Caste And Gender In Contemporary India

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Abstract:

Dr. Nirmal Prava Bordoloi mention in her book Devi that behind all the creation women play a great role. But women are considered as the weaker section of the society and they are to dominate by this patriarchal society. Our tradition, customs and belief also try to exploit the women. Women are considered as impure as they have menstruation process. During this time they cannot enter to the kitchen, temple even she cannot take part in some ritual. In this context we can mention about Taslima Nasrin, she says that religion is something which tries to dominate the women. Today women become empower but still today women have to face such problem like dowry, sexual and mental torture etc. So this paper will explore about caste, gender, the relationship between caste and gender and how the women have to suffer due to this caste problem.

Key Words: Caste, Gender, Sex, Patriarchy

Introduction:

a) Caste in Brief:

Birth determines the caste. Caste is a particular characteristic of Indian society and without understanding caste the Indian society cannot be understood. The word caste comes from a Portuguese word CASTA which means difference in birth or race. It is mainly based on Varna system means system means colour. According to G.S Ghurye,"Caste is the divisions of society into groups with varying degrees of responsibilities and circles of elaborate code of caste rules."
They are prohibited from intermarrying and interlining which members of groups supported to be inferior in status”. According to Louis Dumont,” Caste system is a system of consensual values a set of values accepted by both dominant and dominated.”So the Indian society is stratified into various social groups called caste in which the social and economic rights of each individual caste are predetermined by birth. The unequal and hierarchal access to economic and social right implies that every caste groups except those at the top of the caste hierarchy suffers from unequal division of right. The untouchables or dalits who are paced at the bottom of the hierarchy suffered most.

b) Brief idea about gender:

Gender is socially constructed term. Gender is related with culture which classifies men and women into masculine and feminine. It defines socio-cultural difference between men and women, role assign by the society to men and women as a social being which they have to perform. The concept of gender as we now use it comes into common parlance during the early 1970s. For centuries, the biological differences have been the basis of justification of creating different social role for men and women. Biological difference also made them unfit to participate in the public sphere. Women are judged to be less reasonable than men, more ruled by emotions thus incapable of political decision making.

French feminist, Simon de Beauvoir writes, “one is not born but rather becomes a women. Women’s inferior position is not a natural or biological fact but one that is created by society. The social roles and modes of behavior that civilization has assigned to women have kept them in an inferior position to that of men”. Similarly Oakley argues that “Sex is a word that refers to the biological difference between male and female the invisible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. Gender however is a matter of culture it refers to the social classification into masculine and feminine. Sex is natural thus, largely unchanging and fixed, but gender is constructed socially, thus always has a scope for change.” These are some western view about gender.

In India studies on gender issue do not have a long history. Gender as subject of concern has been realized as recent as in late 1980s. However, in the early 1970s the Research centre for women studies was started in SNDT women’s university, Mumbai, it was largely emerged out of the women’s movement and their struggle for gender equality. Gender is a colonial construct so that Indian view Colonialists imposes their ideas in the third world countries so India is not free from it.

Objectives:

The present study highlights the following objectives:-

1) To study the relationship between caste and gender.
2) To study about the caste problem faced by Dalit Women.
3) To study the subordination of women in all caste based societies.
4) To discuss about the legal provision for eradicating caste and gender based discrimination.

Methodology:

The methodology of the present study is basically descriptive and analytical. All the data used in the paper are collected from several secondary sources like books, journals and newspapers. The collected data are analyzed in qualitative manner.

Relationship between Caste and Gender on the basis of Brahmanical Patriarchy in early India:

Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principle of the brahmanical social order and are closely interconnected. In Uma Chakravarti article explore the relationship between two and focusing on how upper caste women are subordinated by brahmanical patriarchy in ancient India.

In brahmanical patriarchy the purity of women has a centrality because the purity of caste is contingent upon it. An insightful easy by Nur Yalman on the caste of Ceylon and Malabar shows that the sexuality of women, more than that of men. He also said that the honor and responsibility of men is protected and preserved through their women. The appearance of puberty thus marks a profoundly ‘dangerous’ situation and is the context for major rituals which indicates the important relationship between female puberty and purity of caste. Therefore the safeguarding of the caste structure is achieved through the highly restricted movement of women or even through female seclusion. The lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to upper caste purity has to be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher caste ,so women must be carefully guarded. Therefore when women are corrupted all is lost.

In brahmanical texts it is evident that an upper caste woman is the object of moral panic. To prevent a contingency women’s sexual subordination was institutionalize in the brahmanical low codes and enforce by the power of the state. For example, we can say that in Aryan society the patriarchal family had established certain degree to control over Aryan women. We can also take another example from Apastamba dharma sutra, there was a rule that a husband ensure that no other man goes near his wife.

In general context women’s “essential nature came to be identified with their sexuality. In one book argued that women have sinful right from the beginning when the creator first made the five gross element, the three worlds and shape to men and women. Women are the edge of a razor, poison, snakes and fire and all are rolled into women.” Also in satapatha brahmana argued that a women, a Sudra, a dog and a crow all are the embodiment of untruth, sin and darkness. Even the Ramayana associates most women with being essentially weak and sinful. According to Kausally women do not care for a good family, good deed or wisdom and their hearts are ever inconstant. Manusmriti also argued that women are weak, sinful they are unstable as the sand and as cruel as the snake, they are unfaithful to their husband even when they closely guarded to them.
Mahabharata also states that it was too difficult to control women. Manu state that women should not care for beauty and age of a men and their priority should be only stick to that he is a ‘men ‘that means women always obey their husband and do not looked and think about other men.

In brahmanical patriarchy there was subordination of women because of their reproductive structure. Even Manu enjoins that weak man also must strive to guard their wives more carefully than their wealth. In Buddhist literature or in Arthasastra, there were talk about humiliation and physical punishment of women. The husband use violence to control over wife sexuality but if husband not succeed than the kings used the violence. Gautama lies down that a woman who has connection with a lower caste man becomes an outcast. If she commits sexual relation with that man than king shall give the punishment to them publicly. According to him lower caste adulterer should be killed and the woman is to be publicly humiliated and suffer a more ghastly death. The king is enjoined to punish and humiliate her by shaving off her head, placing her naked on a donkey and parading her along the highway.

In brahmanical patriarchy society women should not go out from husband home. Leaving the house of the husband and going to a neighbor an offence even in their maternal home also. They should be permitted to go to their maternal house if there was any occasion with the consent of the husband. That means man treated their wife as their wealth. All decision were taken by the male member in that society and women should obey their order or decision ,even if they not obey than the husband punished to her very badly. So, in the brahmanical patriarch cal society the women were subordinated by man and men always control their sexuality.

Dalit Women Facing Caste Problem:

Dalit women have to face discrimination both from the upper caste and from the society of themselves. Dalits are the victim of caste based system of social hierarchy that regards them as untouchables comprise around 17 percent of Indians total population. Dalits are still face severe hardship and practices underlying much of Indian society today. Dalit women and girl and the disabilities situated at the bottom of the Indian social hierarchy and especially vulnerable .They in many case perform the most dangerous and degrading work, placing their health at greater risk and suffer a constant threat of sexual violence from members of their own community as well as upper caste. According to the National Crime Record Bureau more than 4 dalit women are raped everyday in India. In many of the cases their crimes are committed by upper caste perpetrators. Mainly there are two types of violence aced by dalit women. These are-

1. Violence in the General Community: Verbal abuse from the members of general community and sexually explicit insults are included in this type of violence.1/3 of the women have to face these types of problems regularly.

2. Violence in Family: Domestic violence is also present in the family. If any inter caste marriage happens it always ended with domestic violence .In the case of dalit husband the violence takes on
a strong patriarchal dimension. Women are tortured within the home for not bringing dowry, not bearing male child, for being too ugly or too beautiful and also for talking back to their husband. Alcoholism among dalit husband is also a strong contributing factor for domestic violence. The location of violence against the women is mainly take place in public places and private places.

- Public Places: Bus stands, streets, women’s toilet etc.
- Within the home: Physical verbal abuse, sexual harassment and sexual assaults in their family from noon family members.
- Work Place: Informal sector, daily wage occupations security and many other rights. Dalit women do not report violence from employers in the work place instead keeping silent in order to retain their means of lively hood.

STORY OF SHANTA BAI DHANAJI DANI: From the 1940 s until her death in 2001, Shnatabai danis life was intricately woven into the struggles of the Ambedkars movement. She was one of the best known women leader of the movement. She was then the secretary general of the Nasik branch of knowledge the schedule caste federation. Shantabai was born in a hut in Nasik Khadkali sector which was at the outskirt of the city. Especially her father expected a boy and was disheartened at the birth of a girl, when she was six years old her mother wanted her to enrolled in a mission primary school but not in the municipality school because of the wider span of activities. Their peaceful life have changed when her brother died and her father used to take alcohol and married again. Her mother has left all the relationship with her father and with Shantabai left to Gujarat to join in a high school. After passing the government public exam of seventh standard when Shantabai entered the women’s training college she had not expected to face discrimination based on caste. She was not hope full that caste distances and practices would not be observed here. She was the only Mahar girl in the college. When the girl comes to know about it she had to face discrimination. Everyone ate at the community hall but she was not allowed to enter the hall and would be served in the veranda. She would be served from a distance and have to ate alone. It angered her to see that caste discrimination was also being observed in a government institution and that alone she was being discriminated against. Moreover she was not allowed to use the common bathroom and a temporary bamboo structure had been constructed for her. This she recalls was the level of untouchability practiced in the training college. When she took up her first job in a Vinchur village Shantabai had to face the court of their region for having entered in the temple with her other teacher friend. So these types of discrimination faced by the girl portray her lower caste position in the society and the discrimination according to these.

Legal provision: In Indian constitution there are some legal provisions for caste and gender quality and government also introduce some act to prevent caste and gender discrimination. In part 3 of Indian constitution there are 6 fundamental rights and among them there are some article which give emphasize on equality of women. These are-

1. Article 14 provides quality before law.
2. Article 15 provides no discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, race ethnicity etc.
3. Article 17 provides untouchability should be abolished
4. Article 15(4) (5) provides reservation in educational institution.
5. Article 42 provides the state to make provision for securing human condition of work and
   maternity relief.
6. Article 51(A) provides to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood among all
   the people of India and renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
7. Article 46 provides for the promotion of educational and economic interest of SC and all
   forms of exploitation.
8. Article 330,335 provides for special measures through reservation in government service
   and also reserve seat in democratic political institution. Along with these articles there are
   some acts which are enacted by Indian government to abolished caste and gender
   discrimination. These are-
   a) Poona pact on 16th August, 1932, which was signed by Mahatma Gandhi and B.R.
   Ambedkar to provide for the equitable representation of the deprived classes in
   governance and the amelioration of their socio-economic condition.
   b) Untouchability (offence) act 1955 latter it is renamed as “protection of civil rights act,
       1976.
   d) The prevention of sati act, 1829.
   f) The Bombay harijan temple entry act,1947
   g) The Hindu widow remarriage act, 1856.
   i) The child marriage restraint act, 1929.

   So these are some constitutional provision and act introduced by Indian
   government to prevent caste and gender discrimination from society.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion it becomes clear that both the Brahmin and the dalit women have to
face caste and gender based discrimination. The only difference is that Brahmin women have to
face discrimination both from the upper caste and from their own caste and also from the women
of the upper caste. Caste is such a character stick of Indian society which is embodied within us.
For solving these problems along with the government both women and men have to come forward
so that we can hope for a better society where there will be less caste and gender based
discrimination.

References:

