

Discrimination and Development:

Dalit Women's Activism in Rural Tamilnadu

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It is well known that the dalit women's movement India has offered a nuanced critique of caste and development politics. If it has raised issues with the dalit movement for marginalisation of gender issues, it has simultaneously articulated the 'politics of difference' and highlighted the caste-dimension of women's issues through the critique of upper caste women's dominance in the women's movement. Scholars studying dalit women's movement have highlighted the recent formation of National Dalit Women's Federation and their articulation of dalit women's rights as providing a critique of dalit movement and development politics in India. However, very little attention has been paid to situate such rights discourse within the varied and complex micro-level context in order to understand the dynamics of dalit women's activism and their discourse on caste, gender and development. Against this background, this paper attempts to reinterpret dalit women's activism not as just as a production of international, national alliances and network politics but as interaction between these and the micro-level political activism of grass –roots dalit women. Through a detailed case study of a grass-roots dalit women's movement in Tamilnadu, this paper analyses the contingencies of practices and imaginations of dalit women activists and the diversified ways in which they have articulated and interpreted their political activism by subverting the 'official discourse' of emancipation and freedom and in turn what such an activism discloses in terms of dalit women's critique of caste and development.