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Oral Testimonies of Sexual Violence Victims of Puthirai Vannar Women in Tamil Nadu – A Caste and Gender based Approach

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Abstract:

The issue of women's rights within the Indian caste society remains an ongoing debate. While the Constitution of India guarantees equal rights to all citizens, the practical implementation of these rights often remains stagnant. As a result, caste-based atrocities against women continue to persist across all caste groups. However, Dalit women are the most vulnerable among all women, who face a triple burden of discrimination based on caste, class, and gender. Their social status is considered impure by other caste groups, subjecting them to severe marginalization. This paper examines the specific atrocities faced by Puthirai Vannar women; a community historically treated as "unseeable" within society. While non-Puthirai Vannar Dalit communities also face caste-based oppression, the Indian caste hierarchy ensures that power and dominance are continuously reinforced by upper and intermediary caste groups. The Puthirai Vannar community is often regarded as the "untouchables among the untouchables," facing discrimination from other Dalit subcastes. These, communities also consciously uphold purity norms within Dalit communities, further perpetuating exclusion and oppression as non-Dalits. This research explores how Puthirai Vannar women are victimized through an intersectional lens, considering both caste and gender-based violence. This study presents testimonies and case studies from the northern districts of Tamil Nadu to highlight their lived experiences.

Keywords: Caste, Class and Gender - Puthirai Vannar Women - Caste Atrocities – Women Rights

Introduction

Provisions in the Indian Constitution, under Article 15(3) (1949), enable distinct protections for women. This led to the invention of several policy documents advocating women's rights. However, a significant gap persisted between the legal framework and the actual implementation of these rights in practice (Manik,2021). Progressive legislation and safeguards made by constitutionally have done little to liberate the wide spread evil of caste discrimination. Traditional taboos and beliefs still exert their stranglehold across most part of India. By imposing social obligations, economic deprivation is also experienced by Dalit people (Thorat, 2002). Since the early 1990s, Indian feminist discourse has evolved into multiple strands, reflecting diverse perspectives on gender issues. These emerging voices are deeply connected to the uneven progress experienced by various social groups. Notably, women in India do not constitute a homogeneous category; they differ significantly in health, education, and economic performance, as reflected in human development indicators. This disparity is particularly proved among women from Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes, and Muslim communities. Scholars examining the challenges faced by Dalit women argue that those from lower castes, especially the so-called untouchables, suffer multiple layers of discrimination. Beyond gender based oppression and economic hardship, they also face exclusion enforced by caste based customs and the institution of untouchability. As a result, they experience a triple burden of marginalization—stemming from gender, poverty, and caste (NS Sabarwal, 2015) (Redge,1998). The rise of Dalit feminism, which critiques Dalit patriarchy, has brought attention to Dalit women as the 'Dalits among the Dalits.' Dalit feminists highlight their threefold oppression by caste, class, and gender (Chakravarti, 2003). Guru (2003) further emphasizes that Dalit women talk differently, arguing that the validity of an experience is shaped not just by caste and class but also by gender identity. The caste based discriminations and caste centered occupational division are still continuing in different forms both in rural and urban space of Tamil Nadu, India. Considering double discrimination and triple discrimination which addressed discrimination based on caste, gender and class.

Impact of Caste, Class and Gender on Dalits women

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994) argues that the dominant race-sex analogy, which equates racial and gender oppression, fails to capture the unique forms of discrimination faced by Black women. This approach either conflates their experiences with those of Black men under racial oppression or with those of White women under gender oppression, thereby rendering the specific challenges of Black women invisible. In Indian context, caste system plays vital role in determining life of Dalit women. Social norms influence our behavior through our reflective and rational mind. It also influences through our more automatic, non-conscious responses. When attitudes or stereotypes affect our understanding, actions and decisions in unconscious ways, this is referred to as 'implicit biases'. This kind of bias is activated involuntarily without an individual's awareness or intention (Iris Bohnet, 2017). The Hindu population constitutes 80% of India's population. The caste system stratifies Hindus. It separates them into mutually exclusive caste groups. Importantly, membership of caste is determined entirely by birth (VK Borooah, 2014). In earlier periods, religion played vital role in devolution of properties on women. In modern days, several laws have been enacted to endure property rights of women. In Hindu tradition, husband and wife are treated as joint owners of household. Hence, the theory of joint ownership has kept wife at minor advantage position. One cannot explain the position of women in ancient periods without referring Manu's views (Selvaraj Narayanan, 2016).

Scheduled Castes (SCs), commonly known as Dalits, are historically marginalized communities in India that have endured social, economic, and political discrimination for centuries. The term 'Scheduled Castes' is a constitutional classification for groups historically subjected to untouchability and exclusion. 'Dalit,' meaning 'oppressed' or 'broken' is often used as a self-assertive identity to challenge historical injustices and reclaim dignity (Gautam, 2014). According to Dahiya (2021), Dalit women face systemic oppression due to their caste and gender. Dalit women often face 'double discrimination or double jeopardy,' experiencing oppression both as women and as members of the Dalit community. Their marginalized identity places them at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, subjecting them to intersecting forms of exclusion and injustice. Caste system can be maintained only through the controls of women sexuality and in this sense, women are gateways to the caste system (Amedkar,1990). Béteille (1965, p. 46) defined caste, as a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system. On the other hand, Berreman (1967, p. 70) has defined the caste system as a system of birth-ascribed stratification, of socio-cultural pluralism, and of hierarchical interaction. With Sinha's words (1967, p. 94), caste is a hierarchy of endogamous groups, organized in a characteristic hereditary division of labour.

Under the caste system, it is typically stress-free to trace an individual in his or her stratum, and when this is completed, other individual knows how to deal with him or her even without identifying him or her personally. If X belongs to the leading stratum and Y to the next one, X will be considered socially superior to Y, regardless of their individual qualities, and be treated accordingly. Long debate prevails about caste system whether the caste system is a unique phenomenon or simply one manifestation of general processes of social stratification (Subedi, 2014). Dalit women, often referred to as 'The Dalits of the Dalits' or 'Thrice Dalits' by activist Ruth Manorama, face multilayered oppression. They are marginalized by both upper and lower castes for their gender and caste and endure discrimination within their own households under Dalit patriarchy. Many suffer domestic violence from husbands struggling with caste-based discrimination and substance abuse. Pervasive poverty forces them into exploitative labor, including manual scavenging and even forced prostitution (Dahiya,2021).

Gender and Caste Discrimination

Gender discrimination is a social phenomenon. It restricts women from the participation of the economic, social and political life (Gilroy, 2014). Women are encouraged to perform gender related works in several societies across the world (Eagly and Wood, 1999). Cultural differences vary from country to country. It plays important role in gender discrimination. It is important to identify and address this issue as it connects with economic and social attitudes of any country. Economic crisis and globalization have pushed women to find employment opportunities to earn supplement income for their family (Seguino and Grown, 2006). Agricultural based

developing countries are providing sufficient employment opportunities to women to improve their equality through employment status.

Gender discrimination leads to poverty and deprivation. Persistent poverty and deprivation overlap with certain castes, communities and differ between genders (Barbara Harris, 2008). Manu Smiriti (about 200 BC) says 'woman is a perpetual minor and has to lead entire life under the guardianship of the father, the husband or the son'. Several studies have analyzed the determinants of family composition in terms of differences in religion (Hindus and non-Hindus), castes, land ownership, economic status, age, literacy level, place of residence, etc. (S Deb,2015). India has over 200 million Dalits, with Dalit women making up nearly 16.3% of the country's female population, the majority living in rural areas. Their struggles extend beyond gender and economic deprivation to caste, religious discrimination, and untouchability, leading to the denial of their fundamental rights (Kumar,2021). Moreover, they face severe barriers to justice, with widespread impunity for crimes committed by dominant caste members and seen as easy targets for sexual violence, perpetrators often escape punishment. Studies show that the conviction rate for rapes against Dalit women is below 2%, compared to 25% for all women in India (Rai,2016) (Muley,2022).

Victims of Gender and Caste-based Violence

Violence is a deliberate act, often driven by motivations like revenge, and is typically directed at individuals or groups with lower social status. It can take physical, structural, or symbolic forms. Women from vulnerable sections of society are particularly affected by various forms of violence, including foeticide, infanticide, child sexual abuse, custodial violence, incest, sexual harassment, kidnapping, rape, domestic violence, and stalking (Gautam, 2014). In 2006, the Khairlanji massacre occurred in Nagpur, in which four members of the Bhotmange family, belonging to a Dalit caste, were brutally murdered by members of the politically dominant Kunbi caste in broad daylight. Before being killed, the women of the family were publicly paraded naked and gang-raped (Japleen, 2015) (Bilal,2024). 'Dalit organizations and Dalit women's groups are at the forefront of bringing attention to sexual violence against Dalit women. In 2012, Dalit media groups created a map of Haryana titled '30 Days in a Rape State,' which documented the details of 19 Dalit girls who were raped in the state." In 2015, the People's Media Advocacy and Resource Centre (PMARC) released a list of 212 cases from 2014, documenting atrocities, assaults, rapes, and murders against Dalit women. Dalit woman was gang raped in Rajasthan while she worked to prevent a child marriage. Taken up by the NGO Vishakha, the case led to a landmark Supreme Court rules mandating the creation of prevention cells for working women at their places of employment (Sabharwal,2015). Dalit women have lack of control over their bodies and their sexuality. Out of 34 narratives of 500 Dalit women across four states found that the most frequent forms of violence that are committed are verbal abuse (62.4 percent), physical assault (54.8 percent), sexual harassment and assault (46.8 percent), domestic violence (43.0 percent), and rape (23.2 percent) (Irudayam, Mangubhai, & Lee,2014). Thus, caste, class and gender discrimination stop Dalit women from enjoying their basic human rights (Purvi,2017)

Study area

Most villages in Tamil Nadu are divided into two sections: the 'Colony,' where Dalits reside, and the 'Oor,' where non-Dalits live, as they are socially positioned above Dalits (Anandhi, Jeyaranjan, & Rajan, 2021). In the case hierarchy of Tamil Nadu Scheduled Castes are placed under the lower grade. Among the Scheduled Castes 'PuthiraiVannar' is a caste placed in the bottom of the caste hierarchy. 'Vannar' is a specific caste group in Tamil Nadu which is primarily engaged by the caste society washing clothes and other related work (Ko.Ragupathi,2012). There are various sub-castes within Vannan community. One such is the 'Puthirai Vannar'. Vannan (Washer) generally wash the clothes of other dominant caste groups, but 'Puthirai Vannar' are made to wash the clothes of Scheduled castes like Parayan and Pallan. So they are even called 'Para Vannan' colloquially. 'Puthirai Vannar' caste group has been undergoing various forms of exploitation in general women are more particular. They are made to perform certain caste determined works such as cleaning and washing the unclean clothes of all members of community as well as clothes used by women during menarche and menstruation, rituals related to funerals and servitude works during village festivals especially temple. In the name of caste there are multiple forms of atrocities, violence and humiliations perpetuated against them. They are faced to all forms of violence i.e. physical, economical, verbal, and emotional in general for raising their voices against exploitation;

women are subjected to sexual violence in particular by the dominant scheduled caste men. They are living as untouchables within untouchables. This paper examines the oral testimonies of three Puthirai Vannar women from the Chengalpattu and Villupuram districts of Tamil Nadu, focusing on their experiences of sexual violence. Using primary data collected through in depth interviews, the study aims to explore the impact of caste hierarchy on sexual violence against women. The Puthirai Vannar women have experienced the sexual harassment issues in all over the state of Tamil Nadu the present paper has confined with case studies for the understanding of the menace of women Puthirai Vannar community in Tamil Nadu. Since, these three case studies are the indicators of the social status and rights of Puthirai Vannar women in Tamil Nadu. Conducted with the support of the Puthirai Vannar organization and the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front. To protect the privacy of the individuals involved from this Minority community, the names of the victims have been changed, and the village Taluk name has also been not revealed. This paper aims to examine how their experiences differ from other Dalit women, the forms of sexual violence they endure, and the barriers they face in accessing support and justice.

Case Study 1 - Chengalpattu District

In a village of Chengalpattu district various caste groups reside, including BC, MBC, and SC/ST communities. Among the SC group, the Paraiyar caste is the most prominent. Only two families from the Puthirai Vannar caste live on the outskirts of the main village, near the lake. Ramesh's (name changed) aunt, who is a widow, belongs to the Puthirai Vannar caste and resides in this area. However, she is prohibited from performing caste-based occupations, particularly those related to birth, death, and menarche rituals, which are traditionally imposed on the Puthirai Vannar community by the caste hierarchy. In 2015, Ramesh, then 24 years old, and his family arrived in that village for duck farming during the harvest season. After completing their duck farming responsibilities, the Pariyars were informed that this family would continue to stay in the village to perform rituals for others in exchange for wages. In 2016, Ramesh married 17-year-old Vijaya Lakshmi (name changed) from another village. During the harvest season, Vijaya Lakshmi's father-in-law and mother-in-law would often leave for duck farming or, at times, travel to neighboring villages for livelihood needs. Due to the nature of his work, her husband Ramesh would frequently return home late at night. His parents stayed in another village, where they continued their duck farming activities, a place that was some distance from their own village. On the day of the incident, around 4 o'clock in the evening, Vijaya lakshmi went to an open area near the lake's edge to defecation. as there were no toilet facilities at her home. Suddenly, three unidentified individuals appeared. They covered her face and tied her hands behind her back using her saree. They also gagged her by stuffing her blouse into her mouth, preventing her from calling for help. She was unaware of where they were taking her. She had been abducted. During the ordeal, she overheard their conversation. One of the abductors whispered to the other, "This girl has seen our faces. She could identify us later. We should kill her; otherwise, we might get caught." She continued, describing how they had brutally dragged her into the dense bushes, where thorny plants towered above. As they pulled her through, her hands, legs, and back were severely wounded, bleeding from the deep scratches. Thorns pierced her spine, causing intense pain. Once they stopped dragging her, they assaulted her, violently violating her body.

Following this, they attacked her and began to violently penetrate her. Noticing someone nearby, they dragged her into the lake, repeatedly forcing her underwater. A passerby who was grazing cattle noticed the scene and shouted at them, demanding to know what they were doing. The abductors, gripped by panic and confusion, abandoned the girl by pushing her into the lake before fleeing the scene. Unable to escape due to her hands and mouth being tied, she struggled desperately to survive. Meanwhile, her father in law and mother in law visited her home and were alarmed to find her missing. Growing increasingly concerned; they headed to the nearby lake to search for her. They heard a sound from the shepherd and spotted her in the lake, drenched and trembling. Realizing something was wrong, they quickly rescued her from the water. Seeing her partially exposed, her father in law wrapped her in his dhoti to protect her dignity and took her home. Overcome with shame, she couldn't bring herself to speak about what had happened, fearing her marital family might reject her if they knew the truth. She attempted suicide in the pooja room of her house. Fortunately, her husband's family noticed in time and broke down the steel door to save her. After this incident, she gradually began to open up about the sexual abuse she had endured. Her husband's family empathized with her ordeal and provided emotional support. They decided to file a complaint against the perpetrators.

Her mother-in-law took the matter to the village head, seeking justice. However, he dismissed her complaint, stating that no such crimes had ever occurred in the village before. He insisted that incidents of this nature were unheard of in the community and advised her to remain calm. He suggested that the abductors were likely outsiders and even speculated that they might be from the girl's hometown or possibly acquaintances of hers. After speaking with the victim's mother-in-law, he called the Panchayat Head to inform them about the incident. He explained that he was heading to the Iyyappen temple and wouldn't be able to visit the crime scene. However, he strongly advised her to file a complaint against the offenders at the police station without delay. Later, they went to the police station, where the victim was ill-treated and harassed by the police, who used abusive language against her under the guise of an inquiry. At the station, the officers blamed her behavior, suggesting it provoked the abductors' actions.

Despite her attempts to file a complaint, the police refused to do so, deliberately delaying the process for over three days before outright denying her request. In response, the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front and the Salavai Thozhillalar Sangam (Washing Labourers Association) intervened, organizing a joint protest to demand that the police file the complaint and take necessary action. Afterwards, the police filed an FIR and promptly arrested the three offenders. However, she was unsure about how to proceed with the case. Additionally, she did not receive any compensation. Following the incident, her family chose not to participate in any village rituals, which impacted them economically. They also refused to apply for the MGNREGA card, preventing them from accessing employment for two years. During this period, her family faced numerous humiliations while fighting for justice.

Case Study 2 - Villupuram District

Sugnathi’s (name changed) family resides in Villupuram district. This village has a significant population of the Paraiyar community. Her family’s livelihood depends on playing the Parai, a traditional musical instrument used during death ceremonies. For the past eight years, her family has stopped the practice of ‘oor sooru eduththal’, which involves collecting food from dominant caste households in exchange for performing rituals. Previously, they were paid minimal wages for this service. Suganthi, the youngest child of her parents, faced a challenging life. During her childhood, while studying in the fifth standard, she suffered from a severe fever that left her leg paralyzed. As a result, she rarely went outside. Despite her limited mobility, she spent her days at home with her mother. However, there was a peculiar occurrence that became a common sight—a young man from the village, around twenty five years old, frequently wandered around their house. He, too, had a speech impairment. Suganthi’s relatives noticed his frequent visits and grew concerned. They warned her mother to remain cautious.

On the day of the incident, between 12:30 PM and 01:00 PM, Suganthi's mother left home to feed the hens about ten houses away. When she returned, she saw the boy lying on top of Suganthi in front of their house. Upon noticing her, he got up and ran away, completely nude. Additionally, her daughter was partially unclothed. There was a concern that the boy might have attempted to harm her. Shocked, she screamed. Later, she informed her family members and visited his sister's home to report the incident. His sister explained that the boy had a speech impairment and was generally considered harmless. She believed he might have acted unknowingly and did not see the incident as serious. She advised them to let the matter go and find peace.

At that time, Sumathi's brother arrived home and sought help from the Thurumbar Viduthalai Iyakkam, an organization dedicated to supporting the Thurumbar community (also known as Puthirai Vannar). Members of the Iyakkam intervened and organized a community meeting. During the meeting, the offender's uncle admitted it was a mistake and offered compensation. However, the leaders of the Thurumbar Viduthalai Iyakkam deemed the incident too serious for mere compensation and instead decided to pursue justice. They collectively resolved to file a complaint against the offender at the police station.

When Suganthi’s family went to collect “Oor sooru,” they were met with abuse from people of other communities. These individuals hurled caste-based insults and sexually derogatory remarks, aiming to demoralize Suganthi and her family. They even went as far as to threaten that if Suganthi's mother refused to collect food from the upper-caste communities, they should leave the village. Moreover, they constantly reinforced the notion that people from lower caste groups had no right to file complaints or seek justice, implying they were undeserving of such rights.

The dominant casteist mindset prevalent among other communities perpetuate the belief that the Puthirai Vannar community is inferior. It is commonly assumed that they should receive no privileges, as they are traditionally seen as consuming leftover food only after the households they serve have finished eating. Additionally, members of the dominant communities arrogantly assert that they have the first claim over the bodies of Puthirai Vannar women for their own sexual desires, even before their husbands. This reflects a mindset that justifies controlling the lives and personal liberties of the Puthirai Vannar people, under the pretext of providing them with sustenance.

After all these incidents, Suganthi's mother filed a police complaint against the villagers for the first time and stopped collecting food from the village (Oor sooru eduththal). In response to the complaint, the police asked the victim to identify the offender. Once the victim identified the accused at the police station, she slapped the offender in front of the police right then and there.

After a few days, the accused was released from jail on bail, and the victim received only five thousand rupees as compensation from the government. Meanwhile, the accused is now free and has gotten married, maintaining the same social status as before. The victim's family has not been informed about any updates on the case's progress, and the final verdict is still pending, leaving them waiting for justice.

Case Study: 3 - Chengalpattu District

In this village, three Puthirai Vannar families have been residing for over fifty years. There are more than one hundred and fifty Paraiyar families residing in the village. The three Puthirai Vannar families perform ritual services for the Paraiyar community. These families are divided among the Paraiyar households at a ratio of 50:1, with each Puthirai Vannar family serving approximately fifty Paraiyar families. Gopi (52) and Rani (34) (Name changed) are part of a four-member family and belong to one of the Puthirai Vannar families among the three in their community. Rani is Gopi's second wife. In their daily routine, two male construction workers from the same village often accompany Gopi on his way back home from the workplace, as Gopi works as a daily wage helper for them. Initially, their visits to Gopi's home were without any ill intentions. However, over time, Rani noticed a change in their behavior. She shared that whenever she offered them water, they would intentionally touch her hands with inappropriate intentions. Rani hesitated to tell Gopi about this, fearing that he might misunderstand her.

In 2015, on a Saturday, Gopi went to work as usual to collect his wage. That day, one of the individuals mentioned earlier coerced Gopi into drinking alcohol with them. Although Gopi initially refused, he eventually gave in to their persistent pressure and consumed a large amount of alcohol near the workplace unlike his usual habit of drinking only at home. The excessive drinking left Gopi unconscious and unstable. Taking advantage of his condition, they brought him to his hut, stayed there for a while, and then left. Rani tried to wake Gopi for dinner, but he did not respond. Noticing this unusual behavior, she decided to let him rest, thinking she could offer him food later if he woke up. Exhausted, she lay down beside her children and soon fell asleep. Around midnight, Gopi's two co-workers suddenly entered the house. Before Rani could fully process what was happening, one of them covered her mouth while the other tied her legs. They dragged her away from her children, and then they took turns assaulting her. She cried throughout the night, overwhelmed by fear and helplessness.

The next morning, she confided in her husband about the incident. She had been hesitant to share it, fearing that it might make him question her character. Despite her worries, she chose to be honest. Upon hearing what had happened, Gopi realized that the reason behind them forcing her to drink alcohol was to take advantage of her. Outraged, he went straight to the Village Head to seek justice. However, the Village Head advised him to stay quiet, warning that if they reported the incident to the authorities, it could bring shame to their family's reputation.

It is better for them to remain silent and try to overcome the defamation rather than reacting to it. Additionally, the Village Head advised the victims that he would warn the accused to stop visiting their house and suggested that Gopi should no longer allow them in. With a heavy heart, Gopi responded that he could not risk creating enmity with other caste groups, as doing so would make it impossible for him to continue living in the village. As a result, the victim and her husband chose not to file any complaint, highlighting the extreme level of vulnerability they faced.

Conclusion

In all the case studies discussed, the victims are Puthirai Vannar women, while the perpetrators are men from the Paraiyar caste. Positioned at the lowest tier within the Scheduled Castes, the Puthirai Vannar community faces extreme social marginalization. This system of graded inequality intensifies the vulnerability of these women, exposing them to exploitation. Consequently, their bodies are objectified and subjected to sexual violence, perpetuated by entrenched beliefs in caste-based superiority. Despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights, caste identity continues to shape the lives of these women, who endure pervasive exploitation—physical, sexual, cultural, political, socio-economic, and psychological. The entrenched village caste Panchayat system often overrides constitutional principles, enforcing hierarchically constructed caste norms and rules. This system perpetuates torture and violence, exposing the structural and functional realities of India's caste and sub-caste hierarchies and their impact on social institutions. Additionally, the graded caste hierarchy upholds dehumanizing and inequitable values, inflicting deep and lasting trauma.

Another aspect to consider is that caste hierarchy consistently enforces inhumane practices across all levels in various ways. In this context, men from the lower ladder of the caste system also experience caste based discrimination. So, why do some men from these marginalized caste groups perpetrate violence against women? The answer lies in the concept of 'Gendered Identity.' Despite facing oppression from 'upper' communities, they may still assert their own form of dominance over women. This reflects how power dynamics operate not only across caste lines but also within them, perpetuating a cycle of oppression.

It can be understood that Dalit women are prominently represented among the victims of sexual violence. Theoretically, they are among the most vulnerable groups, as their rights are systematically denied within the Indian caste hierarchy. This denial extends even to men within the same social cluster (Dalit men) and, at times, within their own communities. In the context of caste dynamics, the female body is viewed as a bearer of caste privilege while simultaneously symbolizing concepts of purity and pollution. Historically, targeting women's bodies has been a strategic means to 'pollute' or undermine an entire caste. This pattern is evident throughout history.

Stanko (2008) suggests that all women are 'universally vulnerable.' However, the case studies clearly demonstrate that the most voiceless women are particularly targeted due to the lack of victim representation in the Indian criminal justice system. Although our Constitution guarantees equality in all spheres, it places special emphasis on protecting women who face humiliation and mistreatment, often at the hands of men.

In cases of sexual abuse, offenders are predominantly men, who benefit from privileged gender status in society. The victimization of women especially Dalit Puthirai Vannar women can be understood through the lens of social exclusion. This exclusion not only makes them vulnerable to abuse but also shows that Dalit men can be perpetrators too. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the social world from a woman's perspective, considering the historical and socio-cultural contexts that shape their experiences.

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