

4<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues  
Effective Participation in Economic, Social and Cultural Life

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

I am Pushpa from India Navsarjan Trust .

The right to equality regardless of gender and caste is a fundamental right in India. However in spite of this constitutional edict, the Indian government has acknowledge that the institutional force – caste , class, community and family - are powerful and shape people's mindsets to accept inequality. This is no more obvious than when one visits Dalit women. Vulnerably positioned at the bottom of India's gender, caste and class hierarchies, Dalit women experience the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations in terms of caste-class-gender discrimination and violence.

Violence against dalit women presents clear evidence of widespread exploitation and discrimination against these women. Violence is also core outcome of gender-based inequalities, made worse by caste discrimination. In an Indian context, violence acts as a crucial social mechanism to maintain dalit women's more subordinate position to men and particularly dominant caste men.

Violence or atrocities against dalit women occur at two levels. As part of the caste system whereby violence is used to reinforce caste norms where dalit women are seen as available for all forms of violence, especially sexual violence; and when they transgress caste norms for example by asserting their rights over resources, public spaces or cultural spaces.

I want to highlight just a few of the cases that my organisation, Navsarjan has worked on:

\* Sagita case – 7rs old girl – raped and murdered in school toilet. No arrest has been made after 2 years

\* Parul case – 14rs old girl – victim of gang rape in out of school. She is still suffering the effects of the attack. The case is pending in the court

\* Anju – 16rs old girl – victim of Gang-rape by Teachers of teacher training college. Navsarjan secured the conviction of the attackers in a case which is famous in India 'Patan Case'.

I have the following recommendations to make to the Government of India

1. To ensure the effective implementation of the provisions in the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocity Act.
2. Develop a new strategy to empower Dalit women, for example by providing Dalit women with land since if they own property Dalit women's status will increase and violence may decrease.
3. Conduct awareness raising programmes amongst Dalit women so they have knowledge of their rights

Thank you.