

**Ms Thilagam Ramalingam**

**EVIDENCE , India**

Thank you madam chair.

I am thilagam from India representing EVIDENCE an organisation working on dalit rights

Dalits form 16% of Indian population and around 48% of them, i.e 80 mil are dalit women.

The struggle to include Dalits in social and economic spheres is hampered due to continued caste based discrimination. Despite the existence of constitutional guarantees , affirmative programs in education and employment , laws to prevent atrocities, programs and schemes to improve the socio-economic conditions of the marginalised, the situation of *Dalits* remains unchanged. Dalit women suffer three-fold discrimination - because they are women, they are Dalits, and they are poor.

Denial of right to education and resources restricts Dalit women's ability to protect and assert themselves. They continue to remain the landless unorganised labourer, which is an indicative of the exclusion and lesser access to productive resources like land, credit and quality education of Dalit women.

Furthermore, a large number of dalit women are engaged in traditional occupations mostly considered 'unclean' or 'ritually polluting,' like manual scavenging, due to caste biases.

The deteriorating effects of the New Economic Policies and the increasingly repressive forms of caste and gender oppression on dalit women such as Large scale displacement, migration, exploitation of young dalit women and girls in the labour market to be looked with serious concern. These women, who earlier fought caste and patriarchal discrimination, now face extended exploitation and discrimination of denial of sufficient food, health care, education and dignity.

Moreover, any attempt by Dalit women to assert their fundamental right to equality in any sphere – social, cultural, economic, civil and political – is met with violence. Aggrieved dalit women, while seeking justice, are denied access due to caste and gender biases in the criminal justice system too.

Lack of concrete data (both government and non-government) with regard to caste and gender discrimination and violence against dalit women, is also a major concern. This sadly proves the fact that the intersectional vulnerability of dalit women in facing caste and gender discrimination and its adverse effects are not understood properly.

Therefore the state to be urged to

1. Recognise dalit women as distinct group and make disaggregated data on Dalit women available in census reports, action taken reports, and progress reports
2. Ensure proper representation of Dalit women in statutory bodies and committees and undertake capacity building programmes to promote their active participation
3. Extend Reservation to Private sector with legal safeguards of equal opportunities and non-discrimination and it should apply to multiple spheres, namely private employment, market, capital , agricultural land, access to inputs and services.
4. Already existing laws, policies and programs in protection of the rights of women to be reviewed, strengthened and implemented.