST and upper castes, it is relatively lower among the SC women (7.58). This indicates the fact that most of the SC women still cannot access three or more than 3 ANC cares.

Social group wise access to maternal and child health services reveals that ST (59.28%) and SC (54.12%) population records the highest percentage of women who have less than 3 ANC visits. OBC records only 50 percent and others or upper castes record 36.41 percent. Nearly 64 percent upper caste women visit 3 or more than 3 times to ANC centres. The difference between SC and the upper caste is very high (17.71%).

Post Natal Care:

Table 12- Access to Post-natal Care

	Scheduled Caste	Schedule Tribe	OBC	Others	Others (OBC+ Others)	All India
1998-99	28.36	18.7	33.6	33.8	33.70	31.21
2005-06	37.2	32.2	40.1	53.4	45.8	42.8

Source: ALL INDIA: NFHS - 2 (1998-99) and NFHS-3 (2005-06) IIPS, Mumbai

From NFHS-2 to 3, the percentage of women receiving Post-natal Care (PNC) after the delivery has increased from 31.21 to 42.8, but the social group wise data reveals that SC/ST population has lesser access to PNC compared to OBC and others. NFHS-3 data reveals the gap between SC/ST and non-SC/ST OBC women in accessing PNC. Less than 40 percent SC/ST woman can access PNC while more than 53 percent others can access it. In spite of the increasing trend in the access to PNC, SC/ST women are still lagging behind.

Table 13- Time of Receiving Post Natal Care after Delivery

Caste	Time of Receiving Post Natal Care after Delivery				
	Less than 4 hours	4 to 23 hours	1-2 days	3 to 41 days	No Post-natal Check up
Scheduled Caste	23.7	3.9	4.8	3.8	62.9
Scheduled Tribe	16.3	2.3	4.4	7.4	68.6
Other Backward Class	26.4	4.5	4.7	3.7	59.8
Others	34.5	7.0	6.1	3.3	47.4
All India	27.3	4.9	5.1	3.9	57.6

Source: NFHS-3 Report, IIPS, MumbaiIIPS, and Mumbai Table no: 8.19, page 217

More than 60 percent SC/ST women do not get Post-natal Check-up after the delivery of child. Only 24 percent women get it within four hours while 35 percent non-SC/ST/OBC women receive PNC within 4 hours of child birth.

Table 14- Type of Health Provider of Mother's First Post Natal Check-Up (2005-06):

Caste	Doctor	ANM/Nurse/Midwife	Other health personnel	Dai
SC	23.6	8.3	0.60	3.6
ST	14.2	8.5	1.80	5.6
OBC	28.2	8.2	0.50	2.4
Others	40.3	6.9	0.60	3.1
All India	29.5	7.9	0.7	3.1

Source: NFHS-3 Report, IIPS, MumbaiIIPS, and Mumbai Table no: 8.19, page 217

NFHS-3 data shows that in India, only 30 percent mothers receive PNC from doctors, 8 percent from nurses and 3 percent from Dai. Nearly 4 percent SC and 6 percent ST women still rely on Dai. Only 24 percent SC and 40 percent non-SC/ST/OBC women receive PNC from doctors.

Table 15- Institutional Delivery:

Caste	NFHS-1	NFHS-2	NFHS-3
SC	16.33	27.05	34.76
ST	9.38	17.06	19.34
OBC		36.61	40.21
Others	30.29	40.20	54.60
All India	26.48	34.23	41.49

Source: ALL INDIA: nfhs-1 (1992-93) NFHS - 2 (1998-99) and NFHS-3 (2005-06) IIPS, Mumbai

NFHS data reveals that institutional delivery in India increases from 26.48 percent in 1992-93 to 41.49 percent in 2005-06. However, access to institutional delivery varies across social groups. ST women record the least access to institutional delivery (19.34% in 2005-06) followed by SC (35%). OBC and non-SC/ST/OBC women have 40 and 54 percent access to institutional delivery. Thus, more than half of the non-Dalit women have access to institutional delivery while only 35 percent SC women accessed institutional delivery.

Decision making Power:

Table 16- Decision making on Health Care Services:

Caste	Decision Makers				
	Woman Alone	Respondent Jointly with Husband / Partner	Husband / Partner Alone	Someone Else	Other
SC	29.17	33.97	30.06	5.54	1.26
ST	24.68	35.02	35.77	4.09	0.45
OBC	24.63	35.24	30.13	8.44	1.55
Others	29.68	35.74	28.78	4.73	1.08
All India	27.14	35.15	30.13	6.33	1.25

Source: NFHS-3, 2005-06

Women do not have the power to make decision regarding their health issues. In more than 30 percent cases, husband alone takes decision and in 6 percent cases, someone else (probably in-laws) takes decisions. This picture is not the same across all social groups.

Summary: SC/ST population records higher infant and child mortality compared to the non-SC/ST social group. Women from these social groups have lesser access to ANC, PNC and institutional delivery. They also record poor BMI and high prevalence of anaemia.

Economic Status

Poverty: Incidence of poverty among the SCs has declined over time. It was 48.6 percent in 1993-94 which declined to 37.9 percent in 1999-2000 and further reduced to 30.3 percent in 2009-10. Others or upper castes record a better picture. Incidence of poverty among the upper caste was 30.7 in 1993-94 and it declined to 27.5 percent in 1999-2000 and in 2009-10, it was 17.7. SC population records very high incidence of poverty in 2009-10 compared

to the upper castes as well as higher than the national average (21.0 in 2009-10). Therefore, it can be said that though incidence of poverty has declined among the SCs, more than 30 percent SC are still poor. In 2011-12, incidence of poverty is more than 29% for SC population and 22 percent for all.

Table 17- Incidence of Poverty by Social Groups (%) (Expert Group Method)

Social Group	1993-94	1999-2000	2009-10	2011-12
SC	48.6	37.9	30.3	29.4
ST	49.6	43.8	32.5	43.0
Others	30.7	22.7	17.7	
All	35.9	27.5	21.0	22.0

Source: Thorat and Dube (2012), page 53, EPW, March 10, 2012 vol xlvii no 10

Work Participation:

Table 18- Changes in Male and Female WPR (1961-2011)

	Persons	Male	Female
1961	43	57.1	28
1971	32.9	52.5	11.9
1981	36.8	52.7	19.8
1991	37.5	51.6	22.3
2001	39.1	51.6	25.6
2011	39.79	53.26	25.51

Source: Computed from Census 1961 to 2011

Gender gap in work participation rate is striking in India. For male population, it always remained above 50 percent whereas for female population, it always remained below 30 percent. Female WPR records fluctuations. It was 28 in 1961 and sharply declined to 11.9 in 1971 and again increased to 19.8 in 1981. 1991 onwards, WPR is increasing and currently it is 25.51 in 2011.

Table 19- Social Group wise WPR (1961-2011)

	SC			ST			Non-SC/ST		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
1961	47.1	59.2	34.3	56.6	61.3	52	41	56.4	24.6
1971	35.9	52.9	17.4	39.7	55.9	20.7	30.4	49.6	10
1981	39.4	53.6	24.2	49.5	58.9	39.9	34.9	51.8	16.8
1991	39.2	51.5	26	49.3	54.7	43.7	35.8	51.2	19.1
2001	40.4	50.7	29.4	49	53.1	44.7	37.7	51.7	22.6
2011	40.87	52.75	28.3	48.71	53.9	43.49	38.53	53.3	22.76

(Source: Computed from Census 1961 to 2011)

Female WPR is the highest among ST women. It always remained above 40 percent among ST women and lowest among the non-SC/ST women. In 2011, it is 22.76% among the non-SC/ST women. SC women record lower WPR than ST women, but higher than the non-SC/ST women. In 2001, SC women's WPR was 29.4, and it slightly declined to 28.3% in 2011.

Wage:

Table 20- Wages per day of wage employee at current price of worker 15+ in 2009-10 (in Rs.)

	Male	Female	Total
ST	130.6	82.2	115.9
SC	145.5	90.0	132.2
OBC	178.9	109.8	162.9
Others	296.1	251.2	288.3
OBC+ Others	229.2	158.8	214.6
Total	199.8	130.2	184.1

Source: NSSO, 2009-10

SC female earns Rs. 90 per day on an average while upper caste females earn Rs. 251.2 per day and SC males earn RS. 145.5 per day. The wage gap between SC females and upper caste females is Rs. 161.2 per day and wage gap between SC males and upper caste male is Rs. 150.7. Therefore, in spite of high WPR, wage gap between SC and non-SC/ST females is large.

Table 21- Female Workers engaged in Tertiary Occupations (2001):

	ST Females	SC Females	Non-SC/ST Females
Legislators, Senior Officials And Managers	1.20	0.82	1.69
Professionals	3.40	2.60	7.34
Technicians And Associate Professionals	9.01	5.61	11.48
Clerks	2.25	1.39	4.05
Service Workers And Shop & Market Sales Workers	10.90	8.99	10.61
Skilled Agricultural And Fishery Workers	11.16	9.92	10.61
Craft And Related Trades Workers	19.47	26.15	24.56
Plant And Machine Operators And Assemblers	3.00	3.55	2.78
Elementary Occupations	28.58	31.00	16.32
Workers Not Classified By Occupations	11.04	9.96	10.55

Source: Census 2001

More than 31 percent SC and 28 percent ST female workers are engaged in elementary occupations. Only 2.6% SC women work as professionals

whereas 7.34 percent non-SC/ST women are professionals. In technicians and Associate Professions, more than 11 percent non-SC/ST women are found, but only 5.61 percent SC females are found there.

**Table 22- Social Group wise Unemployment Rate
(1993-94 to 2011-12)**

	1993-94			2004-05			2009-10			2011-12		
	Male	Fem- ale	Total	Male	Fem- ale	Total	Male	Fem- ale	Total	Male	Fem- ale	Total
ST	4.5	3.7	4.2	6.6	6.3	6.5	6.5	6.2	6.4	5.5	5.9	5.6
SC	8.2	8.1	8.2	11.7	12.0	11.8	8.6	9.7	8.9	7.4	7.2	7.3
OBC				7.3	9.1	7.8	5.7	8.5	6.4	5.0	6.4	5.3
OTHERS				6.3	8.5	6.8	4.6	6.8	5.0	4.3	6.6	4.8
OBC	5.5	6.3	5.7	6.9	8.9	7.4	5.2	7.9	5.8	4.7	6.5	5.1
+OTHERS												
Total	5.9	6.3	6.0	7.8	9.2	8.2	6.0	8.1	6.5	5.3	6.6	5.6

NSSO-50th Round, 61st 66th and 68th Round

Unemployment for SC women always remained near around 8 to 7. It increased in 2004-05 and 2009-10, but again declined in 2011-12. There is very little gender gap in unemployment for SC population. Unemployment rate for Non-SC/ST population is 6.6 in 2011-12 which is slightly lower than the SC females.

**Table 23- Unemployment rate by Educational qualification
(CDS of age 15+ in 2009-10)**

Edu level	Male						Female					
	ST	SC	OBC	Others	OBC+	Total	ST	SC	OBC	Others	OBC+	Total
Illiterate	4.8	6.8	5.6	4.8	5.3	5.7	5.3	8.2	6.0	2.7	5.2	5.9
Below primary	4.1	7.8	5.9	4.5	5.4	5.8	3.0	6.7	7.3	2.6	6.0	5.7
Primary	7.5	10.5	6.0	4.5	5.4	6.8	7.6	9.8	6.7	5.2	6.2	7.1
Middle	7.4	10.0	5.6	4.4	5.1	6.2	8.4	10.0	9.8	4.5	7.8	8.2
Secondary	9.6	8.5	4.3	3.5	3.9	4.9	8.8	12.3	13.1	8.9	11.1	11.1
Higher secondary	7.4	9.3	6.0	5.0	5.4	6.0	16.2	22.4	19.0	19.5	19.3	19.5
Diploma/ certificate	7.7	10.3	7.2	7.4	7.3	7.7	11.7	22.3	26.3	14.7	20.7	20.6
Graduate & above	11.3	8.8	7.4	5.3	6.0	6.4	20.3	29.3	23.2	12.0	16.0	17.4
Total	6.4	8.6	5.7	4.6	5.2	6.0	6.2	9.8	8.5	6.9	8.0	8.1

Source: NSSO 66th Round

Unemployment rate is the highest among SC women with Graduate and above degrees. Nearly 29 percent SC and 20.3 percent ST women with Graduate and above degrees are unemployed whereas 12 percent Non-SC/ST/OBC and 23.2 percent OBC women are found in this category.

Summary: Near around 30 percent SC population lives below the poverty line and the figure has not changed in the last few decades. Though SC women record relatively higher Work participation Rate compared to the non-SC/ST women, most of them are engaged in low paid elementary jobs and very few are found in professional or technical jobs. Wage gap between SC and non-SC/ST women is also very high. Unemployment rate is the highest among SC/ST women with graduate and above degrees.

Education

According to 2011 Census, the overall literacy rate of India is 73.8 percent with a male literacy of 82.1 percent and female literacy of 65.5 percent. The census provided a positive indication that growth in female literacy rates (11.8%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (6.9%) in the 2001–2011 decadal period, which means that the gender gap appears to be narrowing.

Table 24- Trend in Literacy Rate (1961-2011)

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
ALL	28.31	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.83	74.04
SC	10.27	14.67	21.38	37.41	34.76	66.1
ST	8.53	11.3	16.35	29.6	47.1	59
Non SC/ST	27.91	33.8	41.3	57.69	68.81	76.1

Source: Computed from Census 1961 to 2011 data

SC and ST record 66 and 59 percent literacy rates while Non-SC/ST population records 76 percent literacy rate. Therefore, there is a high gap in literacy rates among the three social groups.

**Table 25- Literacy Rate across Social Groups, 2011
(Above 7 years of Population)**

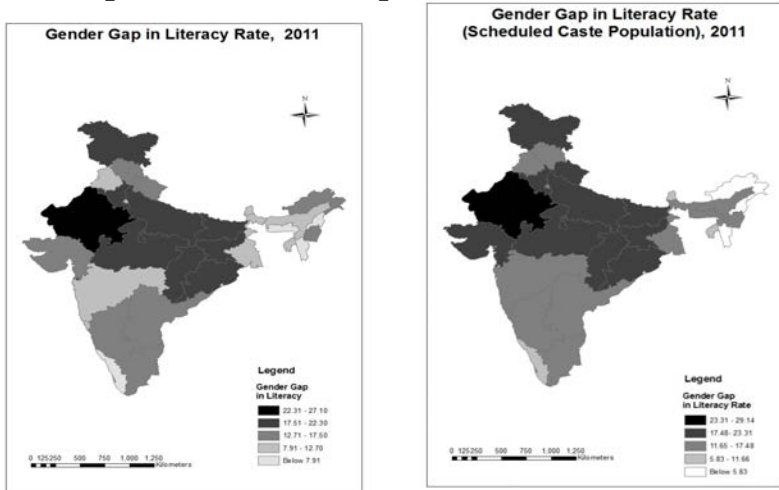
	SC			ST			NON-SC/ST		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
India	56.49	64.21	48.33	49.52	57.37	41.58	66.10	72.38	59.39

Source: Computed from Census 2011

Gender gap in literacy is remarkable across all social groups. SC population

reveals 48.33 percent female and 64.21 percent male literacy rates. ST population records 57.37 percent male and 41.58 percent female literacy rates, and non-SC/ST population records 72 percent male and 59 percent female literacy rates.

Map no: 2- Gender Gap in Literacy Rates (2011)



Source: Computed from 2011 Census data and made by the author

Gender gap in literacy rate is highest in Rajasthan as well as the entire north India. it is same across all social groups.

Table 26- Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), 2009-10

	All			SC			ST		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Primary (I-V)	115.6	115.4	115.5	127.8	128.7	128.3	139.7	137.4	138.6
Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	84.5	78.3	81.5	90.5	86.6	88.6	87.8	78.8	83.4
Elementary (I-VIII)	103.8	101.1	102.5	113.9	113.0	113.5	121.1	116.4	118.9
Secondary (IX-X)	66.7	58.5	62.7	71.2	63.5	67.6	54.2	44.2	49.4
I-X	96.2	92.4	94.4	105.4	103.4	104.5	108.1	102.5	105.4
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	38.3	33.3	35.9	37.4	33.5	35.6	31.4	22.3	26.9
I-XII	86.3	82.4	84.4	94.4	92.6	93.5	96.7	90.3	93.6
Higher Education	17.1	12.7	15.0	13.0	9.0	11.1	13.1	7.5	10.3

(Source- NSSo 2009-10)

Gross enrolment ratio at different level of schooling shows the gender gap across all social groups, but in primary level, there is not much gap. In secondary level, the gender gap in GER is high for all social groups, but SC population shows least gender gap (7.7 for SC and 10 for STs).

Table 27 Level-wise Drop-out Rate in School Education, 2009-10

	All			SC			ST		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
I-V	30.3	27.3	28.9	32.7	25.3	29.3	35.2	33.7	34.5
I-VIII	40.6	44.4	42.4	50.6	52.0	51.3	55.2	60.6	57.8
I-X	53.4	52.0	52.8	58.5	59.7	59.0	74.7	75.9	75.2

Source- NSSO 2009-10

In primary level, boys’ dropout rate is higher than the girls, but in higher level, girls’ dropout rate is higher than the boys. This picture is true across all social groups.

Summary: Gender gap in literacy rate and educational attainment is remarkable across all social groups and it is wider among the SC/ST population. However, recent data (2009-10) reveals that gross enrolment ratio is equally high for both male and female students, but in the secondary level, dropout rate is higher for the girls.

Voice of SC Women

Political Participation:

India, one of the largest democracies in the world, needs wider participation of people across caste, cred, gender and ethnicity, but debate around the Women’s Reservation Bill in the parliament has focused on the bitter truth that politics has proven to be very inhospitable for women in India. Though government has taken various initiatives in increasing women and SC/ST candidates participation at the Panchayat and Municipal level, at the higher level, very few women especially SC women are found. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (1992) ensured that 1/3rd of the total seats should be reserved for SC/ST and women in all Panchayat and Municipalities. It is no doubt a bold step that ensures women’s political participation. At the same time, Women Reservation Bill was also proposed which suggested 33% reservation of all seats in the Lower House of the Parliament and all

State Legislative Assemblies for women. Unfortunately, in its 16 years journey, it has not been passed yet. On 9th March, 2010, the Upper House of India's Parliament has passed it, but the UPA government has failed to pass it in the Lower House. Leaders from Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) want to amend the bill for ensuring more political participation from SC/ST women. Currently, in the NDA regime, the Bill has a possibility to come into power. BJP leader and Minister of Minority Affairs, Najma Heptullah, has recently remarked that "it is the will of the men in the Parliament and not the women which is required to pass these Bills"³.

The available data on the Lok Sabha for the period 1971–2004 reveals the dominance of SC men in politics as compared to SC women. The 15th Lok Sabha has a total of 84 SC Members in the Parliament, of which 72 are men and only 12 are women. However, more women parliamentarians have entered the politics since 1971, and there has been a slight improvement in the percentage share of the women parliamentarians with an SC background though they continue to be under-represented in comparison to SC men. For example, in 1971, Lok Sabha had a total of 26 women Members of Parliament, of which six were SCs, two were ST and the remaining 19 belonged to non-SC/ST groups. In 2009, Lok Sabha, which is a UPA led Congress government, has one of the highest number of women members in the Parliament. Further, the highest number of SC women are also seen in the current Lok Sabha (15th Lok Sabha) which consists of 12 SC women members (see Tables 10. and 11.).

The trend in the membership of women in the Parliament over the years is as follows: The data indicates that the membership of women parliamentarians was the least in the 6th Lok Sabha (the 1977 Janata Party Government), none of women from SC group, only one from ST group, and 19 non-SC/ST women members. After the 1984 Lok Sabha, which had 45 women parliamentarians, the share of women's percentage declined in the subsequent Lok Sabha till 13th Lok Sabha, 1999. However, there has been an increase in the number of women parliamentarians since 1999. This has also resulted in a slight improvement in the percentage share of SC women parliamentarians, and currently, in the 15th Lok Sabha, representation of women is the highest in all general elections till now. However, they continue to be under-represented in the Parliament and are only 10 percent in the Lok Sabha, which is below their share in the population and the critical mass of 33%.

3 <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/comment-will-narendra-modi-government-bring-in-the-women-s-reservation-bill-1990618>

Table 28: All-India Members of Parliament by Caste and Gender

Lok Sabha	SC			Others		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
5th (1971)	86	6	92	400	19	419
6th (1977)	86	0	86	411	19	430
7th (1980)	87	2	89	413	27	430
8th (1984)	80	4	84	403	39	442
9th (1989)	75	4	79	396	22	418
10th (1991)	75	5	80	399	31	440
11th (1996)	77	9	86	398	27	425
12th (1998)	74	10	84	388	32	420
13th (1999)	95	8	103	378	39	417
14th (2004)	67	11	78	395	34	429
15 th (2009)	72	12	84	372	40	412

Source: Who's Who Lok Sabha, GoI, 5th to 15th General Elections, www.parliamentofindia.nic.in

Note: the above data shows the total number of members elected in the entire tenure of five years. It includes the result of by-elections, re-elections etc.

Table 29: All-India Percentage Share of the Members of Parliament by Caste and Gender

Lok Sabha	SC			Others		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
5th (1971)	93.48	6.52	100.00	95.47	4.53	100.00
6th (1977)	100.00	0.00	100.00	95.58	4.42	100.00
7th (1980)	97.75	2.25	100.00	93.86	6.14	100.00
8th (1984)	95.24	4.76	100.00	91.18	8.82	100.00
9th (1989)	94.94	5.06	100.00	94.74	5.26	100.00
10th (1991)	93.75	6.25	100.00	90.68	7.05	100.00
11th (1996)	89.53	10.47	100.00	93.65	6.35	100.00
12th (1998)	88.10	11.90	100.00	92.38	7.62	100.00
13th (1999)	92.23	7.77	100.00	90.65	9.35	100.00
14th (2004)	85.90	14.10	100.00	92.07	7.93	100.00
15 th (2009)	85.71	14.29	100.00	90.29	9.71	100.00

Source: Calculated from table 10

Suppression of Dalit Women's Voice:

Though Indian Constitution provides legal safeguards to SC/ST people from the atrocities committed against them, a large number of SC/ST men and women face violence and atrocities. The term atrocity was not clearly defined

in the Constitution, but Parliamentary Committee on the Welfare of SCs and STs has defined in the 4th Report in para 1.4 in 2004-05 that “Women belonging to SC castes and tribes bore double burden. They were exploited by caste and gender and were vulnerable to and powerless against sexual exploitation.” According to the National Crime Record Bureau in India, four states namely Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh account for 66.9 percent of the total atrocities against SCs/STs (1995-2007). Extreme types of atrocities against Dalit include stripping of Dalit and tribal women, forcing SC/ST persons to drink urine or eat human excreta, blackening their faces, shaving their heads and parading them in village streets. Witch-hunt is another cruel form of atrocity against Dalit and tribal women where poor women are branded as witch by the dominant groups and killed or exiled from the villages. Newspapers reports that 2,556 women were branded as witches and killed in India between 1987 and 2003 (Meena Kandasamy, 2011)⁴. In spite of legal safeguards, victims of atrocities especially women hardly get justice due to institutional prejudices and social stigmatization of rape victims. The SC& the ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 is not strictly followed.

Recently, the horrific news of caste based atrocities in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh has created a wakeup call for the women of socially excluded group. In Badaun, two Dalit cousin sisters were not only killed and raped by upper caste youth, but also hanged from mango trees in the same village. It clearly indicates that the nature of atrocities against SC women and girls has sprung up especially in the rural areas where upper caste people enjoy influence over government machineries. Aam Adami Party (AAP) of Haryana has recently decided to submit a memorandum to the Governor demanding actions to stop the atrocities against Dalit community in the state where four Dalit girls were recently being abducted, raped and killed by some upper caste youth. The incidents of Badaun (UP) and Hissar (Haryana) are not sporadic events, but the bitter picture of a harsh reality still continuing in the twenty first century.

“The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women has noted that Dalit women “face targeted violence, even rape and death from state actors and powerful members of dominant castes, used to inflict political lessons”

4 Meena Kandasamy’s discussion with Chandra Bhan, P

and crush dissent within the community...” State of Madhya Pradesh and Arnav Ram Krishna Balothia and Anr (1995 (2) SCC 2221⁵ Similarly, in its 2007 Concluding Comments the CERD Committee noted its concern about the alarming number of allegations of acts of sexual violence against Dalit women primarily by dominant caste men.”⁶

A recent study conducted by International Dalit Solidarity Network⁷ reveals that SC women face nine major types of violence which can be clubbed into two, six for their caste identity and three for their gender identity. Due to their caste identity, SC women face verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual harassment and assault, rape, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, kidnapping and abduction. Three types of violence like female foeticide, child sexual abuse due to early marriage, domestic violence from natal and marital families are occurred within their families. Survey conducted on 500 Dalit women reveals that 62.4% face verbal abuse from both upper caste men and women, 54.8% face physical assault, 46.8% face sexual harassment and assault, 43% face domestic violence and 23.2% face rape. SC women face atrocities in three places; public places like street, open air toilets etc.; in their own home by relatives and non-relatives and in government places like police stations etc.

In less than 1% of cases, the perpetrators were convicted by the courts. In 17.4% of instances of violence, police obstructed the women from attaining justice. In 26.5% of instances of violence, the perpetrators and their supporters and/or the community at large prevented the women from obtaining justice. In 40.2% of instances of violence, the women did not attempt to obtain legal or community remedies for the violence primarily out of fear of the perpetrators or social dishonour if (sexual) violence was revealed, or ignorance of the law,

5 UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, 2002. Cultural Practices in the Family that are Violent towards Women. UN Doc. E/CN.4/2002/83, para.53.

6 Quoted from “ Violence Against Dalit Women”- Briefing note prepared for the 11th session of the Human Rights Council International Dalit Solidarity Network – Cordaid – Justice & Peace Netherlands – National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights – Feminist Dalit Organisation Nepal

7 “ Violence Against Dalit Women”- Briefing note prepared for the 11th session of the Human Rights Council International Dalit Solidarity Network – Cordaid – Justice & Peace Netherlands – National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights – Feminist Dalit Organisation Nepal

or the belief that they would not get justice⁸.

Recent Amendment and Backlog On March 4, 2014, just before the Lok Sabha Election, the UPA government has brought some effective amendments to The SC& the ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 in which sexual harassments against Dalit and tribal women were to be handled in more severe way. The Bill suggests 'touching a Dalit or tribal women in a sexual manner without consent' or 'acts/ gestures of sexual nature' against them would invite stringent provision of the SC/ST Atrocities ACT (POA), 1989. The Bill also specifies punishment for public servants from other communities who fail to do their duties relating to SC/ST people like registering FIR or arresting the culprits. The Bill also mandates Special Courts at district level to speed up the trial process and atrocities against women would be judged by women judges. Unfortunately, the Bill has not been passed yet.

Summary

Dalit women in India face multiple deprivations for their social status as well as gender identity. Four-fold caste stratification of the society exists all across the country.

Demographic data reveals that the Dalit population records high fertility as well as high infant and child mortality rates. Life expectancy is lower among the Dalit and Dalit women have the lowest life expectancy compared to the upper caste women and Dalit men. Though in general, women have higher life expectancy than their male counterparts, Dalit women show a reverse picture. Therefore, the Dalit population is growing without demographic dividends.

Sex ratio of Dalit population reveals low child and adult sex ratio (slightly better than the non-SC/ST), but much lower than the Scheduled Tribes.

Under age marriage is higher among SC/ST population. Nearly 15 to 16 percent girls from these subgroups get married before the legal age of marriage (18 years). This problem is acute in the north, especially in Rajasthan, Uttar

8 Source: Dalit Women Speak Out - Violence against Dalit Women in India, Written by Aloysius Irudayam, Jayshree P. Mangubhai, Joel G. Lee, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, New Delhi, March 2006

Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. States having higher Mean Age at Marriage, (Kerala, J&K, north-east) also record reverse trend among the SC girls. A considerable number of SC girls from Kerala, J&K and north-eastern states get married before 18 years. In West Bengal, under age marriage is very high (above 23%) among the SC population.

Low age at marriage and high fertility has a direct impact on the health outcomes. Dalit women record low Body Mass Index (BMI), higher prevalence of anaemia and low access to maternal health care facilities. Hardly 35 percent SC women get the facility of institutional delivery during the child birth and a large number of them rely on indigenous methods and stay at homes during the delivery. Mainly husbands and in-laws take decisions regarding their health.

Economic data reveals that nearly 30 percent SC and 43 percent ST households live Below the Poverty Line (2011-12). However, at the same time, Dalit women record higher Work Participation Rate than that of their non-Dalit counterparts. Higher access to the labour market could be a positive aspect of the community, but high wage gap between SC and non-SC/ST women, concentration of Dalit women workers in agricultural sector and elementary occupations show that most of the Dalit women are ill paid and are deprived of high-salaried positions. Unemployment rate is higher among the Dalit women with graduate and above degrees and this condition is acute in the rural areas.

Though all social groups record gender gap in the literacy rate, Dalit population records higher gap than that of their non-Dalit counterparts. Dropout rate is higher among the Dalit girls in Secondary and Higher secondary schools.

Political participation of SC women is lower in the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha. Organised crimes and atrocities against Dalit women are alarmingly high, and the problem is acute in some states.

Conclusion:

Dalit women need group and gender specific policies and programmes to address the issue of multiple deprivations. Though India has various affirmative policies for the socially marginalised groups and women and also

ensures the right to education for all, SC women and girls are still facing the curse of illiteracy and underage marriages. Dropout rate is higher among the SC girls in the higher secondary schools and underage marriage is more prevalent among them. Dalit women require comprehensive policies on health, especially on the maternal and child health because infant and child mortalities are higher among them. Economic data reveals that though Dalit women have higher Work participation Rate, they are mostly concentrated in low paid jobs, and unemployment rate is the highest among SC women with graduate and above degrees. Similarly, political participation is low in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Therefore, Dr.Ambedkar's main strategy for women empowerment, 'Educate, Organise and Agitate' is far from the completion.

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