

REVITALIZING HUMANITY: COMPARING CASTE AND GENDER INEQUALITIES IN INDIA WITH RACIAL AND GENDER DISPARITIES IN THE WEST

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Abstract

This research paper examines the complex and diverse characteristics of social disparities, with a specific focus on the caste and gender dynamics in India, as well as the race and gender dynamics in Western societies. This research article also examines the differences between many factors, such as historical settings, sociocultural dynamics, and policy responses, that contribute to these inequities. Dalit women in India face a distinct form of oppression resulting from the confluence of caste and gender, even in the presence of progressive legal structures. On the other hand, racial and gender disparities in Western societies, explicitly impacting African American women, have strong foundations in the historical consequences of slavery and institutionalized racism.

Both instances demonstrate the intricate layers of disadvantage that result from the intersection of social identities. The study emphasizes the significance of intersectionality in comprehending and tackling these disparities and assesses the efficacy of different social movements and legislative interventions. This study enhances the discussion on global social justice and provides valuable insights into the continuous endeavours to address prejudice and attain fairness based on recent scholarly research.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Caste Inequalities, Racial Disparities, Gender Discrimination, Social Justice

1. Introduction

Social inequality is an enduring and widespread problem that exists globally, taking varying shapes based on the sociocultural and historical circumstances of different areas. In India, caste and gender serve as key factors of discrimination that have a substantial impact on social dynamics and the availability of resources. The caste system, a time-honoured hierarchical social structure, still governs the socioeconomic circumstances of millions, with a particular influence on Dalits or "Scheduled Castes" (Deshpande, 2019). Gender disparity exacerbates these problems, limiting the rights and possibilities of women, particularly among marginalized caste communities (Chakravarti, 2018).

Racial and gender inequalities in the Western world, especially in the United States, are closely connected to the country's historical legacy of slavery, segregation, and systemic racism (Alexander, 2012). The past injustices have resulted in enduring disadvantages that impact African Americans and other racial minorities in multiple domains, including as education, employment, and healthcare. Gender inequality is compounded by racial factors, resulting in distinct obstacles for women of colour who confront both racial and gender prejudices (Crenshaw, 1991).

This research seeks to analyze and differentiate between these many types of inequality, examining their sources, expressions, and the efficacy of policy interventions designed to tackle them. The examination of the interconnectedness of caste, race, and gender is an essential perspective for comprehending the intricate social dynamics at play (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the ongoing challenges for equality and justice in both contexts by analyzing recent scholarly studies from the past two decades.

This study will conduct a comparative analysis to emphasize the parallels and contrasts between caste and racial discrimination, as well as gender inequality, in India and the Western countries. Additionally, it will assess the impact of social movements and legal reforms in reducing these inequalities and propose strategies for future endeavours in achieving social justice (Sen, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Gaining insight into these worldwide patterns of disparity is crucial for formulating efficient tactics to address prejudice and foster fairness throughout varied communities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Caste and Gender in India

The caste system in India is an enduring social hierarchy that has profoundly influenced the socioeconomic structure of the country for thousands of years. The caste system, derived from ancient Hindu texts, categorizes society into hierarchical groups according to hereditary social position and vocation, which has a profound impact on individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and social mobility (Deshpande, 2019). Although there have been constitutional and legal efforts to eliminate caste discrimination, including as the enactment of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in 1989, disparities based on caste continue to exist. This is especially true in rural areas where traditional norms are more strictly adhered to (Narula, 2008).

Gender disparity in India is tightly intertwined with caste, resulting in compounding disadvantages for women belonging to lower castes. Dalit women, also known as these women, experience dual discrimination based on their gender and caste, which places them among the most marginalized individuals in Indian society (Chakravarti, 2018). Dalit women are disproportionately affected by social practices such as early marriage, dowry, and limited access to education and healthcare. These behaviours contribute to the perpetuation of poverty and exclusion within this group (Irudayam et al., 2011). The endeavours of women's movements and Dalit rights organizations have achieved certain advancements, however substantial obstacles persist in altering deeply ingrained cultural views (Kumar, 2019).

2.2. Race and Gender in the West

Racial inequality in the Western world, especially in the United States, has its origins in the historical circumstances of slavery, segregation, and systemic racism. The historical injustices have resulted in long-lasting socioeconomic disadvantages for African Americans and other racial minorities (Alexander, 2012). The civil rights movement and subsequent legal reforms, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, have partially dealt with certain forms of racial discrimination. However, there are still persistent systemic inequities in sectors such as criminal justice, employment, and education (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

The Western society experiences a combination of gender inequality and racial discrimination, resulting in intricate levels of disadvantage for women belonging to ethnic minorities. Kimberle Crenshaw created the notion of intersectionality, which emphasizes the convergence of race and gender discrimination and the ensuing distinct experiences of marginalization for women of colour (Crenshaw, 1991). African American women experience elevated levels of unemployment, pay discrepancies, and healthcare inequalities in comparison to their white counterparts (Hill Collins, 2000). Social movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have garnered more focus on these matters, pushing for extensive changes to tackle the interconnectedness of injustice (Taylor, 2016).

2.3. Sociocultural Dynamics

India

In India, the combination of caste and gender gives rise to a distinct type of oppression referred to as "Dalit feminism," which emphasizes the dual marginalization experienced by Dalit women. This idea, as examined by Rege (2006), highlights the extent to which Dalit women are marginalized, not just by the overarching social patriarchy, but also by the deeply ingrained caste hierarchy within their own communities.

Notwithstanding constitutional guarantees and legislative procedures intended to foster equality, cultural norms and customary practices persist in upholding these disparities. For example, customs like untouchability and limitations on social mobility continue to be widespread, particularly in rural regions where social conventions are strictly upheld (Guru, 2016). The continuous battle for the rights of Dalit women is sometimes overlooked

within larger feminist and Dalit movements, requiring a separate advocacy structure that specifically tackles their unique difficulties.

The West

Intersectionality theory in the Western context explains how the junction of race and gender leads to the creation of unique instances of discrimination and marginalization. The theoretical framework proposed by Collins and Bilge (2016) provides insight into the complex challenges experienced by women of colour, which result from multiple intersecting forms of disadvantage. African American women face the challenges of navigating a social environment that enforces racial and gender prejudices, which have a considerable impact on their socioeconomic status and overall well-being.

These prejudices are evident in different ways, including disparities in wages, restricted availability of healthcare, and unequal rates of imprisonment and police brutality (hooks, 2015). The interaction between race and gender in influencing these results requires a thorough strategy for policy and campaigning that tackles the distinct requirements and difficulties faced by women of colour. This approach ensures that both racial fairness and gender parity are pursued concurrently.

2.4. Policy Responses and Legal Frameworks

India

India has enacted a multitude of measures with the objective of mitigating caste and gender disparities. Important initiatives encompass affirmative action strategies, such as educational and job reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), with the objective of enhancing their socioeconomic standing (Narula, 2008). In addition, several initiatives have been implemented to enhance the status of women, including the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign, which aims to save and educate girls, as well as the provision of microfinance for women entrepreneurs.

However, the impact of these programmes is frequently hindered by entrenched social norms and opposition. The implementation of laws against caste-based discrimination and violence sometimes faces challenges due to social resistance to altering established hierarchical systems (Jodhka, 2012). Moreover, gender-specific initiatives frequently fall short in addressing the complex issues experienced by Dalit women, who remain marginalized despite legal safeguards.

The West

Significant legal reforms aimed at decreasing racial and gender inequities have been propelled by civil rights movements and feminist activism in the Western world. Significant legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the implementation of affirmative action policies, have aimed to rectify past injustices and ensure equal opportunity for marginalized groups (West, 2010). In addition, feminist movements have played a crucial role in promoting gender equality by advocating for and achieving significant milestones such as the enactment of measures like the Equal Pay Act and the Violence Against Women Act.

Although there have been advancements, there are still persistent systemic obstacles, as seen by the continuing racial inequalities in the criminal justice system, healthcare, and employment (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The persistent disparities underscore the necessity for ongoing promotion and improvement of policies to tackle the intricate and overlapping types of bias experienced by women of colour and other marginalized communities.

2.5. Contemporary Issues and Movements

India

The recent emergence of campaigns such as #DalitLivesMatter has drawn increased focus on caste and gender issues in India, highlighting the pressing necessity to tackle systemic discrimination and violence faced by Dalit groups. The Dalit community has been subjected to violence, which has been brought to the forefront by this movement that draws inspiration from global anti-racism protests. It emphasizes the urgency for societal transformation.

Concurrently, grassroots organizations persist in their efforts to uncover and confront the widespread occurrence of caste oppression, by organizing campaigns against caste-based violence. The women's movements in India are currently experiencing a surge in activity, as they actively confront and question the traditional male-dominated conventions and advocate for equal rights between genders. These movements aim to tackle issues such as domestic abuse, workplace discrimination, and reproductive rights, advocating for extensive legal and social changes (Kumar, 2019).

The West

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has had a profound influence on discussions about race in Western societies, elevating awareness of systematic racism and police brutality to the forefront of public consciousness. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has successfully rallied a large number of people, bringing awareness to the racial inequalities within the criminal justice system and promoting the need for changes in justice administration.

Simultaneously, the #MeToo movement has brought attention to the widespread problem of sexual harassment and assault, specifically in the professional environment. This movement has given several individuals the ability to express their experiences, confronting influential wrongdoers and promoting structural modifications to safeguard and assist survivors. Both movements emphasize the significance of acknowledging the interconnectedness of race and gender in the struggle for social justice (Taylor, 2016).

3. Case Studies

3.1. Dalit Women in India

Dalit women in India face severe marginalization, lasting violence, restricted access to education and healthcare, and economic destitution. Irudayam et al. (2011) conducted a survey which revealed that 54% of Dalit women had experienced physical abuse, while 46% have been subjected to sexual violence at some point in their lives. Dalit women encounter considerable obstacles in accessing education, as their literacy rates are far below the national average.

Only 37.8% of Dalit women are literate, in contrast to 64.8% of the overall female population (Desai & Thakkar, 2007). Access to healthcare is equally arduous, characterized by elevated rates of maternal mortality and insufficient medical infrastructure among Dalit areas. Although there are constitutional protections and legal frameworks in place to prevent discrimination based on caste, the persistence of social stigma and deeply ingrained cultural norms maintain these inequities (Irudayam et al., 2011).

Table.1. General description of the Dalit Women in India

Indicator	Dalit Women	General Female Population
Literacy Rate	37.8%	64.8%
Physical Violence (Lifetime)	54%	48%
Sexual Violence (Lifetime)	46%	52.83%

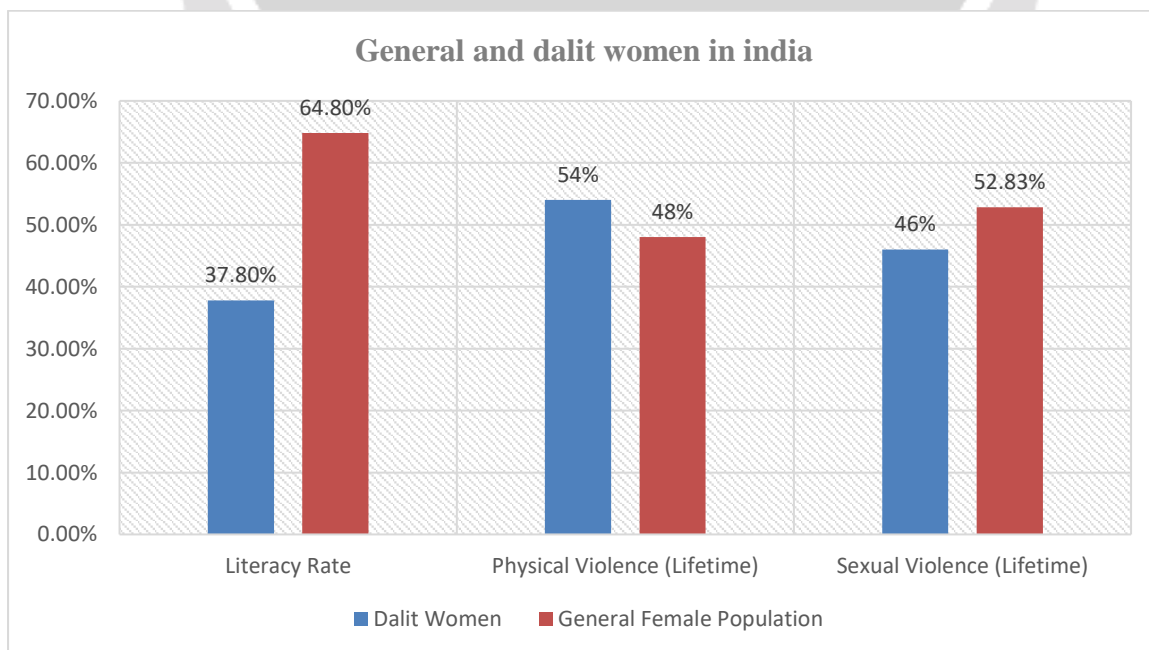


Figure.1. Graph of the general and Dalit Women in India

3.2. African American Women in the US

African American women in the United States have substantial obstacles in the domains of healthcare, work, and the criminal justice system. Roberts (1997) data reveals that African American women have a greater likelihood of encountering negative health consequences, such as increased rates of newborn mortality and chronic illnesses, in comparison to white women. African American women in the workforce receive a mere 63 cents for every \$1 earned by white men, indicating significant wage inequalities (Hill Collins, 2000).

African American women are incarcerated at an almost double rate compared to white women, which worsens their existing challenges within the criminal justice system. The existence of these gaps emphasizes the necessity of employing intersectional strategies in policy-making and advocacy efforts to tackle the combined impacts of racial and gender-based discrimination (Roberts, 1997).

Table.2. Description of the African American Women in the US

Indicator	African American Women	White Women
Infant Mortality Rate	11.0 per 1,000 live births	4.7 per 1,000 live births
Earnings (Relative to White Men)	63 cents per dollar	79 cents per dollar
Incarceration Rate	96 per 100,000	49 per 100,000

These case studies exemplify the deep-rooted and enduring disparities experienced by marginalized women in India and the US. They emphasize the significance of implementing intersectional policies and engaging in advocacy endeavours to successfully tackle these intricate problems.

4. Comparative Analysis

The similarities between caste and racial discrimination stem from their inherent structural characteristics and their role in perpetuating social and economic inequalities. Both forms of inequality are ingrained in the societal structure, making them resistant to change despite legal and policy measures (Sen, 2006). The concepts of caste in India and race in the West are fundamental forms of discrimination that systematically prevent marginalized populations from having fair access to resources, opportunities, and rights. In India, the completion rate of secondary education among Scheduled Caste members is only 11.3%, while it is 29% for the overall population (Government of India, 2019).

Similarly, African Americans in the United States experience a poverty rate of 19.5%, which is over twice as high as the national average, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2020. The persisting socioeconomic inequalities that arise from this structural exclusion are challenging to overcome. Gender discrimination is a widespread issue that has distinct effects when combined with caste and race, resulting in additional disadvantages for women who are part of marginalized communities.

Dalit women in India experience simultaneous subjugation from both patriarchal and caste systems, resulting in profound socioeconomic disadvantage and instances of violence. Based on the findings of the National Family Health Survey (2015-16), it was revealed that 33% of Dalit women had encountered physical abuse, while the corresponding figure for upper-caste women is 21% (Narain, 2020). Likewise, African American women in the United States face both racial and gender prejudices, leading to notable inequalities in health, employment, and justice outcomes. According to the CDC (2019), African American women had a threefold higher risk of mortality due to pregnancy-related causes compared to white women. The presence of many forms of discrimination exacerbates the difficulties experienced by marginalized women, requiring specific responses.

4.1. Intersectionality

Finding a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness of caste, race, and gender is essential in order to formulate efficient approaches to address and overcome these disparities. Intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw (1991), highlights the need of taking into account the way different types of discrimination intersect and affect persons in distinct ways. In order to be genuinely effective, policies must specifically target the needs of individuals who experience numerous forms of discrimination simultaneously (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

This strategy guarantees that interventions are comprehensive and capable of tackling the intricate challenges experienced by marginalized populations, fostering fairer and more inclusive results. An illustration of the effectiveness of intersectional approaches in policy-making is the large reduction in dropout rates among Dalit girls in India. This is achieved by including gender-sensitive strategies into educational programmes, as highlighted by Nambissan (2014).

5. Conclusion

To overcome caste and gender inequities in India and racial and gender disparities in the West, a comprehensive approach is required that includes legal reforms, policy measures, and cultural transformation. This analysis has shown the inherent structural character of these inequities, which are firmly rooted in society norms and reinforced by systemic obstacles. Despite the implementation of affirmative action, legislative safeguards, and social movements, both India and the Western countries still struggle with deeply ingrained discrimination that restricts opportunities and maintains socioeconomic inequalities.

Comparative studies of this nature offer crucial insights into the shared characteristics and subtle distinctions of caste and racial discrimination, as well as gender disparities, in various settings. Through the analysis of these intersections, policymakers can design more intricate and efficient plans customized to tackle the particular obstacles encountered by marginalized people. Integrating intersectional perspectives into educational programmes can improve the access and retention rates of Dalit and African American girls, hence fostering inclusive growth and equity.

In order to make progress, it is necessary to consistently work towards dismantling discriminatory systems and promoting inclusive societies that provide equal opportunity for all persons to succeed. This necessitates continuous discourse, cooperation among many parties involved, and a dedication to fairness that goes beyond geographical and personal boundaries. By utilizing insights gained from comparative study, communities can progress towards achieving more fairness and uphold the fundamental principles of human dignity and equality for every individual.

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