

Domestic Violence and Dalit Women

Sujatha Devarapalli

A brief note on the workshop held on 13th October 2012

The Work shop on Domestic Violence and Dalit Women was held on 13th Oct.2012 at Anveshi attended by Dr.Vijaya Bharathi, Dr.Sudha Rani, Dr.Surepally Sujatha, J.Subhadra, Jajula Gowri, Prof.Sheela Prasad, Dr.Lalitha, Madhavi, Anveshi women Staff, family counselors, scholars from HCU and EFLU and few others. The discussion was initiated by Gogu Shyamala.

Gogu Shyamala: Domestic Violence is a known subject for all of us. In the recent past, the discussions on DV act are increasing. We also come across a lot of awareness programs on DV act. However, the present study will focus on dalit women in domestic violence. Many people are asking us that why did we choose to study dalit women in domestic violence separately? and the same people are also accepting the fact that domestic violence is more in dalit community. In this context, we need an answer to this particular question. The problem of domestic violence is not only the problem of dalit women but it is the problem of dalit community as it is interlinked with the other problems in the community, such as education, health, economy etc. Hence, the present project is not only a challenge for people who are working in it but also to the people who are thinking in the same direction. The present workshop will be an opportunity to think and find ways in understanding the problem.

Dr. Sudha Rani: Though domestic violence is an universal phenomenon from 6, 7 years the discussions on DV are increased. The problem is spread all over the world. The problem consists of both physical and mental assault. According to an UN report 15 to

70% of women across the world are suffering in domestic violence. In India, the National health survey says that 32% of women in urban areas and 42% of women in rural areas are the victims of DV. Bihar stands highest in DV cases and Himachal Pradesh stands for lowest cases. There are some myths and facts about DV. Generally, the alcohol consumption is shown as one of the reasons for DV. But, the surveys say that non alcoholic men are also doing violence on their women. Here, there is need to look at the reasons for the violation of dalit women's rights and need to study them separately. Since, Gopal Guru's paper on "Dalit women talk differently" the voice of dalit women raised effectively. Sumitra Bhave's anthology of eight dalit women questioned the Brahmanical pattern of patriarchy and the control of caste men on their women. Dalit women also questioned that why their contribution in history is not recorded. Dalit women also questioned the feminist movement for voicing only about upper caste women and dalit movement for neglecting dalit women's issues.

Marriage as an institution is another issue to be considered here. Ambedkar said that through inter caste marriages we can break that institution. But, in practice, the inter caste marriages also become a burden on dalit women. Dalit Women who are married to upper caste men are humiliated by the inlaw's family and thrown out after a point.

Another major problem dalit women face is space/privacy in her thatched house. Regarding the space and privacy dalit women have in the family, Challapalli swaroopa Rani's "Mankena Puvvu" is a retort to the "Neeli Meghaalu" an upper caste feminist's poetry. Swaroopa Rani criticizes upper caste feminists for describing their condition in a well organized kitchen and not looking at the firewood arranged with the support of three stones in a open space by a dalit woman. Even to satisfy the sexual desire of her husband in a one room house is a problem for a dalit woman.

Ilaih says there is no violence in dalit families. Such romanticism of dalit families by dalit intellectuals and dalit movement doesn't help dalit women at all.

The nature of work is another issue to be discussed. Generally, we find women headed families more in dalit families. In such families, women earn for the family by doing menial work including scavenging. These women are harassed by their male family members including husband, sons even sometimes brothers.

In literature, women are seen as a property. In 1935, Boyi Bheemanna wrote a story called "Illalu" (House Wife). It was the first story on dalit women in Telugu literature. The story is about a dalit woman who faced harassment at her work place by Dora and at home by her husband who suspects her character. The position of dalit women did not change from Illalu (1935) to recent Mankenapuvvu by Challapalli.

For the purpose of the present study, we should gather testimonials of dalit women, and by analyzing the recent trends and finding the limitations in the DV act it would be easy for us to find solution to the problem. Our education begins in our surroundings not in the family.

Dr. Vijaya Bharathi:

It is very difficult to establish violence on dalit women. Violence is rooted in the Varna system. Women are looked as 5th varna by our ancestors. Woman is depicted as Adi Sakthi in Sri Devi Bhagavatham.

Dalit men look up to upper caste women. They respect upper caste women. They recognize their contribution to the movement and history. Dalit men never bring their women to the movement, even if they bring they don't use their capabilities, even if they use, they don't recognize. Whereas, dalit women always try to protect their culture. They respect their community. Sometimes due to traditional practices also violence on women increases. In 1950 itself, Pamu Rammurthy had written poems on inter caste marriages.

Even though we can not expect that dalitism will bring a solution to the problems of women which was not solved by feminism at least it will give an opportunity to think and understand the problem in different dimensions.

We should also keep in mind that experiencing domestic violence is different from voicing against the problem.

J.Subhadra: Subhadra started her discussion with a quotation “All men are in a mission to control women. The ways are different”. Later, she read out a story called “Idupu Kagitham” (Separation/Divorce Papers) by Chennuri Sudhakar. The story is about a dalit woman called Sammakka and married to Sarayya, a drunkard. She has two daughters. Sammakka earns for the family. Sarayya always beats Sammakka to get money for liquor. That day also, Sammakka was beaten by Sarayya for money. He abused her that she is not giving him money but she is giving to her pimp. But this time, Sammakka refused to give him money. Finally he told Sammakka that if she doesn't give money he will kill her daughters. Afraid by this, Sammakka gives him 10/Rs. Sarayya felt happy and left the house with a smile on his face. As Sammakka couldn't tolerate his behavior any more, she went to Dora and requested him to give Idupu Kagitham (separation on paper). Meanwhile, Sarayya came to know that, Sammakka has gone to meet Dora; he also rushed to Dora's courtyard. Dora asks Sarayya whether he is willing to leave his wife Sammakka or not. Angered, Sarayya told Dora that he is not ready to give “Idupu Kagitham” .Then, Dora asks Sammaka's little daughter whom she prefers, Amma? or Ayya? The little girl hides herself at the back of her mother. Finally, Dora tells them that it is difficult to issue Idupu Kagitham as one of the partners is not willing to take divorce. Hence, Dora asks them to come again with one decision. Dissatisfied Sammakaa reaches home with her children. That night Sarayya again beats her. The next day morning, the whole village shocked to hear that Sarayya committed suicide by hanging himself. Dora visits the house of Sammakka to console her. Sammakka looks at Dora with an expression of “don't you think we came to one decision”. There ends the story.

Subhadra continued her discussion by saying that there is a vast difference between dalit patriarchy and upper caste patriarchy. Dalit men are always in frustration. They are slaves to upper caste men. The upper caste men possess political power; economic power. The production is in the hands of upper caste men. As a result, dalit men are turning to be criminals (Here, Surepalli Sujatha interrupted Subhadra by saying the same frustration or even more, dalit women are also facing but why dalit women are not becoming criminals?) Subhadra agreed what was pointed by Sujatha and continued her discussion .This is a very serious issue. For upper caste women violence is an observation but for dalit women violence is an experience. During the national movement all the social reformation was concerned only to reform upper caste women by abolishing child marriages and by encouraging widow marriages, etc. Now, after 100years, again one of the congress leaders suggested child marriages to stop rapes on women in Haryana.This is very strange.

Jajula Gowri: As a legal counselor, she shared some of the case studies in the work shop. According to her, It is difficult to prove domestic violence in public. Educated dalit women especially, the women working in IT sector are getting into inter caste marriages. But after the marriage they are finding difficulty in adjusting with their in laws family. They are facing a lot of humiliation in those families. In such cases , one side the earnings of the dalit women are draining to the upper caste families and the other side in return they are facing harassment Not only married Dalit women are facing problems with the family even unmarried dalit women are facing problems with their own male family members. Many times dalit women are raped by their step fathers and cousins. Such cases are difficult to prove as it is difficult to proceed to legally. The victims of DV approach the counseling centre as the last resort. It is difficult to identify the caste of the victim in the beginning itself. Through conversation we identify the caste of the victim. dalit women approach the counseling centers at a very damaging condition. Many times police refuse to register the cases of dalit women. Such women visit the counseling centre for help.

Surepally Sujatha: She tried to interlink the suicides in SEZs and domestic violence. She narrated a story of a dalit woman who committed suicide after she lost her fields in SEZS. Sujatha says violence is everywhere. Dalit women are figured out in public violence very well but she was not figured out in domestic violence discourse. Economic status and domestic violence are interrelated. Unlike upper caste women Dalit women face complete isolation when she gets separated from her husband. Generally an image of a family is a wife, husband and children. A single woman is always treated as a threat in society. Dalit women also trapped in caste, class, society and environment. The legal Acts don't come to help her at all. The out side world is not sympathetic towards dalit women.

Dr.Madhavi's remarks: Until and unless we know the reasons for violation there is no point in bringing legal acts. To recognize the atrocity is more important. We should also look at the problems of dalit women in different classes. Because, the experience of dalit women in lower class may be different from the experience of dalit women in middle class and educated. Along with the economic vulnerability we should also look at the other vulnerabilities

Dr.Suneetha's closing remarks: The actual discussion on Domestic Violence has started now. DV is not static. In every discussion, we find new things. We should understand the problem according to the situation.

2nd Workshop Notes

The 2nd work shop on Domestic Violence and Dalit Women conducted by Anveshi on 18th December 2012 was attended by Dr.KY.Ratnam, Dr.Chakrapani, Dr.Nageswar Rao, Dr.Bhangya, Dr.Satyanarayana Ms Ranjana (Oxfam), EC and GB members and Research

Fellows of Anveshi, Students from, TISS, University of Hyderabad, Osmania University ,and Eflu ,dalit activists, lawyers and counsellors

Gogu Shyamala: The project on Domestic Violence and Dalit Women started in Anveshi is funded by Oxfam. This project is part of the collective work of seven INGO'S through out India. We are trying to look at domestic violence particularly on dalit women and their mechanisms to address the problem. I personally feel this is an opportunity to think about violence and family in dalit families. Family does not mean only in laws family of a woman it also means her natal family. When we are talking about domestic violence on dalit women we should talk about both the families and we should also relate it to the community too. In towns and cities community does not stand like in villages.

The work culture in dalit families allow dalit women to go out to earn livelihood. Dalit women is more responsible to her family and children. Usually dalit men don't share the responsibility of the family burdens. A Dalit woman looks after her children. She sends them to school. She tries to satisfy all their demands. In the process if she fails to satisfy even one member of the family violence starts on her. Today, Childrens' demands are increasing highly.

The changing trends in society influencing dalit families too. During our fieldwork we found that dalit families are not giving importance to education. They don't like to spend on the education of their daughters. They feel marriage is the safe zone for women. Generations are changing but the mindset of dalit parents is not changing. They are spending a lot of money on dowry and other wedding expenditure and becoming bankrupt after their daughter's marriage. Even after the marriage if some problem arises again they have to spend money on caste panchayats etc to settle the matter.

In other cases we found failure love affairs. In some cases of upper caste man having love affair with dalit women we found that after some years of relationship he refused to marry her just because she belongs to lower caste.

In some cases we found severe physical violence on dalit women by their family members. In unbearable conditions dalit women approach police stations. Rural women don't go to counselling centres. They don't have access to counselling centres and lawyers. Hence they go to police stations to give punishment to her husband or other family members who did violence on her.....

D.Sujatha: One of the main objectives of the study is to find out the institutional response to dalit women in domestic violence: In what situations do they approach public institutions – counseling centres, NGOs, police personnel and courts for help? What kind of access do they have to such institutions? Do they require the support of the family and the community in approaching the public institutions? Keeping these objectives in mind we conducted a field study in the counselling centres run by Oxfam in Hyderabad and East Godavari district and CC run by the Family Welfare Department in Nalgonda. We also took some individual interviews during our field work.

The CC located in the premises of the police control room, Nampally is run by Oxfam with the help of SWARD (**Society for Women Awareness and Rural Development**). This CC is very popular in the city. Some 15 to 20 cases come daily. Most of the victims are Muslims of all classes. A good number of non dalit, middle class women also come for help. Dalit women are very rare. One important point to be mentioned here is that only after our project was announced they started recording the caste of the victims. In my observation the counsellors are very friendly, listening to the victims patiently and the office set up is well organised. There are two counsellors Kiranmayi and Devaki. These two are trained in counselling by Oxfam and TISS, Mumbai. The counselling of each case takes place in three sessions/sittings. After taking a complaint from the victim, the counsellors give a date to both the parties for counselling. On the given date if the other party did not attend the counselling they will take the help of the police to bring the party to the CC. In the first session the counsellors listen to both the parties together. In the second session the counsellors talk to the parties separately. After conducting individual sessions, they give some time to both the parties to sit together for sometime at the outside of the CC and come to a decision. The final action will be dependent on the decision taken by both the parties.

In East Godavari we have conducted field study in the CC run by Oxfam with the help of SVAS (Samatha Voluntary Association for Service). There is a lot of difference between the CC of Nampally and the CC at Alamuru. The counsellors do not take up the case immediately after they receive the complaint. First, they conduct an enquiry by sending an enquiry committee to the victims place. If they found the case is genuine, only then, they will take up the case. Here they also do counselling in three four sittings. At village level family matters don't confine to families itself. The whole community tries to be involved in such matters. Sometimes it becomes very difficult for the counsellors to do justice to the victim. As Samatha has a strong base at local level and its activities are widely spread in that region, the counsellors are able to help the victims.

The project team of SVAS has taken up many activities to bring awareness among the people on domestic violence as well as DV Act. They conduct Jeep campaigns, rallies, sing songs and conduct traditional performances like Burrakatha in the streets of the villages instead of conducting public meetings and giving long speeches on domestic violence. They also conduct Public Hearings in the district head quarters every year. In Public hearing meetings they invite senior advocates, Police officials and ICDS officials as their resource persons. They also invite survivors (Samatha addresses the victims of domestic violence as 'survivors'. They strictly banned using the word 'victim' in their organisation) and conducted a debate on the issue.....

Dr.K.Y.Ratnam: Indian family itself is a violent family. Dalit movement should take initiative in addressing the issue of domestic violence of dalit women. Anthropologists and psychologists discussed various patterns of violence such as physical violence and Psychological violence. Until now, no study is focussed deeply on Jogini system and the violence on dalit women in the name of rituals. Here we see both cultural and physical domination of dominant castes. Not reading this type of historical and cultural violence of dominant castes is a limitation of women's movement.

What is domestic? There is a need to redefine the concept of 'domestic' in the context of violence in dalit families. Indian women are constantly made subordinates and inferior by

the dominant castes the same inferior feelings are inculcated in dalit families too. Violence to be understood through the historical and cultural domination of dominant castes .

How do we construct domestic violence? And how do we redefine the concept of domestic violence?

Criminalization doesn't solve the problem. Same thing applies to the atrocity cases also. Atrocities on dalit will not come to an end simply by filing an atrocity case on few upper caste men/women. Even dalit movement could not describe an ideal dalit family. It could not addresses many family related issues such as dowry and dalit men are not exception to perpetration. To study the patriarchical terrorism we need lot of data and a perspective developed through intellectual mediation to reconstruct the whole issue

Dr. Satyanarayana : Dalit women doesn't see any problem with dalit man but her problems are how to educate her children and how to feed them daily etc.

How does one think about the issue?

What is the complicity of the issue?

Dalit Women's problems are many...

How to deal with cheating cases? DV Act doesn't offer any support or solution.

There are a lot of loopholes in the existing laws. Children harassing mothers for cell phones etc doesn't come under DV Act.

The centrality of the problem should be addressed carefully.

What is the nature of dalit family? Kalyan Rao,s Antarani Vasantham is about family. Tara Kumar's Panchatantram is about family. Putta of Madduri is about family.

These families are looking at the oppression of upper castes but not the oppression within the family.

All caste panchayats and caste sangams are not corrupt. They do play an important role in the community. Their role is very important in mediation and negotiation.

Bringing Ambedkar and Phule into the study is another interesting thing.

For a middle class woman sending a child to a school is not a problem with all the support system she has but for a dalit problem sending her child to school itself is a problem.

Dr. Nageswar Rao: I came here to share some of the issues faced by my community. Dalits are excluded socially, culturally, historically. They are at the bottom of Indian Society. They don't own lands. Dalit women face discrimination of society and family. In the context of social exclusion they don't have access to mainstream society. They are deprived people. I have translated a report on the study of SC/ St atrocity cases recently and I can relate the same cases happened in my village too .To understand the violence on dalit women a book titled Dalit Women Speak Out is available inn the market. In this book, the three types of violence on women are discussed. They are Gender based, caste based, and class based. There is a need to study violence deeply. In our village most of our problems are solved in front of the caste sanghas. Because, police are not accessible to dalits as Dalits can't bribe them. Jogini system prevailed in the villages even to this day. Manual scavenging is another huge issue that dalits are facing today.

Our women do not understand what domestic violence is.Our family do not break up so easily. Even our woman beats us.

The project should be studied by understanding the environment of our families.

Dr. Bhangya: The project study has a lot of potential. It is a very broad study. Lot of things are involved in the study. We should seriously think about violence. There are degrees of violence. Dalit women's experiences are different from upper caste women. Sathi is an upper caste women's experience and Jogini is a dalit women's experience.Burning once for all is an experience of upper caste women and burning every day is dalit women's experience.Earlier dalit families are loosely constructed after

modernization, the concept of family took lot of changes. The middle class imagination of family entered dalit families too. The imitation of dowry also brought out the imitation of violence.

To overcome this problem, writing and campaigning might be helpful in bringing some kind of change.

Dr.Chakrapani: The idea of demanding law through empirical research is very interesting.

Violence within the walls never comes out. I don't agree saying dalit families are democratic. As much democratic Indian country is and as much democratic uppercaste families are in the same way dalit families also democratic. Dalit men are not dropped from anywhere. They are not great. But dalit women are really great. If we look at Sujatha's observations we will find how many obstacles dalit women face to reach law. Police have caste. Counsellors have caste.

Syamala described the meaning of violence and the meaning of family quite well in her presentation.

Until now, there is a notion that there is no religion in dalit framework. Now it is understood that there is no family too.

There are no legal acts to address the problems of dalit women. The SC/ ST atrocity cases take long time to be processed.

Patterns of violence to be included in DV Act. It should be studied more vigorously.

The nature of state itself is patriarchal. Since purusha sukta Indian men got all powers.

Not sensitizing the state on gender is also a problem.

Caste Panchayats are lumpenized. Local politics play an important role here. The judgements are either biased or influenced. If the judgement given by Caste Panchayat is not obeyed a fine will be imposed.

Don't blame dalit movement. Because, there is no dalit movement. Neither Mala Mahanadu nor Madiga Dandora took up dalit women's issues. Even women organisations did injustice to dalit women.

There are no community representatives among counsellors and Police.

There is a need to redefine the term upper caste also .Because, the atrocities on dalits are done by Bcs.

There is a need to redefine Crime as well as legal Act.

Responses:

Veena The case studies collected during the field study should have been presented in the workshop. Without case studies it is difficult to understand and to give suggestions on how to go about the project. There is a need to collect detailed and rich case histories to get a complete picture of your work.....

Lalitha: In the liquor campaign of 1991 dalit women campaigned with a slogan 'Maa Vooriki Saara Vaddu' (Our village don't want liquor). Generally, we look at 'mental peace' as a middle class perception. But, after the liquor is banned rural dalit women felt that 'now we can have 'mental peace' .During drought period the program of rice credit line also gave 'mental peace' to poor dalit women for having economic/food security at home.

Rama: Today, women are feeling secure about the cash transfer program. They are scared that where will this program lead them.

We should understand the difference between violence within the walls and outside the house. In middle class families whatever violence happens it happens within the closed

walls. But in dalit families everything happens just out side of their thatched houses. (Rama also shared some of her experiences with her dalit servant maid family and the physical violence faced by the woman of the family by her husband)

Sudha; Law didn't do much to the victims. There is a need to redefine legal acts

Suneetha: Our earlier projects on domestic violence focussed on institutional responses to the victims. In our study, we found that reforming the husband is the only expectation of a wife. She doesn't want her husband to be punished or what law can offer to her etc.. We are not looking at the failure of the law. The DV Act came after thirty years of struggle. There is a gap between law and justice. DV act includes both reform and punishment...

Mary: I have a problem with one of the speaker in the morning session who commented that 'dalit women also beat their men' which is highly a false statement. I strongly object to this statement. There might be some such instances in the past but today dalit women are facing lot of problems in the society and in the family. We don't have access to any public institution. We can't share our problems with anyone. Even dalit man is not ready to listen to our problems. Our struggle should start from our homes itself.