



Dalit women fight!

"Let them not rape us every day and murder us. Make the police give us our rights. I will fight for all those who are abused and dead and I hope if my turn comes someone will be there to fight for me"

Manisha, Dalit woman,
Human Rights Defender

IDSN International Dalit Solidarity Network

WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE DISCRIMINATION



PHOTO: JAKOB CARLSEN

There are an estimated 260 million Dalits worldwide, born as 'untouchables' in a highly stratified caste system.

Caste systems are found in South Asia, in communities migrated from South Asia across the globe and in other caste stratified countries in Africa and Asia.

Violence and other crimes against Dalits are widespread and are often committed with impunity. Where special legislation exists to protect Dalits it severely lacks implementation.

Police fail to act on gang-rape and hanging of girls

On May 29th, 2014, two teenage girls were gang-raped in Uttar Pradesh, after stepping into a field, because they had no toilet at home. The families had gone to the police when the girls had gone missing but police had refused to register the case. The next morning the 14 and 16 year-old girls were found dead – hanging in nooses from a mango tree. The police did not take action until villagers blocked the main road with the dead bodies and alerted the media. Global media covered this case and police men were suspended and arrested. There are thousands of cases like this, where Dalit women and girls are the victims, that never get reported and never get justice. Amnesty International have demanded that authorities must impartially investigate this case stating that this case is a symbol of a widespread situation where, "Members of dominant castes are known to use sexual violence against Dalit women and girls as a political tool for punishment, humiliation and assertion of power."

Front page: Instagram photo posted by a Dalit woman activist taking part in the 2014 'self-respect' march, to demand justice for victims of violence against Dalit women.





**"If you are not considered human,
human rights do not apply to you"**

Moni Rani Das, Dalit woman activist

Dalit + Woman = Multiple Discrimination

Dalit women are born into an 'untouchable' caste in an apartheid-like system designed to oppress them, deny them their rights and leave them with no choice but to obey the system.

They are trapped in deeply patriarchal societies where women are considered the property of men and are often blamed when men violate them. The severe discrimination they face from being both a Dalit and a woman, makes them a key target of violence and systematically denies them choices and freedoms in all spheres of life.

Their access to justice is negligible, forcing them to fight those who rape, rob, cheat or beat them, with no support from the systems of justice meant to protect them. The police refuse to take their complaint, the courts will not convict those who violate them and they are threatened, if they try to oppose them.

This is the reality Dalit women face. Still, Dalit women are fighting for their rights every day. They are asking the world to speak up when they are silenced, take action when they are shut down, and have the courage to demand that human rights and the rule of law apply, also when it is a Dalit woman who is violated.

"The reality of Dalit women and girls is one of exclusion and marginalisation ... They are often victims of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights violations, including sexual abuse and violence. They are often displaced; pushed into forced and/or bonded labour, prostitution and trafficking"

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Rashida Manjoo, 2013

"The combination of caste and gender makes millions of Dalit women extremely vulnerable to discrimination and violence, including rape"

Human Rights Watch

Raped, beaten and violated

For centuries Dalit women have been key targets of violence and rape. They also often bear the brunt of reprisals because they or other Dalits in their community step out of caste lines by trying to improve their lives or access education or work, not traditionally tied to their caste. These reprisals can be in the form of violence, naked parading, beatings, rape, destruction of property, or being set on fire. Minority Rights Group recently reported a study finding that 70% of cases of atrocities against Dalit women were committed as Dalit women tried to assert their rights and challenge caste and gender norms.

Attempts at political influence are often met with violent reprisals or economic sanctions and even when given a political seat Dalit women are often forcefully silenced or ridiculed.

In Pakistan Dalit girls also face abduction, forced conversions and forced marriage. As a religious minority, Dalit women experience violations such as rape and torture as a form of punitive measure and prosecution. These crimes are almost always committed with impunity.

Despite the fact that in India, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act furthermore bars violence against Dalits and in Nepal the Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Crime Elimination and Punishment Act, prohibits 'untouchability' and violence against Dalits in the public and private sphere, both acts severely lack implementation. Violent abuse of Dalit women therefore remains widespread in caste-affected countries and is even on the increase in many areas.

"Sexual violence against Dalit women is a systemic way of enforcing status quo of the Dalits"

Status report of the working group on Human rights in India and the UN, 2012



House burnt for saying no to dominant caste man



Bindu, a young Dalit girl, sits with her grandmother in what is left of their home. She had incurred the wrath of the local upper castes by refusing an offer from the son of the town leader of 50 rupees (about \$1) for sex. So their house was torched and their belongings thrown into the river. Dalit women and girls are subject to violence and rape at a disproportionately high level due to multiple discrimination.

Attacked for pursuing her dreams

Chanchal, a 19-year old Dalit woman, was at home, asleep when four men from a dominant caste attacked her and poured almost a litre of acid on her face. Chanchal was breaking caste norms by trying to pursue an education and the men had been harassing and threatening her for months. She is now severely disfigured and says, "the police nor the government seems serious in pushing my case." Only after extensive media pressure did police take action.

Dalit women want justice



PHOTO: AIDMAN

Dalit women are protesting against impunity in connection with a spate of rapes and violence against Dalit women in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Maharashtra states. In March 2014, four Dalit girls were gang-raped by men from the dominant Jat caste. They were drugged, raped and dumped at a railway station. Villagers believe that the police were involved. The girls, their families and people from their community have been camping out and protesting in New Delhi for months – demanding justice. They are afraid to return to their village in fear of violent reprisals from the dominant castes.

Gang-raped Dalit girl fights for justice

A 16-year old Dalit girl was gang-raped by a group of up to 10 mainly dominant caste men in Haryana, India. The rapists filmed the gang rape on a cell phone and later circulated the video in the village. When the father of the girl saw the video of what his daughter had to go through he committed suicide. Despite this clear video evidence of the rape the police did not register the case until Dalits arranged mass protests.



“Great, now you have proof that you enjoyed yourself”

The reply of an Indian court judge to a gang-raped Dalit woman, upon seeing a video of the rape filmed and distributed by the dominant caste rapists and presented by the woman in court as evidence of the rape.

Denied justice

Dalit women suffer from severe limitations in access to justice and widespread impunity in cases where the perpetrator is a member of a dominant caste, above the Dalits in the caste system. Dalit women are therefore considered easy targets for sexual violence and other crimes, because the perpetrators almost always get away with it. For example, in India, studies show that the conviction rate for rapes against Dalit women is under 2% compared to a conviction rate of 25% in rape cases against women in India generally.

A similar picture is seen in other caste-affected countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Crimes against Dalit women are largely committed with impunity as their social status as ‘untouchables’ often hinders them from filing reports with the police or accessing legal systems. Even when Dalit women get a report filed with the police, caste and gender prejudice in the courts are another severe obstacle to obtaining justice for Dalit victims. A deeply ingrained discriminatory mindset within the systems of justice in caste-affected countries is a key part of why Dalit women are routinely denied justice.

In its 2013 India report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Minority Rights Group International found that Dalit women face various and grave institutional and procedural obstacles to justice. The report states that in a majority of cases, rapists from dominant castes accused of raping a Dalit woman are either not arrested or their arrest is significantly delayed. In cases where they are arrested they are often let out on bail – despite this not being legal. In the 2014 report, ‘Justice under Trial’, the National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ) furthermore highlight that impunity in cases involving Dalit victims is in fact on the rise.

“Non-implementation of legislation and policies and the lack of effective remedies and effectively functioning state institutions, the judiciary and police included, remain major obstacles to eliminating caste-based discrimination”

European Parliament 2013 Resolution on Caste-Based Discrimination

"Slavery is one of the cruellest manifestations of caste discrimination"

Director of Anti-Slavery International,
Aidan McQuade

Born into modern slavery and prostitution

Dalit women often work in modern slavery and are key targets for trafficking into slave labour and prostitution. Across South Asia, they are used as debt slaves in brick kilns, garment industries and agriculture. 98% of those forced into the dehumanising work of manual scavenging, removing human waste by hand, are also Dalit women. In Bangladesh Dalit women also often work as bonded-labourers in tea plantations. Dalit women may also be offered into temple prostitution as 'Devadasis' (sex slaves) in India or be born into prostitution in Nepal due to their caste status.

Caste systems are present in four out of five countries ranked the worst slavery offenders, in the 2013 Global Slavery Index, by Walk Free Foundation. India alone accounts for half of the people on the planet regarded as 'modern slaves'. The index cites caste and tribe systems as main factors influencing the prevalence of modern slavery in India, singling out Dalit women and children as among the most vulnerable.

Anti Slavery International estimates that the vast majority of bonded labourers (over 80%) are either from communities designated as "untouchable" or from indigenous communities. ILO research, reported to the UN Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, also shows a clear link in Asian countries between forced labour and long-standing patterns of caste discrimination .

"While legislation has been adopted to eradicate bonded labour and manual scavenging, reports and interlocutors indicate that there is a consistent failure in the implementation of such laws and a tendency to minimize the significance of the problem"

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women,
Rashida Manjoo, 2014



Dalit women protest against modern slavery



PHOTO: RASHTRIVA GARIMA ABHIYAN – JAN SAHAS

Participants in a two-month long march in India set fire to baskets used by Dalit women manual scavengers to carry human excreta from dry latrines. This dehumanizing job is inherited by Dalit women through their caste. The burning of baskets is a symbol of the emancipation of manual scavengers.

14 year-old born into prostitution

Binita is a 14 year old girl from the Badi caste in Nepal. She is born into prostitution due to her caste, and is left no other opportunities because of deep-rooted discrimination and caste traditions. "This is not a job for a 14 year-old girl, she should go to school, but she is forced to do this," says Binita's mother. Binita dreams that one day she can make enough money so that she could also go to school.

Dalit girls drop out of school early



PHOTO: © MATTHEW BECKER/ADVOCACY PROJECT

This little Dalit girl in Bangladesh is lucky to be one of the few attending a school set up specifically to combat discrimination and keep Dalits in school. Dalit girls in Bangladesh generally do not attend school and for those who do, they often drop out quickly due to discrimination and poverty. NGOs estimate the illiteracy rate of Dalit women in Bangladesh to be around 96%. The lack of education for Dalit girls is a key hindrance to improving their living conditions and the extreme poverty they face.

Bullied by peers and teachers

A 2014 Human Rights Watch report finds that, “Teachers will tell Dalit students to sit in the back of class and then basically ignore them. They are often served their free school lunch only after all the other students. They are even asked to do tasks considered degrading, like cleaning the toilet – something that never happens to privileged kids. Teachers also make derogatory remarks, or don’t stop more privileged children from ostracizing them.” A 2014 UNICEF education report tells the same story, highlighting that Dalit girls are among the most vulnerable to dropping out of primary education in India.



“They don’t learn anything, must sit separately and are served food last when there is often nothing left”

Father of a Dalit child in a Government school in India

Denied an education and basic services

According to reports from UNICEF and Human Rights Watch the dropout rates of Dalit girls is alarmingly high compared to the national average. The reports find that discrimination and segregation in schools in India is forcing Dalit girls out of an education and pushing them into child labour and modern slavery. In his thematic report on education, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism was also alarmed to find that, “The forms of structural discrimination and abuse that Dalit children face in schools are often so stigmatizing that they are forced to drop out of school.”

Caste and gender discrimination in the delivery of health care, water, sanitation and other basic services are also a major obstacles for Dalit women severely impacting on their welfare and opportunities. This discrimination has been documented repeatedly by UN agencies and major international human rights and development NGOs.

These organisations have also stressed major issues with land and property rights when it comes to Dalit women. As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, they often face forced evictions from their properties or from their land by dominant castes. A major march aimed at registering land rights for 2,500,000 Dalit women in India was carried out in 2013. Nonetheless, land ownership and the retention of land still remains a key issue for Dalit women across the region.

Generally Dalit women suffer from extreme poverty due to centuries of persistent discrimination and exclusion. Attempts at setting up small businesses or taking on work traditionally reserved for higher castes are often met with sanctions, boycott, destruction of property or violent retaliation.

“Caste-based discrimination remains widespread and deeply rooted, its victims face structural discrimination, marginalization and systematic exclusion, and the level of impunity is very high”

2013 joint press statement by seven UN Special Procedures mandate holders.

"Even if no one else recognizes us as human, we will shout it from the rooftops. ... The shame is not on the women, the shame is on the world that allows this to happen"

American Dalit woman filmmaker, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, who spoke at the Women in the World summit in New York about violence against Dalit women

Fighting back

Dalit women are uniting against one of the world's most gruesome and effective systems of oppression – the intersection of caste and gender discrimination.

Dalit women's movements across the world are growing stronger and are connecting to each other and reaching out to decision-makers and the global public. They are asking the international community and people of the world to come together and stand beside them, and to speak up to end the global silence that is allowing this gruesome form of discrimination to persist.

Across caste affected countries in South Asia Dalit women's movements are challenging the systems that have been oppressing them for centuries using protest marches, sit-ins, online grassroots activism, awareness raising events and numerous other new and traditional ways of getting their concerns heard.

Dalit women in diaspora communities in Europe and North America are also mobilising and taking part in solidarity actions, offline and online.

"There should be no place in our day and age for the degrading practices of caste discrimination and untouchability, further amplified by the intersection of discrimination based on caste and gender"

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay



Dalit women self-respect march



PHOTO: AIDMAN

In March 2014 hundreds of Dalit women marched for a full month across 5 states in India to demand justice and claim their self-respect. They visited victims of atrocities such as rape and violence and protested in front of police stations, courts and town houses to demand that their cases be recorded and the perpetrators brought to justice. The participants used #dalitwomenfight to post updates from the march on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Dalit women empowerment in Nepal

The Dalit women's movement in Nepal is growing in strength and numbers and in recent years, numerous marches and events have been carried out in Nepal to demand the rights of Dalit women. Dalit women's groups are working to spread awareness and empower Dalit women across Nepal to fight for their rights and defy the endemic caste and gender discrimination still rampant in the country. They have also participated actively in lobbying for the political representation of Dalit women and for the implementation of Nepal's Act outlawing caste-based discrimination and untouchability.



End the silence and take action today

United Nations

“I call upon member states to take on the challenge of addressing caste-based discrimination and the human rights violations flowing from this seriously and by mobilising all of their relevant institutions to this end.”

Message from the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, backed by countless UN Special Rapporteur and treaty body recommendations.

International human rights mechanisms – treaty bodies and special procedures mandates of the Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group – have increasingly raised concerns on the intersection of caste and gender discrimination, and recommended special measures to address it.

The expert bodies have made multiple observations and recommendations to governments and other stakeholders, specifically on violence against women with a low caste status. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has repeatedly called for action by governments and world leaders to address the issue, for example in connection with the global response to crimes of sexual violence in India, and her office continues to work for the elimination of caste discrimination. The issues facing Dalit women must be raised in all relevant multilateral fora, thematic debates and at the UN Human Rights Council.

Key recommendations for UN action to support Dalit women will be made available at: www.idsn.org/UNDalitWomen

European Union

The 2013 European Parliament Resolution on Caste Discrimination has made strong calls urging EU institutions, member states, and businesses to address caste discrimination, and particularly the situation of Dalit women, directly, actively and urgently.

Key recommendations for EU action to support Dalit women will be made available at: www.idsn.org/EUDalitWomen

Policy-Makers

Policy-makers in countries across the world must push for change in all bilateral and multi-lateral dealings with caste-affected countries and heads of state must repeatedly bring up caste and gender discrimination without hesitation or self-censorship. They must articulate their concerns in clear terms about the severe human rights violations faced by Dalit women due to caste and gender discrimination combined.

Citizens of the World

People across the globe can play an active role in spreading awareness, protesting and supporting Dalit women in their fight.

They can take to the streets, use social media, make films, projects, get creative to end one of the world's most brutal system of discrimination.

They can demand that their politicians take action on this, that the media report on it and that businesses check their supply chains for discrimination.

Finally, they can lend strength and moral support to these women by forming solidarity groups and networks – online and offline – across the globe.

Start today by using #dalitwomenfight on Twitter/Instagram and supporting the struggle on facebook.com/dalitnetwork.





PHOTO: RASHTRIVA GARIMA ABHIYAN – JAN SAHAS

Dalit women are uniting and organising to demand an end to the increasing violence and discrimination that they are subjected to in caste-affected countries. They are spreading a message of empowerment and hope to millions of Dalit women. This picture is from a two-month long march across 18 states in India to end the humiliating practice of manual scavenging, where Dalit women are forced to remove human waste from dry latrines using simple tools and baskets to carry it in.

More information

Short video on Dalit women

<http://tinyurl.com/dalitwomenvideo>

Briefing paper on Dalit women in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh

www.idsn.org/dalitwomen

Info on caste-based prostitution and manual scavenging

<http://idsn.org/caste-discrimination/key-issues>

Follow and spread the latest updates on Dalit women via:

www.facebook.com/dalitnetwork

www.twitter.com/idsnupdates

www.twitter.com/#dalitwomenfight

www.youtube.com/idsnvideo



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