

# Scheduled caste Women in Contemporary Indian Situation

## Abstract

The scheduled caste constitutes about 16.2% of the total population in India. Although there is a large volume of anthropological literature describing the characteristics of and differences among the various schedule castes in India, little inter-disciplinary research has been done to uncover the status of women among the schedule castes population in India. This paper will analyze the status of women among the schedule castes in India.

Frequent comparisons will be made to the social and cultural practices of the schedule castes, mainstream Hindus, as well as the scheduled caste population. Through this analysis, we will show the distinctiveness of the schedule castes cultures and the fact that many women from the schedule castes face less discrimination than Hindu women.

## Introduction

The schedule castes constitute about 16.2% of the total population in India (166,635,700 according to Census of India, 2011). About 93.80% live in rural areas and 6.20% live in urban areas. The term “schedule castes” is a term used for administrative purposes to confer certain constitutional privileges and protection to a group of people who are considered to be backward and disadvantaged and they are often perceived as backward people who live in remote and isolated regions and engage in primitive occupations,

The schedule castes, scheduled Tribes and other backward Classes together constitute about 60 % of India population. They together form the Dalit Category. Caste discrimination has a unique and specific impact on Dalit women who suffer multiple forms of discrimination. Dalit women are especially vulnerable to violence by the police and private actors. As the majority of landless laborers, Dalit women come into greater contact with landlords and enforcement agencies than “upper-caste” women, rendering them more susceptible to abuse.

Dalit women have unequal access to services, employment opportunities, and justice mechanisms as compared to Dalit men. In relation to employment opportunities, Dalit women are allotted some of the most menial and arduous tasks and experience greater discrimination in the payment of wages than Dalit men. In relation to services, Dalit women have less access to education and health facilities, ensuring that their literacy, nutrition, and health standards fall far below that of Dalit men and non-Dalit men and women. The number of Dalit women in decision-making positions is also very low. Investment in projects targeted to the development of Dalit women is also far lower as compared to those for men. Violence against women remains rife across all communities but Dalit Women are worst affected despite very stringent laws and constitutional safeguards. There is often pressure upon Dalit women complainants to compromise or conciliate in the interest of protecting the family because the integrity of the home is deemed to be more important than their dignity of the women. In cases of complaints of rape and sexual molestation, Dalit women often find themselves being objectified and treated with disdain. Instead of being treated with consideration and sensitivity, they are sometimes blamed-even by the court-for having contributed to commission of the offence. This, coupled with the low rate of conviction in crimes against women leaves a large majority of Dalit women unable to secure effective protection from the criminal justice system.

In addition to the trauma of rape itself, Dalit victims have to suffer further agony during legal proceedings as complaints are handled roughly; victims are more often than not humiliated by the police; and the experience of giving evidence in court is so distressing that it puts severe psychological stress on them.



**Kumud Sharma**

Assistant Professor  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Rajasthan,  
Jaipur, India