

Uncovering Women's Experiences: Examining Gender Dynamics in Dalit and Brahmin Society through the Lens of Political Feminists

Dr. Krishnaprada Dash

Head, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, DRIEMS Autonomous Engineering College, Odisha, India

ABSTRACT

Feminism analyses and resists gender-specific oppression and prejudice that women run into in various facets of their lives. Its aim is to destroy patriarchal systems, question gender norms, and achieve gender parity in the economic, political, and social sectors. Dalit and Brahmin patriarchy are different aspects of Indian society which reviews the hierarchical structure and gender dynamics within the caste system in India. Dalit women face caste, gender, and class-based discrimination on top of their marginalization, which hinders their access to education, job prospects, and decision-making authority. The fight against Dalit patriarchy seeks to weaken and collapse these repressive institutions, give Dalit women a greater say, and advance social equality and justice. On the other hand, the control and privilege that Brahmin men, who constitute the top caste in the orthodox caste order, enjoy are often referred to as "Brahmin patriarchy." Brahmin men often maintain positions of power, enforce societal norms, and regulate religious and cultural practices. By limiting their participation in public life and reinforcing gender stereotypes, this patriarchal system hinders the agency and autonomy of Brahmin women. Women in homes have generally been the victim of oppressed. Women face different forms of abuse within their own homes due to patriarchal norms. They often have to abide by sex stereotypes, have no power over decisions, and are entirely reliant on their male family. This article argues that mainstream Indian feminists' approach to gender justice is incomprehensible and uncommitted. It proposes to rethink Indian feminist discourse with a focus on its socio-cultural difference from the rest of the world, which suggests that theorizing from a Dalit feminist standpoint is the only way to consummate feminist philosophy.

Keyword : - Women, Feminism, Dalit, Brahmin, Gender

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a supportive movement with social and political dimensions that aims to secure equal rights, opportunities, and fair treatment for individuals of all genders. Fundamentally, feminism revolves around questioning the patriarchal systems and frameworks that have long favoured a male dominated society. It acknowledges that gender inequality extends beyond an individual level, constituting a systemic challenge such as historical marginalization, disadvantages, and exclusion of women from positions of power and influence. Feminists actively work towards rectifying these inequalities by advocating for gender equality and striving to eradicate gender-based discrimination and stereotypes. This includes various domains such as education, employment, healthcare, and politics, where disparities persist and call for rectification. Feminism acknowledges and values the diverse experiences, identities, knowledge, and strengths of women, and actively working towards empowering them to fully exercise their rights. The main objective is to create a balanced and fair society where all women, irrespective of their backgrounds, have equal access to the same opportunities in life as men.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Feminism has a diverse historical narrative, characterized by different waves and strands that have surfaced over time. The initial wave of feminism emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily aiming to secure

women's suffrage and legal rights. Subsequently, the second wave emerged in the 1960s and 70s, focused on crucial matters like reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and sexual harassment.

In the present era, feminism continues to evolve and adapt to the ever-changing landscape of challenges and concerns. One notable development is the emergence of third-wave feminism, which places a strong emphasis on intersectionality.

While intersectionality has taken up increased prominence in contemporary conversations surrounding feminism, but it is not new. It recognizes that gender intersects with other facets of identity, such as race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and physical ability, which collectively shape an individual's experiences and determine their levels of privilege or marginalization. Intersectional feminism endeavours to confront these interconnected forms of discrimination and actively fights for the rights and needs of all women, particularly those who belong to oppressed communities.

Feminism is not about suppressing either of the genders or to varying degrees of who is worse off, it is about learning the ways in which inequality affect both men and women. It is about understanding that we all are in this together standing up for each other. Feminism enables women to pursue and accomplish their aspirations. It serves as a medium for empowering women and making them comfortable in their own lives. It enables one to be successful the way they want to be. Women's issues are present in all facets of life, such as economics, the environment, criminal justice reform, and national security. This may sound like an overly general response, but it covers it rather well on both a domestic and international front: the incredibly potent trio of sexism, racism, and economic inequality. We have indeed moved towards a progressive and inclusive society still women are facing a number of challenges that are unique to their gender. They still encounter prejudice and barriers in both their personal and professional life, despite the significant advancements made in the direction of gender equality. In our society, women face victimization on multiple fronts, regardless of their economic stability, caste, or religion. This unfortunate reality highlights the urgent need to empower women and dismantle the barriers that restrict their progress. In this article, we will explore how women from diverse backgrounds are subjected to various challenges, and we will emphasize the importance of working collectively to create a more inclusive and equitable world. Our society continues to grapple with stereotypes that unfairly burden and limit women, impeding their opportunities and stifling their inner potential. It is imperative that we confront these stereotypes head-on, championing equality as we embark on a transformative path towards granting them equality.

3. OBJECTIVES

This article aims to throw a glance at various issues faced by the Dalit and Brahmin Indian women.

3.1 Exposing the Hidden Plight of Women's Victimization:

Women experience particular sorts of victimization that are shaped by intricate social dynamics in cultures where caste systems are well embedded, such as Dalit and Brahmin groups. Within the stringent cultural norms of Dalit and Brahmin societies, women silently bear the weight of distinct forms of victimization. These caste-based marginalized groups go through pervasive social injustices and prejudices that specifically impact women.

Dalit women suffer the most from double marginalization since they are victims of stigma based on both caste and gender. They often have to deal with multiple types of oppression, persistent social marginalization, a lack of educational opportunities, and economic exploitation. They also deal with higher incidences of violence, including sexual assault, and fewer prospects for career advancement. Traditional views of patriarchy and stubborn gender roles that place women in inferior roles still exist in Brahmin society. Brahmin women frequently experience restrictions on their personal liberties, job options, and autonomy. Opportunities for higher education and employment are frequently limited as a result of the pressure to meet social expectations.

In both Dalit and Brahmin societies, economic empowerment and access to high-quality education are vital parts of the liberation of women. However, there are many hurdles faced by Dalit women, including limited career possibilities and caste-based discrimination in educational institutions. Even though educational achievement may be better in Brahmin society, but there are challenges for the one who aims to pursue higher education and positions of leadership. Although class hierarchies are criticized and challenged by Marxism, it frequently ignores the

widespread influence of patriarchal power systems. Women still experience oppression in many areas of life, such as domestic violence, possessing no influence over decisions, and social norms that uphold traditional gender roles. Marxist discourse should incorporate an intersectional viewpoint that takes into account the complexity of gender-based discrimination in order to advance social equality. Home is where we feel safe, it's a sanctuary of love and support. However, women may experience a variety of assaults inside their own households while no one watches behind closed doors. Domestic violence is one of the most frequently occurring forms of abuse in homes. Women experience violence from intimate partners or other family members on a physical, emotional, and psychological level.

3.2 Challenges Faced by Women in Dalit and Brahmin Society:

While considering different facets of Dalit existence, Gopal Guru, a political theorist, discussed the patriarchal influence that Dalit women experience inside their caste group. He referred to this as "Dalit patriarchy" (Guru, p. 2549). Sunaina Arya in her articles "Dalit or Brahmanical Patriarchy? Rethinking Indian Feminism" writes that the "Indian feminists have furthered the concept and attempted to popularize it as a separate form of patriarchy free from the umbrella of brahmanical patriarchy. (218)"

As opined by Guru, "Dalit women have organized separately from Dalit men in the post-Ambedkar period due to internal factors such as subordination and suppression of an independent political expression" (p. 2549). This dissent reveals that it is not only caste and class identity but also gender positioning that decides the validity of an event, that Dalit men are reproducing the same mechanisms against their women, and that local resistance within Dalit's is important. Sunaina Arya, has derived the following claims against Dalit Patriarchy:

- (1) Dalit women's experience of patriarchy is unique and more intense from upper caste or savarna women;
- (2) Dalit men face taunts regarding their masculinity concerning the protection of the 'honour' or izzat (women's chastity) of their community;
- (3) Because of brahmanical exploitation at the hands of upper caste people, dalit men behave aggressively and oppress 'their' women, who are most vulnerable in the castebased social structure;
- (4) Dalit men's practices of patriarchy are not humble than that of the brahmin or other savarna men;
- (5) Outraged with brahmanical humiliation, dalit men seek to tease savarna women;
- (6) there exist brahmanical and dalit or intra-caste patriarchies. (221)

According to Arya, "All of these claims are of empirical kind, ... Hence, there are strong challenges against the conception of dalit patriarchy. (221)

Brahmanical patriarchy encompasses the idea that individuals are assigned specific positions of privilege and disadvantage, leading to violence and discrimination against lower caste groups. This patriarchy perpetuates the enslavement and exploitation of the lowest castes, rather than originating solely from within those considered lowest. When considering caste and gender, it becomes evident that Dalit women experience caste-based discrimination in the vertical structure of society and gender-based discrimination in the horizontal structure. The concept of Dalit patriarchy is therefore flawed due to logical, empirical, and theoretical shortcomings. The misinterpretation of Brahmanical patriarchy as Brahmin patriarchy has resulted in the creation of the concept of Dalit patriarchy. However, in order to achieve a more just, free, and equal society, it is crucial to focus on dismantling Brahmanical patriarchy. Caste is a major factor in how this type of patriarchy functions, and it has a big impact on "the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault, and physical violence at the workplace and in public" (Rege, p. WS43).

3.3 Exploring the Obstacles Presented by Oriya Hindu Family Practices

As stated by Usha Menon in "Feminism have Universal Relevance? The Challenge posed by Oriya Hindu Family Practices", "Home-grown Indian feminists, ... are drawing solace from such evidence of rural women's discontent – it makes them feel less isolated and 'deculturated'" (p. 80). However, they are unaware that all people, including Hindu women, are capable of reflecting on their situations and expressing dissatisfaction without necessarily seeing themselves as victims of insidious, systemic exploitation. This is an explanation for the failure of feminist organizations to muster the kind of substantial grassroots support they have been working toward since the 1970s. Hindu women do not perceive themselves as victims of systemic gender inequities, but rather acknowledge that some women face difficulties in their lives, but such situations are ameliorated through the actions of individual

women and their family members. The temple town of Bhubaneswar in Orissa, eastern India is centered around a medieval temple dedicated to the Hindu god Siva. Hindus believe in the materiality of all phenomena and conceive of the body as open and relatively unbounded. They use this theory to manipulate and transform their physical substances to refine themselves, through daily practices and rituals of refinement. Women's bodies, being more permeable due to menstruation and reproduction, face cultural pressure for self-refinement. This leads to seclusion within family compounds, limited interactions with familiar individuals, and adherence to prescribed daily practices.

3.4 Feminist Debates Directly Engaging Marxism:

A fresh genre of feminist philosophy called Marxist Feminism has formed with the goal of fusing feminist and Marxist perspectives. Through the inclusion of knowledge of gendered labor, reproductive rights, and the relationship between gender and class, it aims to rectify the gender-related shortcomings of orthodox Marxism. Marxist feminists are pro-active in socialist movements to combat sexism. Dalit jobs are seen as menial, unclean, and defiling, and as Meena Gopal notes, "technological advancement and the benefits of modernization" remain out of reach. These labours, which "continue to be part of social reproduction within the domestic sphere and the informal labour market," (p. 93). include manual scavenging and midwifery. Thus, there is an intimate connection between the household, public, and caste orders. Chhaya Datar in *Waging Change* states in order to effectively reach women workers, the trade unions must offer family and individual therapy, educational programmes, and other initiatives. Datar also states that at Nipani, she discovered a higher percentage of single women, more instances of sexual independence, and a high prevalence of partial prostitution. Women support one another in this by lending each other their homes temporarily. Smita M. Patil in "Revitalising Dalit Feminism: Towards Reflexive, Anti-Caste Agency of Mang and Mahar Women in Maharashtra" studies that two Dalit communities in Maharashtra discovered that Mahars had converted to Buddhism and stopped demeaning caste-based occupations, whereas Mangs affiliated with Hinduism continued those occupations (making brooms, baskets, and ropes) and moved to new forms of stigmatising jobs in urban areas, like sex work and domestic labour. Patil critiques mainstream feminism and Marxism for failing to address 'caste-cum-class oppression'.

Ideologies, such as the notion that women are physically frail and unfit for manual activity, lead to the sexual division of employment. However, men are trained to operate the new technology when the manual job that women do gets automated, pushing women to switch to less well-paying and laborious tasks. For a long time, the Indian census did not classify this labour as "work" because it is done for the family without payment. Women's work thus remained invisible.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Diving into a phenomenon deeply entrenched in society for years, it is disheartening to witness the continued perpetuation of the legacy of suppressing women across all domains. While noteworthy progress has been made in empowering women, there are still cities and countries where the term "women victimization" remains all too familiar. However, feminism has emerged as a powerful force, successfully combating gender oppression and serving as a catalyst for empowering women. It has not only achieved significant strides in dismantling patriarchal systems but has also played a pivotal role in empowering women worldwide.

Mainstream Indian feminism displays a lack of commitment to gender justice for the most vulnerable women. We must encourage the most marginalized people to take the lead to create an actual gender theory. What is required is the active engagement of Dalit women in dissecting the theory experience hierarchy, and an active refraining from caste, class, region, language, culture, and other restrictions. A subject and object of feminist research must intersect. Dalit women must be strengthened in order for the theoretical articulation of lived realities to be feasible, and education and research must be improved in order for Dalit women to have easy access to them. Feminist actions to protect and fight for the rights of the most vulnerable are significant. It is past time for strategies that are distorted by unrealistic ideas such as Dalit patriarchy to return to their true purpose. In addressing the issue of women facing violence and oppression within their own homes, it is imperative for men within the family to unlearn and challenge patriarchal norms. Understanding the significance of restoring the voices of their wives and daughters is crucial. Parents must instill in their sons and daughters the values of gender respect right from the beginning. It is a collective societal responsibility to prioritize proper education and practical implementation, as this male-dominated society will continue to suppress women unless decisive action is taken.

4. REFERENCES

- [1]. Arya, Sunaina. "Dalit or Brahmanical Patriarchy? Rethinking Indian Feminism." *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2020, pp. 217–28. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48644572>.
- [2]. Datar, C. *Waging Change: Women Tobacco Workers in Nipani Organise*. New Delhi: Kali for Women. 1989.
- [3]. Gopal, M. "Ruptures and reproduction in caste/gender/labour", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48 (18): 2013, pp. 91-97.
- [4]. Menon, Nivedita. "Marxism, Feminism and Caste in Contemporary India." *Racism After Apartheid: Challenges for Marxism and Anti-Racism*, edited by Vishwas Satgar, Wits University Press, 2019, pp. 137–56. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.18772/22019033061.11>.
- [5]. Menon, Usha. "Does Feminism Have Universal Relevance? The Challenges Posed by Oriya Hindu Family Practices." *Daedalus*, vol. 129, no. 4, 2000, pp. 77–99. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027665>.
- [6]. Patil, S.M. "Revitalising Dalit Feminism" Towards Reflexive, Anti-Caste Agency of Mang and Mahar Woment in Maharashtra", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48 (18): 2013, 37-43.
- [7]. Parsons, Elsie Clews. "Feminism and the Family." *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1917, pp. 52–58. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2377507>.
- [8]. Rege, Sharmila. "Dalit women talk differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and 'towards a dalit feminist standpoint position'", *Economical and Political Weekly*, 33(4), Oct. 31 – Nov. 6, WS39-WS46.
- [9]. Valk, Anne M. "'Recalling Our Bitter Experiences': Consciousness Raising, Feminism, and Women's Oral History." *Radical Roots: Public History and a Tradition of Social Justice Activism*, edited by Denise D. Meringolo, Amherst College Press, 2021, pp. 75–96. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.12366495.7>.