Analyzing the Intersectionality of Gender and Caste Dynamics

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Abstract: With a focus on the interconnection of gender and caste oppression in Indian culture, this study explores the notion of intersectionality. The disparity between the world's wealthy and poor has become wider as a result of globalisation, which has also brought about economic growth and progress. As a result of oligarchic power politics, minorities in India have had their fundamental human rights violated due to long-standing gender and caste inequities brought about by the country's unexpected economic boom. Parliament continues to be a place where women who identify as belonging to more than one identity group are either ignored or underrepresented. Many various feminist movements with varied origin stories have contributed to the current mainstream post-constitutional Indian discourse. Despite their diversity, these feminist groups nevertheless fail to provide a theory that appropriately addresses the intersection of gender and caste. Through their efforts, Dalit feminist groups have effectively elevated the status of "Dalit women" inside the feminist canon and challenged it for treating the women's issue through a caste lens.

Keywords: Gender, Cast, Dalit women, intersectionality

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INTRODUCTION

My primary goal in doing this research is to better understand the experiences of Dalits, and Dalit women in particular, via the lenses of gender and caste. We will take a quick look at the brutality, exploitation, and injustice that Dalits faced, and how they fought back, first with small acts of defense and later with organised resistance, after realising they were human beings just like the upper castes and beginning to have social and economic aspirations of their own. In keeping with a general decrease in labour market involvement, female labour force participation (LFP) has fallen dramatically during the last 20 years. Nearly 90% of India's workers are in the informal sector, which has seen fewer job openings due to structural constraints in the country's service and industrial industries. The combination of sexism, casteism, and other forms of discrimination places women at the base of the labour pyramid, where they are mostly employed in agriculture or the informal economy. Various review studies have attempted to organise the present state of knowledge about the examination of interconnected power/penalty systems and categories. The definition of "intersectionality" is a hotly debated topic in these evaluations. Sociologists use the concept of "intersectionality" to analyses the complex web of privilege and discrimination that forms around people and groups based on their social and political identities. Instances of such variables include gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, physical appearance, age, weight, and height. It is possible that these overlapping and crossing social identities are both a strength and a weakness. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of high-quality quantitative studies that either bolster or disprove the practical applications of intersectionality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ripunjoy Bezbaruah et.al (2020) The changing roles and statuses of women in current Indian culture are the focal point of this research study, which examines how contemporary literature depicts these women. Through a qualitative examination of chosen works, the research delves into the many ways writers depict the struggles and achievements of contemporary Indian women. It takes larger themes like gender intersectionality, family relationships, and cultural expectations into account. Additionally, the study investigates if fiction acts as a mirror reflecting or influencing cultural attitudes towards women and how these literary portrayals may have an impact on how Indian society views women. This study seeks to provide light on how fiction depicts contemporary Indian women and therefore add to our knowledge of the power of literature to effect social change. By illuminating the way fiction may shape attitudes and encourage a more inclusive understanding of modern Indian women, it hopes to close the gap between literary and social discourse.

Dinesh Chand et.al (2019) According to Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), the idea of intersectionality is crucial for comprehending sexism and other forms of discrimination against women. There was no appropriate framework to address the prejudice against Black women, she says. Different regulations were in place for white women and black males. An further point made by Ruston and Lindstrom (2013) is that "intersectionality in different dimensions of social life, axes of differentiation, axes of oppression, social structures, norms and activities are intersecting, mutually modifying and inseparable." Women from what are traditionally considered to be the "lower" castes in India experience discrimination in a number of contexts where gender, class, and caste all come together. As a result of societal disparities and the historical legacies of structural hierarchies, women in the Musahar group of Uttar Pradesh face problems for survival. Musahar women face further marginalisation due to the intersection of caste with the traditional subordination of women in many social contexts. The lifeworld of Musahar women is examined in this research, along with their marginalisation and agency at the intersections of gender and caste identity in different places shaped by hierarchical power dynamics.

Shailaja Paik (2018) Scholars have paid particular attention to the oppressed histories of India's Dalit ("Untouchable") people since the political unrest of the 1990s. This research, however, also ignored the female Dalits in favour of males. The inclusion of Dalit women as research "subjects" is a relatively new development, nevertheless. In the same breath, the Dalits are both dominant and dominated. In my article, I want to show how scholars have helped us understand how various Dalit women in colonial and post-colonial India are dealing with the discrimination they face on two fronts: as sex-based women and as caste-based Dalits. In this theoretical work, I centre on the experiences of "new" Dalit women in contemporary India and how they navigated the complex web of relationships between caste, class, gender, sexuality, and community in order to establish their own identities and achieve respect and dignity. Thus, in order to shed light on the evolving social dynamics and intricacies of Dalit women's lives, I go into several topics, including generative gender and "new" Dalit women, upper-caste discrimination, community, patriarchy, honour, and formal education. To engage in inclusive and fruitful politics, to build solidarity, and to genuinely reshape the broader disciplines of South Asian Studies, India Studies, Dalit Studies, and Gender Studies, my review article shows that Dalit women's historical and political practices and universal perspectives are profoundly democratic.

Henry Asiimwe (2013) A significant addition to the literature, discussions, and studies on bride price is this study report. A systematic conceptual framework is utilised to support the analysis of bride price payment's perceptions, experiences, processes, and outcomes. Data is gathered through interviews, focus groups, and observation to highlight the perspectives of those most impacted by bride price—the grassroots men and women whose voices have been marginalised in previous discussions and literature. This research aims to address the following question: How are people's experiences and views of bride price influenced by conceptions of masculinity/femininity, gender, class, and modernization? It draws on answers from field data collecting in Mbarara, western Uganda. This study analyses data gathered from interviews with various actors and firsthand observation of the bride price payment functions using a conceptual framework that includes gender, masculinity, class, modernization, and intersectionality. Despite the widespread support for bride price within the community, this paper argues that it is skewed towards male dominance and female subordination, with the potential to increase gender inequality, diminish women's voice in household decision-making, and even lead to wife abuse due to its gendered motivations, processes, and outcomes. Additionally, it contends that the practice has become too commercialised, lost its original purpose, and portrays women as bought commodities due to modernization influences and the demand for players to adhere to certain class position. Many young men and women have been unable to tie the knot because of the exorbitant prices. While it is not essential to outlaw the practice entirely, as some lawmakers and campaigners have called for, the study argues that significant changes are needed to eliminate commercialization and financial incentives so that more people planning to be married can afford it.

Angela Harris et.al (2018   ) The analytical framework of intersectionality is unpacked in this chapter. To begin, the present momentum around intersectionality is prompted by the Black Lives Matter movement. Next, we trace the origins of the term "intersectionality" back to its coinage by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who introduced a Black Studies provocation into the realm of law in an effort to question established anti-discrimination doctrine and single-axis thinking. Our description of the value of intersectionality in social analysis is the third and foremost objective of the chapter. The metaphor of the intersection and the disputes around it are discussed, including the conflict between fragmenting and universalizing viewpoints, which is mediated by the idea of "strategic essentialism." As a fourth point, we take a look back at the work of education scholars who have attempted to explain gender and racial subordination in the field since the article by Ladson-Billings and Tate in the Teachers College Record. Lastly, we would like to make a few comments on an upcoming study on intersectionality.

'INTERSECTIONALITY'- THE CONCEPT: ITS EVOLUTION, CRITIQUES, AND CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE IN INDIA

To fully grasp the meaning of this piece, one must be familiar with the development of the idea of intersectionality. A dramatic reevaluation of the relationship between race and the law was introduced to the United States in the 1970s by the critical race theory and critical legal studies groups. Those who study critical legal theory have argued that marginalised groups face persistent prejudice and discrimination in the law since it was designed to preserve society's status quo. At the same time, Black feminist thinkers and writers like bell hooks (1984), Audre Lorde (1984), and Patricia J. Williams (1991) argued that deconstructing the white, middle-class, heterosexual, western woman is essential to feminist theory and

practice. In order to highlight distinctions, their work argued that the terms "woman" and "Black" have to be understood separately. By doing so, they muddied the waters around the concepts of exclusion and discrimination. Furthering these critical contributions in feminist movements and legal philosophy, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) developed the concept of "intersectionality" to expose the bias in the legal system by using the analogy of a road crossing. The experiences of Black women, she said, sit at the junction of two roads—racial discrimination and gender discrimination—and the word "intersectionality" was born out of this reality.

Over the last several decades, the notion of intersectionality and its application have come under fire. A concept's potential is inseparable from its practical applications, according to Bilge (2013). While crossing fields and continents, intersectionality, like other travelling ideas, was subject to extensive tokenization, displacement, and misinterpretation. An key indicator of intersectionality's effectiveness as a strategy, according to Bilge (ibid.), is whether or not its implementation results in the empowerment of oppressed groups. According to her, "disciplinary feminism" uses intersectionality as a shield for its "own strategic situation... and its racial privilege-whiteness" (p. 415). By recasting white feminist ideas as intersectional thought, the claim to a more expansive history of intersectionality obscures the unique contributions of women of colour.

CASTE SYSTEM AND ITS ORIGINS

People in Indian society are classified into several castes according to their ancestry, economic status, and even skin colour. This system of discrimination is exclusive to Indian culture. Discrimination against members of the Dalit caste continues in modern-day India, despite several anti-discrimination statutes (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Even though caste is rarely considered as a big barrier to prospects for progress among urban Indians, many matrimonial ads contain caste preferences for the marriage. This is because urban Indians are generally classified by money. According to Baker (2006), in rural regions, a person's social position, educational opportunities, and access to basic needs are all determined by their caste.

There are three main tenets that the ancient books state the Indians adhere to. The maintenance of established social ranks is a common thread. According to Indian belief, there is a strict hierarchy in the cosmos that places humans at the highest pinnacle of that structure. This hierarchy applies to both living things and inanimate objects. There is a natural hierarchy among humans according to caste, and even within castes there is a natural hierarchy according to age and gender (Sinha & Kumar, 2004). Three thousand years ago, in the Purush Sukta, a section of the renowned Rigveda, the caste system was briefly referenced. The Vedic caste system was supposedly established for the benefit of a select few, according to social reformers like B.R. Ambedkar and Max Muller (History of the Indian caste system, n.d.).

According to Dumont (1980), the Indian caste structure is subdivided into four main divisions called varnas. Priests (Brahmins), fighters and monarchs (Kshatriyas), merchants (Vaishey), and those who worked the land (Shudras) were the first social classes (Gupta. 2006). These broad groups have been further subdivided into many smaller ones, and they were codified into society in order to serve the nefarious agendas and power struggles of a select few.

Principal features of caste system in India

1. Segmental Division of Society: A number of smaller social divisions, known as castes, exist throughout the civilization. Birth is the only determinant of membership in each of these advanced social groups, or castes.

2. Hierarchy: A basic social idea of hierarchy is taught to us by castes, argues Louis Dumont. This caste system places the Brahmins at the very top and the untouchables at the very lowest. The intermediate castes occupy the space between the two extremes, and their relative standings are not always obvious.

3. Endogamy: The main feature of caste is endogamy, which means that people from the same caste or sub-caste should only marry within their own group. Breaking the law of endogamy would lead to social exclusion and caste disgrace. But there was also hypogamy, in which women wed men of lesser social rank, and hypergamy, in which women wedded men of greater caste or money. All the castes also practise gotra exogamy. According to the concept of gotra, each caste is further split into smaller and smaller subsets. Because it is considered that people of the same gotra are descended from the same ancestor, marriage within a gotra is taboo.

4. Hereditary status and occupation: Megasthenes, a Greek explorer who visited India around 300 B.C., notes that endogamy and hereditary employment were two characteristics of the caste system.

5. Restriction on Food and Drink: Due to the belief that it can get contaminated, a caste would often refuse to eat prepared food from any lower-caste member. Food was also tied with a number of taboos. The taboo around food preparation, which specifies who is allowed to make certain dishes.

THEORIZATIONS OF THE INTERSECTION OF CASTE AND GENDER IN INDIAN FEMINISM

Dalit feminist thinking introduced the concept of intersectionality to Indian feminism. The article said that women from the Dalit caste, who exist at the crossroads of caste and gender, have unique experiences as a result of these interrelated systems. According to Paik (2014) and Ghosh and Banerjee (2018), intersectional thinking may be traced back to Jyotirao Phule (1991) and Savitribai Phule (2011), particularly in regard to the gender and caste categories. In their view, the social and economic realities of an individual were impacted by two interrelated forms of marginalisation: caste and gender. According to Periyar (2009), who continued this line of thinking, the Brahmanical system marginalised women and lower castes alike, and the only way to end this was for people to give up their religious beliefs and caste status. These concepts build upon Ambedkar's theory that "the superimposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste," bringing together gender and caste as overlapping systems.

Theorising the experiences that arise from the junction of gender, class, and caste has been an important tool for Dalit feminists over the years. Although the Indian women's movement sought to analyse the gender-class dynamic in depth, Patil(2017) contends that it failed to do so because it "addressed the problem of Dalit women as fundamental caste-based Indian reality" (Ibid., p. 3). Serious challenges to established feminist canons were first raised by Dalit feminist critics in the 1990s (Rege, 2006). "Limited reading of the materialist determinants of brahmanic knowledge producers/systems that cut across the

spectrum of political ideologies" was challenged in it (Patil, 2013, p. 38). As a result of the patriarchal prejudices that Dalit feminist politics brought to light, Guru (1995) argued that Dalit women should "speak differently."

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN GENDER AND CASTE

Gender norms and their evolution can only be better understood via the use of an intersectional lens. Gender norms are contextually dependent and interact with other types of social difference. A person's multiple vulnerabilities, such as limited access to services, violent experiences, fragile wellbeing, limited financial inclusion, and lack of voice and decision-making in public life, can be caused, worsened, or compounded by the intersection of multiple inequalities. Local cultural norms and practices influence and sustain these vulnerabilities, which are in turn ruled by overlapping power systems.

Therefore, it is essential to adopt an intersectional perspective in order to acknowledge that gendered norms are interconnected and to combat the false sense of sisterhood and unity promoted by dominant feminist narratives that fail to address the power dynamics and divisions that influence gender norms. Efforts to shift norms such that they are based on inclusion, voice, and representation are also necessary for an intersectional approach. Therefore, initiatives should be co-designed and executed in collaboration with marginalised groups, ensuring that their voice and experience are included.

FAILED AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN INDIA

Unfortunately, economically and socially disadvantaged minorities in India have not benefited from affirmative action programmes since these programmes primarily targeted historically marginalised castes and only members of such castes were eligible for reservations. Resentment and animosity between castes is rising like a wave in response to reservations and quotas, with members of upper castes seeing these policies as discriminatory since they are not based on performance but on caste (Basu, 2011).

Reservations have not prevented numerous government agencies and educational institutions from having seats reserved for members of backward castes and SCs go empty. Sowell (2004) found that only 3% of students from SC and ST backgrounds in India acquire degrees in STEM professions like engineering and medicine. Books, tuition, housing, and boarding are all part of the cost of education, and the money the government gives out isn't nearly enough to pay it all. Some economically disadvantaged castes are thriving while others are struggling; still, government policies must be adjusted to assist the marginalised community that is afflicted by various identities (Basu, 2011).

As a foundational component of any welfare state, affirmative action is necessary to address the many social inequities that exist in today's society. When underrepresented groups file complaints, affirmative action acts as a system to hear their concerns and address them. Affirmative action is a prime illustration of how Rawls's theory can be put into practice. Rawls argued that in order for the government to treat everyone fairly and create a harmonious society, it should prioritise those who are less fortunate rather than fulfilling market demand.

CASTES, CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN INDIA

Beneficiaries of Affirmative Action:

According to the Indian caste system (Shah, G., H. Mander, S. Thorat, S. Deshpande, 2006), the society was split into hereditary groups: the castes. Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are common terms for certain subsets of the population. Scheduled caste members have historically been subject to discrimination in the form of social exclusion and restricted educational and occupational possibilities. Scheduled tribespeople, who are distinct from the aforementioned groups, have traditionally been the most economically and socially disadvantaged members of society, and as a result, their manner of life has evolved to reflect this (A. Deshpande, 2005). It is very challenging for STs to get their fundamental necessities since they reside in far and isolated places.

Beyond the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, there are other economically and socially disadvantaged groups in society that are known as Backward Classes (BC). The educational level and traditional vocations of these castes are the main factors that define their backwardness. A new social stratification has emerged, with members of this new stratum being eligible for the affirmative action programmes that have recently been instituted, such as the 10% quotas set aside in public schools and government jobs. "Economically Weaker Section" describes this newly formed demographic.

Constitutional Perspective of Affirmative Actions:

In 1950, the Constitution of India established affirmative action for SC and ST communities. Afterwards, other castes were also granted the same. With the help of affirmative action, these historically marginalized groups get special treatment in government jobs and schools. The government has taken several steps to ensure that underrepresented groups have equal opportunity to receive public services and high-quality education, but reservation policy, which is an example of affirmative action, has shown to be the most successful.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND CULTURAL CONFLICT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Most theories of human development focus on male-female dynamics, ignoring the fact that women are diverse and that various groups of women experience varied levels of influence. The plight of women, who are often overlooked while experiencing extreme persecution and living on the edges of society, is a major problem. The intersection of gender and caste discrimination is often overlooked by legal frameworks, leading to victims of prejudice in many situations not receiving the justice they deserve. This is explained in the preceding sections (Symington, 2004). How tragic that the world's largest democracy cannot guarantee its inhabitants adequate access to fundamental human rights.

The intersectionality framework, among other tools, helps to shed light on the intricacies of various identities, which in turn allows us to analyse women's concerns with a focus on context and structure. It is important to go slowly through the design and implementation phases of such frameworks in order to account for the many social, political, economic, and cultural factors that influence grassroots outcomes. The prevailing societal views on hierarchy, patriarchy, power politics, and colonialism might be challenged

with the use of a useful framework that would allow for the development of thorough studies of the aspects contributing to a situation's creation (Symington, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Disturbingly, minorities constitute as much as a third of India's population, and their plight is especially poignant in a growing nation like this one that has seen significant transformation in its industrial, technical, and economic frameworks. Despite the Vedic teachings of equality and the goddess worship of women, the harsh and ironic reality seems to be the case. A massive framework like this, if not carried out properly, runs the risk of becoming as ineffective as the present reforms and programmes. The program's primary goal, bearing in mind the scope and scale of the intervention, should be the cultivation of human resources at the organisational and social levels.

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