

## EVE- TEASING AND TAMILNADU LEGISLATORS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO QUESTION HOUR

By

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### Abstract

*Eve teasing has been a serious social evil widely prevalent in our country. Nowadays, so many cases are filed against eve teasers and sometimes the victims most probably school and college students commit suicide. Eve teasing is widely prevalent in all walks of life. Wherever women work, they are targeted and teased whenever possible. We cannot just say that only the school children and college students are affected by eve teasers, women politicians were also teased on many occasions in the Tamil Nadu legislative Assembly. Women ministers like Dr. Jothi Venkatachalam and Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu were targeted many times. Questions related to eve teasing were also raised in the Assembly and the legislators tried to mock the victims instead of the culprits. The Madras Legislative Assembly Debates and Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Debates were used for preparing this research paper. More over leading newspapers and interviews were also added to enrich this paper. Though women became legislator they still remained women at heart. Eve teasing still continues and we seldom care about it. The ruling party members also sometimes tease their own party legislators if they achieve something. They are not encouraged inside their party itself. This paper mainly focuses on the ordeals of the women legislators and their male counterparts.*

**Keywords:** women, legislators, eve teasing, questions, assembly procedures.

### Introduction

Eve teasing is an euphemism for public sexual harassment or molestation often known as 'Street Harassment of women by Men'. The Eve teasing problem first received public and media attention only in the 1970s. Eve teasing has been a serious social evil widely prevalent in our country. The women politicians also never escaped from eve teasing. Women's participation in politics was very rare on those days and it gained momentum only after the independence. Only the elite and sophisticated women participated in politics

and they were highly respected. It was during the third assembly more women participated in active politics. Even though women became ministers, they could not escape bullying. This paper focuses on the hardships faced by women legislators and the attitude of the male chauvinist legislators.

### Women Legislators

During the first election Dr. T. S. Soundaram Ramachandran and Dr. Jothi Venkatachalam were alone in the assembly (Q.Q.R.M.L.A 1952-1957), whereas in the second and third assembly more women participated

actively in politics. (Eleven) Women legislators never hesitated to question their own parties. The members belonging to the Dravida Munnetta Kazhagam were great orators and they cross examined the congress party on many occasions; the women also were pierced whenever possible. When Jothi Venkatachalam was the Health Minister, she was cornered from all sides by the D.M.K Members. When she explained about the family planning scheme, one of the D.M.K member enquired whether she had done the family planning surgery because she had three children. (Asaithambi DMK) She must really be shocked on hearing that A.S. Ponnammal also accepted that women were not given due importance in the Assembly and she referred to some instances when the opposition members used abusive and vulgar comments on them (Ponnammal).

### **DMK and Question Hour**

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam became the ruling party in 1967 and Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu became the Harijan welfare minister (Q.R.M.L.A 1967-1970). Inter-Caste marriages were encouraged and legalized by the D.M.K government. People considered inter caste marriages as a controversial issue even in the modern period and it was very rare in the 1960s. In the 1940s the Dravida Kazhagam and Periyar introduced self – respect marriages in which so many ceremonies and rituals were avoided. The D.M.K government introduced awards and gift of gold coins to the couples of inter caste marriages. Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu being the Harijan Welfare Minister had to popularise the inter caste marriage. She was humiliated and teased on many occasions. K. Vinayakam, the congress M.L.A enquired about the number of inter caste marriages

reported to the government for the purpose of gold medal from July to August 1967 (MLAD 379-382). Actually, there was no report available to that question. So, he further enquired whether the married couple would apply for the award of gold or the government, using its administrative machinery found out the inter caste married couple. They arrayed supplementary questions in such a way, that Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu lost her control and bluffed in the assembly.

Dr. H. V. Hande enquired if the government was willing to give any reward for those who married before the announcement of the reward with retrospective effect. J. James enquired about the number of applications received till then for the award. Peer Muhammad asked whether the couple of inter- religious marriages would be given the award. V. Swaminathan wanted to know about the number of inter-caste marriages district wise. Narasimhan and another legislator enquired if it was a second marriage, would the government provide any award? V.K. Kothanadaraman went one step ahead and asked the minister the concept of inter caste marriage. S. Murugaiyan enquired if the bride or groom belonged to Harijan community, would the government give more rewards? The minister replied that altogether 60 applications were received till then and she also assured that the introduction of the award was to create casteless society. Being a woman she was cornered on all sides, but she never gave up. M. Muthaiah suggested the Harijan welfare minister to provide job opportunities for the couples of inter –caste marriage in the public sector to improve their status (TNLAD 112-117). She strongly asserted that people who were discussing

about the inter-caste marriages were not actually having interest in it. On the contrary they probed the question to ridicule the government. Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu also firmly announced that the bride and bridegroom of the inter-caste marriage must belong to the scheduled caste or Adi Dravida community. According to her opinion, all the other love marriages and inter caste marriages between a forward caste and a backward caste or between a backward class and most backward class could not be considered as an actual inter caste marriage. Kovai Chezian referred to the Tamil proverb that 'the marriages are made in heaven, but actually they were conducted on the earth. He stressed the government to enforce inter caste marriages strictly to eradicate caste system. In the course of heated discussion, Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu Stated that only the inter-caste marriages were made in heaven. There was widespread discontentment and finally Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu half-heartedly accepted that marriages were made in heaven and inter-caste marriages might be held in hell (TNLAD 129-132). T.N. Anantha Nayaki inquired the government about the steps taken by them to eradicate untouchability (TNLAD 666).

### **Eve Teasing in Legislature**

Many a time women were teased or criticized in the Assembly. On the pretext of asking questions, some members disrespected the women folk. For instance N.Kittappa of the ruling DMK party enquired about the commentary written by Bharathidasan to Thirukkural. He expected that the government would publish the commentaries of Bharathidasan. But the minister Anbazhagan answered negatively. Immediately Pulavar. C. Palanisamy

intervened and stated that the commentary of Parimezhalagar had irrational ideals not suited for the modern times. He quoted the thirukkural,

'No God adoring low she bends before here lord;

Then rising, serves, the rain falls instant at her words'

It means if a woman who does not worship God, but who worships her husband and says, 'Let it rain' it will rain. By explaining the thirukkural the member explained that it would not rain if a women come out and say let it rain, it meant that there was no chaste women in Tamil Nadu, so he insisted the government to replace the commentaries of Parimezhalagar with that of Bharathidasan. The women legislators strongly agitated against his views and explanations which were directed against the women folk. At once Dr. Jothi Venkatachalam shouted at the speaker to control the member and the speaker instructed him to put a question and not an explanation.

Questions related to eve teasing were also raised in the assembly. The congress M.L.A N. Dennis Sardornically asked about the actions taken against the eve teasers of Girls High School Sembiam near Madras. (TNLAD 217) That was the first incident in Tamil Nadu which received public attention. Some boys were arrested for teasing the School girls and it created difference of opinion among legislators. The eve teasers were punished with the simple fine Dr. H.V. Hande Sought a clarification regarding the eve-teasers in the city of Madras during the months of August and September 1971 (TNLAD 272-273). More than fifty three persons were arrested for eve-teasing.

V. Krishnamurthi interrupted and accused women for their scanty dress and considered them to be the main reason for eve teasing and he also referred the matter to the chief minister. He further explained that women were wearing 'tights' and Sarees in 'low hips' and he asserted that women were instigating the ordinary men, and he stated that men must not be convicted for eve teasing. He stated that amidst laughter. The chief minister also announced that he would convene an all party meeting to settle the issue. The answer given by the Chief minister and the comments passed by the male members depicted women as a lower creature. If they had enacted stringent laws to control the eve teasers, there would not have been so many losses (Sharika Shah 1998). The male dominated assembly seldom cared for the women.

## Conclusion

One could not forget the shameful day of the assembly, when Duraimurugan ripped the saree of the former Chief Minister Selvi. J. Jayalalitha (The Hindu) Women politicians are teased and pierced many times. On 25<sup>th</sup> March 1989, amidst heavy violence inside the house among the ruling D.M.K. party members and the opposition; Jayalalithaa was brutally attacked and visibly molested by the ruling D.M.K members in front of the assembly and speaker on the behest of the Chief Minister Karunanidhi. Women had to struggle hard in the field of politics and their survival depends on their psychological fitness. What happens to women members inside the assembly is not known to the laymen. Women had to go a long way to cope up with the arrogant men. More women have to participate in active politics to overcome all their difficulties.

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The Hindu, dt. 26<sup>th</sup> March 1989.

The Self-Respect Marriage Bill was introduced on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1967.

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