

Water Discrimination: Dalit Losing Control Over Water Resources in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: The study accomplished in Tamil Nadu emphasizes an invasive prototype of discrimination against the area, surrounding monetary privations, physical separation of communities, ideas of purity and pollution, and prejudiced performances regarding admission to public water possessions. This research also transports to the vanguard the substantial challenges faced by Dalit women in obtaining water from public sources. In rural Tamil Nadu, Dalits stumble upon a huge number of obstacles when it comes to accessing safe drinking water. A considerable number of Dalit households lack access to water sources. These access-related challenges, compounded by social fences, induce Dalits to go on lengthy journeys to gather water from numerous sources, subjecting them to different forms of deficiency and favouritism in the practice. In a few examples, water sources are located at significant distances from the villages, requiring Dalit women to travel extensive distances to get drinking water, which is regularly tainted. Furthermore, the technical progress in water supervision and purification has not reached several low-caste communities. Accordingly, the matter of securing access to safe drinking water remains an unrelenting confront for Dalit households, with water supply distresses always ranking high on their list of priorities.

Keywords: Water Access, Untouchability, Social Exclusion, Discrimination and Panchamas.

INTRODUCTION

In India, a ruthless truth continues: Dalit communities face a deep disparity when it comes to accessing safe drinking water. Their villages are frequently marginalised, pressed to the margin when it comes to water sources. Lots of Dalits should rely on upper-caste individuals' kindness to access public wells, an inequality highlighted by the requirement for Dalit women to shape divide queues, tolerantly awaiting their turn at bore wells while non-Dalits fetch water. Besides, taps and wells in non-Dalit areas are unavailable to them, compounding the water-related challenges faced by Dalits. As a result, these communities now and then tolerate comprehensive periods without water to shun the unfair behaviour they face. This disparity is intensely entrenched in India's age-old caste system, initially prearranged into four separate varnas, which disqualified a fifth cluster identified as 'Untouchables,' 'Outcastes,' or the 'Depressed Classes.' In spite of government classification as Scheduled Castes and apparent upliftment actions, the caste system's lasting grasp is evident in the untouchability, verbal and physical abuse, and still violence that Dalits tolerate. Astonishingly,

despite comprising a noteworthy 16.6 percent of India's population, Dalit households mainly rely on scanty public facilities, including access to safe drinking water. They not only compete with imperfect access to clean water but also face frightening barriers that hinder it. In numerous regions, innate social and cultural standards, like untouchability, cast darkness above water sharing, overwhelming thoughts of equality and fairness. Dalits stand the trouble of water collection while continuing favouritism from their upper-caste neighbors. This favouritism may engage protracted waiting, disparaging language, and physical violence, compounding the challenges they face owing to their desire for political depiction and their intrinsic vulnerabilities as Dalits. Furthermore, water access in rural Tamil Nadu isn't exclusively determined by untouchability; power dynamics, spatial disparities, and caste clashes add additional hurdles to the matter, frequently leading to violent arguments. This study aims to survey the versatile challenges Dalits face in accessing drinking water and the collision of water accessibility and convenience in their lives. It highlights the essential role played by the caste pecking order in determining drinking water access for these marginalised and

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susceptible sections of society. In Tamil Nadu, a region renowned for its rich culture and history, a bleak prototype of dissimilarity has emerged, weaving economic hardships, community separation, and a history of favouritism into the fabric of daily life. This research reveals the challenges faced by Dalit women as they gather water from communal sources. In rural Tamil Nadu, the Dalit community tackles frequent obstructions in their expedition for clean, life-sustaining water. A lot lack possession of water sources; they are at the mercy of outside factors that delay their access to safe drinking water. The obstacles, compounded by communal buildings that inflict layers of deficiency and favouritism upon Dalits, demand long and tough journeys to fetch water from far-away sources. Technological progressions in water organisation have been unequally dispersed, sending off low-caste communities lacking current solutions to their water challenges. As this study probes into the comprehensive proportions of water access, it divulges the unrelenting confront of Dalit households securing their equitable share of safe drinking water. The need for sufficient water provision time after time takes a middle phase in the lives of Dalit communities, underscoring the thoughtful insinuation of this lasting move violently.

The hypothesis posits that increased access to safe drinking water in Dalit communities within Tamil Nadu would lead to a reduction in water-related health issues and an overall improvement in well-being. Conversely, it suggests that there is no significant association between access to safe drinking water and the occurrence of health issues in these communities. Furthermore, it establishes a link between enhanced access to safe drinking water and a decrease in the incidence of water-related health problems among Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu. The statement of the problem encapsulates the deeply ingrained discrimination faced by Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu, particularly in accessing safe drinking water. The ongoing water-related conflicts in villages like Kayampatti, Kodikulam, Muthuramalingapuram, Karikkilipalayam, and Thenpalanji vividly illustrate the overarching challenge of caste-based inequality and bias in the distribution of this vital resource. Dalit communities confront unjust barriers, leading to uneven access, physical assaults, and derogatory insults, reinforcing the caste hierarchy. Urgent reforms are imperative to ensure equitable water access and promote social justice and equality for all residents in Tamil Nadu. The research objectives aim to delve into recent water-related conflicts in Tamil Nadu, specifically focusing on Kayampatti Village, Kodikulam Village, Muthuramalingapuram, Karikkilipalayam, and Thenpalanji Village. These objectives encompass documenting and understanding incidents of discrimination and conflicts faced by Dalit communities, analysing various forms of oppression, examining the role of water scarcity, exploring systemic factors, assessing vulnerability, identifying contributing socio-

economic and political factors, and recommending solutions. The research seeks to enhance understanding of the water access challenges faced by Dalits, advocating for reforms that prioritise social justice, equality, and the eradication of caste-based discrimination in Tamil Nadu. The methodology involves a qualitative study investigating recent water-related conflicts and discrimination against Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu, with a specific focus on Kayampatti Village, Kodikulam Village, Muthuramalingapuram, Karikkilipalayam, and Thenpalanji Village. The research employs interviews, discussions, and document analysis to highlight water access challenges and advocate for social justice, equality, and the eradication of caste-based discrimination. The literature review significantly enriches our understanding of the pervasive issue of water-related discrimination against Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu. It explores historical, socio-cultural, and contemporary dimensions, shedding light on critical aspects such as historical roots, the intersectionality of caste and gender, the human rights perspective, socio-political factors, water scarcity impact, the role of grassroots initiatives, and policy implementation gaps. The review underscores the deeply entrenched nature of the issue, emphasising the necessity of holistic solutions addressing both discrimination and water scarcity. It not only lays the groundwork for further research but also emphasises the ongoing need to understand evolving forms of discrimination and develop effective strategies to secure equitable access to safe drinking water for Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu.

Water Rights

The study results reveal that a considerable 83.2 percent of respondents have access to safe drinking water sources. 'Safe drinking water' here indicates water that is drinkable and free from damaging microbes and materials, although it could have small issues like colour, odour, or taste owing to softening minerals. This comprises tap water, public standposts, local hand pumps, and similar sources. On the other hand, water from rivers, streams, ponds, rainwater harvesting, and open wells is deemed insecure for drinking. In the midst of Dalits relying on unsafe water sources, 74.0 percent fetched their drinking water from open wells, while 20.2 percent depended on rivers, and the residual 5.8 percent sourced water from springs, ponds, or other locations. Three distinguished trends exterior: an important dependence on common (public) sources for safe drinking water, like limited hand pumps; a lot of Dalits lack ownership of water sources, requiring them to move outside their communities to fetch water; and an elevated reliance on open wells for those who do not have the opportunity to utilise them for safe drinking water. The customary Hindu caste system has traditionally marginalised Dalits, positioning them at the base of the communal ladder as the 'Fifth Group' or 'Panchama', efficiently without them from different aspects of life. Caste-based disparities persist in their recognisable

forms, including substantial and job-related segregation, as well as favouritism and deficiency in the right to use land, natural resources, justice, education, social relations, and employment opportunities. The Mahad Movement, led by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, established the rights of Dalits to access public watering places, challenging the traditional hegemonic control of upper castes over water resources and promoting the active participation of women in the movement. Following his path, numerous progressive social movements in India have raised the issue of water access as a fundamental human right. Notably, in rural Tamil Nadu, socio-cultural norms play a more significant role than the mere presence of water in shaping water access challenges.

Water Availability

Water, as an imperfect and imperative supply, shows complicated relations with class, caste, and gender dynamics, chiefly about its management and allocation. The nearly all egregious and ingrained forms of unfairness and untouchability obvious themselves mainly brightly in the background of water access, mainly moving marginalised communities like the Dalits when they ask for to use communal water resources. These communal resources include different forms, ranging from state-sponsored public water supply systems to customary or current water harvesting structures. The accessibility of these resources to households serves as a vital indicator of the effective completion of government policies aimed at meeting the primary needs of the inhabitants. Yet, firm instances divulge a hierarchical arrangement leading to possession of water sources. Those households gifted with their confidential wells live in the top stratum of this pecking order, enjoying superior expediency compared to others. In spite of this barren difference, many Dalit households, frequently characterised by a lack of person-to-person water relations, are completely dependent on state-run public water-providing systems. The restraints required by hopeless poverty regularly avert them from possessing a devoted drinking water source. The survival of the caste system has efficiently distorted the community water provisioning structure hooked on a sign of power dynamics, wherein Dalits are methodically debarred from direct access to water, reinforcing the intensely ingrained and harsh structures of the caste-based hierarchy.

Water and untouchability

More than a few caste groups inside the Dalit community are regarded as untouchables, suggesting that substantial nearness or contact with them is supposed to pollute the natural resource, depicting it flabby for use by upper castes. These water sources may include wells, ponds, rivers, streams, or water amenities connected with waterworks. This extremely ingrained cultural custom was thoroughly imposed in different regions of Tamil Nadu, with the application of untouchability mostly manifesting in the area of access to drinking water. In villages where a communal water source was at hand,

favour was always accorded to the upper castes. In numerous examples, Dalits were forbidden from straight accessing these communal sources; in its place, an upper-caste individual would draw water from the source and fill the Dalits' containers lacking any physical contact. Upper-caste individuals engaged a pair of methods to defend their management over water resources. One move towards concern is preventing untouchables from coming into direct contact with their water sources. They would draw water and shift it into containers belonging to the untouchables, which were situated at a distance from the water source. One more latent array may have entailed establishing detachment queues for Dalits and upper castes, with allocated time slots to handle access.

Water Scarcity

Dalits are prevalent all through the country, residing in varied ecological regions, each characterised by separate patterns of rainfall and temperature circumstances. Tamil Nadu, in exacting, wrestles with both contained and cyclic water shortages. Firm areas fall inside low-rainfall zones, making them mostly susceptible to water scarcity. The common steamy monsoon weather in India brings about extensive periods of baking dry spells with negligible or no rainfall. Throughout such stages, not merely do surface water reservoirs decrease, but groundwater levels also move away, increasing the accessibility of water for household use. Dalits, as a social and economic cluster, bear an uneven burden when it comes to water shortages. Their water sources are less reliable, and they are flat to ventilate during dry spells. Compounding their challenges is their imperfect ability to acclimatise to water shortage circumstances. In regions wrestling with water shortages, the collision of ecological anxiety is particularly marked and harsh among Dalits. In villages where caste-based prejudice is common, Dalits cannot rely on normal water sources during periods of water shortage. Access to these meagre natural resources in Tamil Nadu villages is not simply uneven but is also intricately tangled with the socio-political dynamics of the community.

The distance from the water source

Proximity to the water source holds the greatest implication in determining access to water and the quality of water provided. The accessibility of water must be opportune and reachable as desirable, and individuals who must expedition important distances yet a few hundred metres are probable to face constraints in obtaining a sufficient supply. This, in turn, places force on water practices and hygiene practices. Different governmental agencies have recognised that a minimum of 40 litres of water per person per day should be available within a distance of 1.6 kilometres from each household. This translates to a maximum of 30 minutes of walking time, classically requiring three round trips with buckets. A lot of households, of course, take advantage of much shorter distances. Though even those with admission to a water source within less than 50

metres motionless spend expensive time collecting water, a burden that numerous cannot afford to bear. While the main source may be safe, the expediency of the minor resource is compromised. Infrequently, family members ought to assume journeys to safe water, further complicating the circumstances.

Women and water access

A distinguished feature of water convenience is that the accountability of attractive water from remote sources mainly falls on women, despite their age or social class. For Dalit women, whether in rural or urban settings, this load becomes yet more burdensome due to their incomplete possession of and suitable admission to water sources for drinking and household reasons. These Dalit women tolerate maltreatment on two distinct streets: (a) they are obliged to recover water for all their vital needs due to ingrained traditions and normal practices, and (b) they face disgrace, including verbal abuse, corporeal attacks, and even sexual harassment, exclusively because of their caste individuality. In Dalit households, the task of collecting water for domestic use is often entrusted to women. Unpaid for the nonattendance of gamely accessible potable water sources, they are obliged to gather water from inaccessible locations. Even when they have access to common drinking water sources, they may be subjected to separation, such as being forced to line disjointedly or having to wait while upper-caste women have secured their allocation of water. In plentiful locations, Dalit women are prohibited from drawing water from wells; in its place, they ought to be situated by until upper-caste women pour water into their containers. The upper-caste women shout at them and tirelessly subject them to shame, frequently admonishing them with phrases like, 'Maintain your distance; do not pollute'.

Water Distance

The time allocated by women for water collection includes, to a different extent, not only the physical challenges they come across but also a variety of extra forms of prejudice originating from the same source. According to government proposals, each household should have access to the smallest amount of 40 litres per capita per day of water within a distance of less than 1.6 kilometers. Though, in actuality, a noteworthy part of households assume complete journeys for diverse reasons, as well as non-functional or out-of-order water sources, limitations forced by upper-caste individuals on the use of suitable sources, unprocessed or unsafe water, and water supply shortages. Information proposes that Dalit women compose a standard of five trips per day to fetch water, with the regularity of such trips ranging from 2.6 times in Vellore to 6.5 times in Sivagangai. Naturally, each of these trips consumes 15 to 30 minutes of their time. Furthermore, they practice unfavourable impacts on their family's economic well-being and their aptitude to competently handle their domestic household tasks. The confronts obvious from their retorts cover: 1. Difficulties in caring

for their children; 2. Delays in cooking and sending children to school; 3. Children going hungry; 4. Reprimands from family members; and 5. Physical violence perpetrated by family members. The majority of these women believed that their economic losses stemmed from the impediments to their husbands' ability to reach their places of employment.

Storage

Dalit households mostly rely on common water sources, with their daily water storage practices wrought by the labour implicated in procuring water. They classically store water in containers such as buckets, large cans, and pitchers. In Tamil Nadu, Dalit households display outstandingly partial water storage per individual, with the archetypal water storage lessening well beneath 10 litres per person. This is drastically lower than the suggested minimum amount of roughly 40 litres per person per day to accomplish essential water necessities.

Water Conflicts

The succession of current water-related conflicts in Tamil Nadu serves as a deserted manifestation of the inexorable preference and command that Dalit communities accept. These offensive incidents shed light on the permanent caste-based disparities in accessing one of life's most primary necessities: safe drinking water. In this rational clarification, we get a whole assessment of all of these incidents, delving eagerly into the complex details that elucidate the total challenges faced by Dalits in their unrelenting pursuit of unbiased water access. The case of Kayampatti Village reveals circumstances where Dalit families are irrationally left devoid of access to a collective water reservoir, leading to a tricky succession of unnatural admissions and differences. The focused locking of the watchdog scheming water compounds the hardship, forcing Dalits to clutter for water during petite and irregular windows of chance. Kodikulam Village, on the other hand, highlights the notion of sacredness being used as a justification to prohibit Dalits from accessing a demanding well, thus emphasising nervousness about cleanliness and utilising the turnout of honeybees as a biassed tool. Muthuramalingapuram's account unveils a hurtful example where Dalits are systematically lacking access to a common water tank, exemplifying the steady phantom of untouchability. Even with the heaviness issued by numerous upper-caste Hindus, officials prioritize the defense and rights of Dalits. In Karikkilipalayam, spectators witness an offensive occasion where an upper-caste community hinders a young Dalit boy from accessing water, subjecting him to disparaging caste-based abuse. This event occurs in the context of a harsh water shortage and additional limitations on Dalits within the community. The upsetting attack on 52-year-old Dalit woman Andichhi in Thenpalanji Village serves as a bleak reminder of the weakness of Dalit communities. Her dilemma began when her daughter-in-law faced verbal abuse while

attempting to fetch water, eventually leading to a bodily assault on Andichhi and her family. Jointly, these incidents underline the complicated web of social, economic, and political factors that effect favouritism and uneven access to necessary resources, mainly safe drinking water. The vital need to address these issues and support evenhanded water access for Dalits in Tamil Nadu remains a pressing anxiety that stresses instant notice and inclusive improvement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study uncovers the lasting challenges faced by Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Kayampatti Village, Kodikulam Village, Muthuramalingapuram, Karikkilipalayam, and Thenpalanji Village, as they strive for equal access to safe drinking water. The upsetting incidents emphasise intensely entrenched caste-based disparity. Instant notice and complete improvement are crucial to guaranteeing the well-being and self-respect of Dalit communities, necessitating concentrated efforts from society, authorities, and policymakers. Plans skirmishing caste-based favouritism and promoting identical access to safe drinking water must take preference. The study emphasises the enduring need for support and improvement to ensure a brighter, more evenhanded prospect for Dalit communities.

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