

# Caste and Patriarchy: Heterogeneous Oppression on Women

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## ABSTRACT

Heterogeneous Oppression on Women explores the complex interplay between patriarchal structures and the caste system in India, shedding light on the diverse forms of discrimination and oppression faced by women. The study highlights how women from different caste backgrounds experience varying levels of subjugation, emphasizing the role of societal norms and power dynamics in perpetuating gender inequality. Through a critical analysis of historical and contemporary perspectives, the research underscores the need to understand the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender in addressing the multifaceted challenges encountered by women in Indian society.

**Key Words :** Oppression, Heterogeneous, Intersectionality, Subjugation

## INTRODUCTION

Over centuries, the patriarchal world subjugates women in several ways, whether it is physical, mental or social. Women are deprived in almost every section of Indian society. Women are facing problems such as dowry, sexual harassment, illiteracy, domestic violence etc. Women are suffering various types of discrimination everywhere, but the discrimination a woman faces in her life is varied according to her cultural and social background. In other words, women are not a homogeneous entity but a heterogeneous group. Women are heterogeneous on the basis of culture, class, caste, and social backgrounds. So, her experience of subjugation and oppression can't be the same everywhere, and they can't be universalized. This study particularly focused on Indian woman of different caste groups. The role of caste can't be ignored because it is the root cause of Oppression of Indian women. There are several things that can differentiate the experience of women from one another. Women are always seen as an object that should follow the patriarchal structure of society. Man is considered as a subject, and a woman has to adjust herself in man-made situation. Indian caste system forms an

ideology of hierarchy, and within that hierarchy we can find the superiority of man and inferiority of women. On the basis of caste, women have different experiences in her life. A Brahmin have caste restriction and patriarchal oppression but the same time she has privileges being a member of upper caste group like dominance over lower caste, better economic condition and good living conditions. The situation of Dalit women is way more different than Brahmin women. Dalit woman faces caste discrimination, patriarchy, poverty at the same time. In the Hindu caste system, the role of women is defined majorly on the basis of which caste she belongs to. Because caste has its idea of purity and pollution, the patriarchal caste system has assigned her different roles, and she has to maintain the caste boundaries. In a way, they are using women to maintain their own dominant structure which is made to subjugate women. An 'upper caste' woman has only those privileges which can't harm the system of caste and patriarchy which can't be neglect while understanding the real condition of woman. Because caste hold all the powers, an upper caste privileges is also conditioned by caste boundaries. An upper caste woman can't describe the situation of a Dalit woman, and she cannot be an ally with Dalit woman unless she

criticizes her own privileges that she has been enjoying for centuries.

### **Patriarchy and its interrelation with Caste and Gender:**

Whenever we talk about women subjugation it is clear that there is lack of equality. Fact that we all are human is not that much important for society but the discrimination and inequality on the basis of gender is. If one part is subjugated then another part must have more power. That is patriarchy where one gender become dominant by subordinating other. Patriarchy basically means domination of man.

Patriarchy works as an obstacle for the upliftment of women. Patriarchy gives all the power to man and woman is just subordinate to him. Here power indicates privileges, political leadership, property right, right to make decision etc. In India patriarchy is involved everywhere in both public and private sphere. All institution is influenced by the system of patriarchy. Patriarchy believes that man is superior to the women. India is a county of patrilineal society where head of the family is man and he has all the rights to take decision about family. Rituals and practices of Hindu society make sure that all the dominance remain in the control of man. Man dominates over the house even he is younger than the women in the house. Linage system of family is also followed by the man only. In patrilineal societies Man is owner and women are his slave. Patriarchy exists everywhere in different form according to different places (Bhasin, 2000) use capital when you write name-change it across. In house male dominate as a father, husband, brother and son. At work place male dominate as owner, get more wages for same work, and get more recognition. Domination of man is everywhere only the role changes (Bhasin, 2000). Throughout the history patriarchy also modernized as per the situations. In the old-time patriarchy effected differently than now. For example, sati paratha that exist earlier was a form of patriarchy and now the ways of subjugating women are different. Relation of man women is somehow institutionalized by the patriarchal structure (Sultana, 2010). Feminist called it a power relation between man and woman in which man hold power and a woman work as his secondary support system. For society a man is always a prime factor and a women is always secondary. For the better understanding we have to look at how caste is related with both gender and patriarchy. Gender relation with

Caste Jodhka as cited in Gorring (2018: 2) caste has its power politics and humiliation in it which is directly interlinked with the gender issues. Gender is also hierarchical like caste and within the caste we find different status of women (Chakravarti, 2002:25). Dalit women are more subjugated than the women of upper caste. Through the socio-cultural practices this power politics is hidden. Like every ritual that is being performed in society never shows that they are trying to make dominance over lower caste but they try to show that they are doing something very important for the society. A Dalit woman is suppressed socially, biologically, economically more than the OBC and upper caste women. Being "Severna" is not just by birth but having socio-cultural capital (Gorring, 2018). Upper caste women have much more rights in society to humiliate Dalit women. It is institutional humiliation of a suppressed section of society which is authorized. Other thing which relates caste and gender is honor. In Hindu caste system a man is known for their dominance over the women body (Gorring, 2018). A man is the master of women life and this is called as masculinity in Hindu caste system. A man who controls a woman physically and mentally is consider as an honorable human being in the society. For a women situation are totally different, an honorable woman is a woman who follow her master without any question. A woman doesn't have her own identity. A woman who tries to improve her situation and focus on her goal she is characterized by society in negative way (Beauvoir, 1949). Society don't see her as an ideal woman if she starts focusing on herself, she is considered as liar, selfish or actor in the world of men (Beauvoir, 1949). These situation and ideology of man make her subordinate throughout her life. Patriarchy relation with caste Patriarchy is the key concept of both gender and caste. Hindu caste system see man like the owner of women virginity. A woman is seen as reproducer of child for the Vansha of man (Chakravarti, 2002). Whereas she doesn't have any right on the child. Her wish is not being considered in this process of child birth. And on the other hand, she has to prove her virginity to her husband. Proving virginity to her husband is very important for women in Hindu caste system. Behind this ideology there is only one motive which is to subjugate women physically and mentally because scientifically there is no way to check someone virginity. This is only a myth that a woman should bleed on her first wedding night. A man has control 13 over the sexuality of women. She is used

like a machine which can make human being for the labor force of man. Within this importance of women virginity differ according to the caste. An upper caste woman should have virgin because she has to maintain the purity and on the other hand a Dalit woman is used as sexual pleasure of upper caste man. For making this humiliation authorized, Hindu caste system give different moral and duties to man and women where man should hold all the power and on the other hand women should have loyal and devoted to man. Here we can see the objectification of women. A woman is an object and man is subject (Beauvoir, 1949). A woman is not being treated as a human but like a material which can be used and modified as per the wish of a man. On the other hand, a woman never taught to objectify a man. Women do not care about the beauty and look of a man. It is enough for her that he is a man weather he looks ugly or handsome (Chakravarti, 2002;68). Jodhka as cited in Gorring (2018;2) caste has its power politics and humiliation in it which directly interlinked with gender issues. A woman herself play role in maintaining caste boundaries. A woman has to follow patriarchal structure while suffering from patriarchal structure. An unequal system can't survive without the help of oppressed people (Bhasin, 2000) Some of specific women are privileged and they handle the whole work by supporting. In general Women have benefits but it doesn't change the fact that society is male dominated. A woman supports more to her son than her daughter (Bhasin, 2000) A woman also wants a male child just to make herself more important that she give male child to the family. On the other hand, she forgets about her own identity. A woman who gives birth only to girl child she is being accused by the society and her own husband force her to give birth to more child until he gets his "vanshaj". He doesn't care about her body and strength. In most of the cases women don't oppose this situation because she knows that she will get respect only if she gives birth to a boy. Another thing which leads to patriarchal dominance is that in patrilineal society women have to leave her house after marriage so only man live with the parents. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in every institution of society, Socialization of society makes it invisible (Bhasin, 2000). A woman is provided every basic thing to get live by the man. It is also being said that a man also provide security to her. But the question on which society don't focus that from what and from whom a woman needs security. Giving shelters and security from this structure while following this structure can't hide the fact that women

are subjugated in this patriarchal structure (Bhasin, 2000) A part from this there are several factors which can define more about the women situation in patriarchal structure.

### **Caste and Experiences:**

There is no society which is unstratified. Every social system in the world has some hierarchical order and differences which differentiate a human with another. On the basis of this stratification, we can find different prestige, privilege, respect and power. In India, there are two bases on which Hindu society is divided varna and caste. As per religious Hindu text "Rigveda" there are four varnas which emerged from body parts of a spiritual man. These four varnas are Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. All varnas has difference of status and power. On the basis of these varnas hierarchical order of caste exist in Hindu society. Ambedkar as cited in Chakravarti (2002) caste is a system of graded inequality in which caste is arranged in an order. As much as we go up in this hierarchical order, we see more power and we go down, we see decrease in power (Chakravarti, 2002:7). Every caste has their different rituals and life styles which indicates their status and difference in the society. Like an upper caste person do more ritualistic thing then the middle or lower caste people. There are two main factor which help upper caste to maintain their monopoly one is "ritual purity" and another is "economic status" (Chakravarti, 2002:9). Upper caste members are considered as pure and ritualistic. And they have more hold on the sacred knowledge then the lower caste. Caste system is based on endogamy and on the purity of blood relation. As ancient times India was a homogeneous group of people in which we can see fusion of various races and they all were culturally united. Because of this cultural unity we were able to say that India has a homogeneous identity. But endogamy in caste system become a problem for it because it binds people in a certain defined unit. Ambedkar as cited in (Rege, 2013) endogamy is the only characteristics that is peculiar to caste. When it comes to Gotra Caste follows the exogamous rule. A person can't marry with the same Gotra and two other Gotra is avoidable to maintain the caste boundaries and blood purity. Thus, the superposition of endogamy of exogamy means the creation of caste (Rege, 2013). Ambedkar as cited in Menon (2012) 'The real remedy for breaking caste system is Inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste'. Marriage relations are restricted

in other caste group because inter caste marriage can ruin the caste system. Kinship system and marriage restriction are strength of caste system. Marriage restriction in another caste group is restricted because it maintains differences in one caste group to another. Caste system allow an upper caste man to marry a lower caste in some situations which is called as hypergamy. Hypergamy is allowed because it is not harmful for patriliney. Descent line can be traced by the man. But the practice of hypogamy where an upper caste woman marry to a lower caste man is highly restricted, because it harms the patriliney system of society. When any of the partner died after marriage so it creates the situation of surplus man and surplus women. When husband die it create a surplus woman and when a wife dies it create surplus man. In this situation that person can break the caste boundaries and can marry outside the caste, to prevent this caste system has made some rules. For the surplus woman who is as widow should be burn alive with the husband body because she can create problem in two ways. If she remains alive and try to remarriage, one she can break the rule of endogamy and second if she marries within the caste, she will take the chance from the potential brides in the caste (Rege, 2013). So, she must be burn alive. In any case if it is not possible then widowhood should be enforced on her. After that her life become a sin for her. She has to be in control of her family. She no source of allurements. She is treated as unwanted by the whole society because she doesn't have husband and inauspicious for society. Whereas, the Surplus man has a totally different situation, he can't be burn alive simply because he is a man. Man is a dominant figure as per Hindu caste system, restrictions on him is more difficult. So, he is stronger to break the endogamous rules than the women. He is an asset to caste group which is very important. So, caste system tries to do solution in two ways, they are, one, celibacy enforce on him for his whole life with a lot of sympathy and second find a girl for him who is not marriageable yet within the caste group. In the case of celibacy, he become danger for the society so the first option is more prominent (Rege, 2013). Apart from this caste structure also, there is restriction for the food, water, shelter, clothes and many more. A person lifestyle is depending on which caste he/she belongs. We can take example of Mahar satyagraha led by Dr. Ambedkar on 20 march 1927. In Mahad, Maharashtra untouchables didn't have rights to take water from public tank. Lower caste people are considered to

be servant of upper caste people. Upper caste people in order to maintain purity of caste system don't allow to keep any relation with them. As we know that there is no physical creation through which we differentiate people and talk about purity. That's why the social practices, rituals and taboos are made to differentiate human (Gupta, 1991). The difference of biological and physical creation is not what defines Hindu caste system. It has made its own social difference to make separation. Another important thing which maintains caste system is occupational structure. Every caste group have their own occupation which they inherent to their children. This occupation structure is also decided by caste hierarchies and it is highly restricted. A lower caste person can't work as priest and an upper caste person can't do a job of sweeper. But ideology behind it is different from them. For an upper caste, it is against his owner in society and for lower caste they don't deserve it. Experience of Dalit with upper caste Now it can be understood that caste decide almost everything like the life style, rights and privileges which a person can get in his lifetime. So, the experiences of different caste group must be different from one another. Best life example we can get from the real-life stories shared by Shanrankumar Limbale who is Maharashtra's foremost writer and activist. He has done a lot of work in Dalit literature. He describes his stories the brutal condition of people by the caste system (Limbale, 2018). He presented the condition of Dalits after the independence when Indian supposed to get all the rights. But unfortunately, India is not free from this caste system which is the cruel enemy then the British. One of the stories shared the experience of Lingayat caste boy which is the upper dominant caste and the Mahar boy whose name is Hanmya from the lower caste. Lingayat boy was the son of sarpanch of village and belong to a very rich dominant family in the village. Hanmya is very poor then him. Both the boys were good friend of each other but they can't reveal the caste of lower caste boy. Because the upper caste people don't accept a lower caste person to be his friend. When the Hanmya invited his friend in family function. All the member of upper caste were shocked, On the other hand Hanmaya's family treating that upper caste boy like he is an owner and they are servant to him. They prepared separate food for him, reject to sit with him on same place and make separate arrangement for his stay as good as they can. It was so surprising that how the lower caste people give respect to a boy just because of his

caste. And the lower caste boy has to hide his caste when he went to his house. Hanmya hide his caste for so many days and he was scared. He even changed his name with Pujari. After some days, mother of Lingayat boy fell ill and she needs blood for his survival. And the blood group matched with Hanmya. All were agreed Hanmya giving blood to his mother. But next day everybody got to know that Hanmya is a lower caste boy. Mother was so upset and angry, she refused to take blood from the lower caste boy. She said she will choose to die instead of taking blood from a lower caste person. He destroys our purity and we have to go Ganga to take bath (Limbale, 2018). This is how caste system dominate the understanding of people about humanity, Upper caste got power and at the same time restriction to maintain the hierarchical order. And lower caste person has to serve them as servant. In another story we can see the experience of a Dalit working in the same place with upper caste and Brahmins. It was a government office where upper middle and lower caste people work together. The upper-class people dominate over the Dalit, they do Laxmi pooja every day. Laxmi is the goddess of Hindus. They try to make their spiritual dominance over the Dalits. Middle caste people just remain quiet in all the activities. And the number of Dalits are very less which make the situation worse. One day a Dalit bring the picture of Dr. Ambedkar into the office. He wants to place it on a wall of office but all the upper caste person disagrees with it and they insulted him. In this situation he replied that why you do Laxmi pooja every day in the office after this they had a fight. Activist came into the office to solve this matter but at the end Upper caste people manage defend themselves and Dalit person face a lot of difficulty. His own caste people don't support him and situation remain the same. This is how upper caste is supported by government also. And they have all the power in their hand. A Dalit only have to adjust with it. Even if a Dalit manage to be in a good place in the life after all the suffering and difficulty he doesn't respect from the society. Being a Dalit by caste is the curse he has to suffer with whole life (Limbale, 2018). Experiences of Dalit women A part from this, Patriarchal system exist in caste structure which provide all the power in the hand of man. A woman is considered as impure and subordinate to man in Hindu caste system. So, a woman suffers with both caste system and patriarchy within it. Indian women are taught to be under the patriarchal rule. Because the system of patriarchy can only function with the

contribution of women. One experience shared in (Limbale, 2018) describe the situation of Dalit girl named Soni. Her father didn't accept her when she was born. He wanted a male child. After Soni's birth he leave her mother and started living with another woman. Now Soni's mother can't take the responsibility of her good upbringing. So, she fixed her marriage with a guy who is so much old than Soni. Her marriage was fixed only because he didn't ask for dowry. That guy had two wives before Soni, one of them he killed and another one leaves him. But still Soni was forced to marry that guy by her mother. He was a drunkard and raped her every night after marriage. Soni have to bear the pain every day and she suffers a lot. But one day she left his house. She has no way to earn money and take care of her. She starts working as a prostitute and her life lost as like the other poor Dalit women. Her husband got another woman to sleep with. Another experience shared by Limbale, which shows how a Dalit woman Ratna was tortured by a goon named Gana of her village. She was in love with a boy but her mother opposes her for this. She was being physically and mentally tortured by that goon only because she is a Dalit woman. Society thinks that Dalit woman is easy to access for harassment. Her life doesn't have any value. On the other hand, when she tried to meet with her love she is being judged negatively by the community. But community didn't help her when she was beaten by Gana. Her mother had to follow what Gana was saying to her so she looked her into the house. She should be always available for that Goon and not allowed to go out. She cried every night and wanted to do suicide. Her only crime was that she is a Dalit. This is how a Dalit woman have no respect in society and her sexuality means nothing to anyone. Even her family was not able to stop her misery because nobody listens to her voice. Experience of Dalit with Upper caste women There are several examples of Dalit exploitation by the upper caste people. The domination of upper caste over the Dalit community can be seen in every aspect of their life. An experience discussed in (Limbale, 2018) in which a Dalit boy fall in love with Patil's girl named Madhavi. Patil is an upper dominant caste. People from this caste group didn't like lower caste group. They burnt the house of Shalan who is their friend and witness of their love story. She lives with her father in a hut which is newly built by them but Patils don't like it. They burnt her hut in fire and brutally beat her father. They burnt her house by saying that only Patil can have a good house.

Her father was murdered by them she was in full of grief but didn't say a word about their love story. She was just crying that she lost her only family member and her house without any mistake. But her father said before dying because you engaged with Patil girl all these terrible things happened to us. This shows how Dalits had to suffer because of their relation. The structure of caste doesn't allow to cross the boundaries. The fusion of upper caste with lower caste should not be happen because these caste boundaries are made to sperate people from one another (Rege, 2013). Another experience of Dalit man shared by Limbale (Limbale, 2018) shows how the life of Dalit don't have value in the rich caste dominant society. In big cities main focus of people is only on development. And in India Dalit people have to sacrifice their life for it. Dalit families live in slum and hut in front of big bungalows. A Dalit man loves an upper caste rich girl. She lives in a Bungalow where Dalits sister used do go for job as a maid. He used to stare her when she comes on window. He admires her beauty so much and love her so much. But one day Upper caste people come and ask to remove huts where Dalit families used to live. They said that in this place we will made a park so you dirty people can't live here. Upper caste people remove their little houses and Dalits leave that place. The love story of that Dalit man remains uncomplete and many lives loss their houses. As much as a city developed, they loss their houses and one day city people will throw them outside. In every part of their life Dalits have to suffer from the dominance of upper caste. In contemporary India where Ambedkar work a lot to uplift the situation of Dalits. For Ambedkar giving basic resources to deprived section is more important than the issues of Gandhi's temple entry (Chakravarti, 2002). The acts of Gandhi support upper caste group which again become a stone in the way of upliftment work for Dalits. He stopped the grant of separate electorates which was proposed by Ambedkar (Chakravarti, 2002). Poona pact was given that grant and it doesn't help Dalits a lot. In the making of constitution also Ambedkar help to abolish every aspect of discriminatory factor like caste, creed, religion etc. but still we can see caste and region based political parties in our country. In today's situation Dalit women is still facing the same issues but upper caste women can access the resource. Another observation made Rege; a Dalit feminist is that universalization of woman condition hides. Poona pact was given that grant and it doesn't help Dalits a lot. In the making of constitution

also Ambedkar help to abolish every aspect of discriminatory factor like caste, creed, religion etc. but still we can see caste and region based political parties in our country. In today's situation Dalit women is still facing the same issues but upper caste women can access the resource. Another observation made Rege; a Dalit feminist is that universalization of woman condition hides (Rathee, 2020). Dalit women condition from world because they only talk about collective operation of women. There are no study and experience of Dalit women is described in literature. An upper caste woman has proper knowledge, resource and power to uplift her situation. Even after reservation we see that Dalit women are still working in messy conditions. In government job they have job for cleaning because society see them in certain way and they don't have any another resource to make their living. Women of upper caste is not allowed and want to these types of jobs. If we talk about Dalit participation in political work after reservation, they are getting jobs but still not in higher positions. We can see in gram panchayat when lower caste women get elected, she doesn't receive the same respect from the members and people of village. A scene is captured in Tamilnadu where a Dalit woman is member of gram panchayat but still, she has to sit on the floor because she is not allowed to sit on a chair with upper caste people. Dalit women condition from world because they only talk about collective operation of women. There are no study and experience of Dalit women is described in literature. An upper caste woman has proper knowledge, resource and power to uplift her situation. Even after reservation we see that Dalit women are still working in messy conditions. In government job they have job for cleaning because society see them in certain way and they don't have any another resource to make their living. Women of upper caste is not allowed and want to these types of jobs. If we talk about Dalit participation in political work after reservation, they are getting jobs but still not in higher positions. We can see in gram panchayat when lower caste women get elected, she doesn't receive the same respect from the members and people of village. A scene is captured in Tamilnadu where a Dalit woman is member of gram panchayat but still, she has to sit on the floor because she is not allowed to sit on a chair with upper caste people (Rathee, 2020). Here we can understand that caste is not just a matter of politics but it run in Hindu blood since many years. Like these experiences caste in India affect the lives differently. Experience varies as

per the caste group.

### Conclusion:

To conclude, the purpose of this research work is to develop the understanding of Heterogeneous oppression of Indian woman. The Homogeneous explanations are not enough to understand the reality of Hindu society. Because of the patriarchal society, a woman suffers various kinds of discrimination, including physical and mental. The male patriarchal society teaches a woman to be a 'good daughter', 'good wife' and 'good mother' by using various socializing agents. Further, she has no right to oppose these things in many societies because it is considered disrespectful. The ideology of the Hindu caste system determines the duty of a woman, in which she should majorly support the men in all activities. Caste and gender intersectionality is crucial in understanding the actual condition of women in various Hindu societies. Gender inequality is the central part of Hindu caste ideology, and it is the major part that serves and maintains the patriarchal structure. Every caste group has different roles, power and prestige and according to which they act in society. So, this differentiation of power also affects the condition of women. We can't universalize the deprivation of women because a woman of upper caste doesn't face the same kind of discrimination that a Dalit woman faces. In which the latter is doubly or triply disadvantaged in Indian society. In India, a lower caste woman's subjugation becomes harsher because she faces both Brahminical patriarchy and gender equality. Without the abolishment of caste system equality for both upper and lower caste woman is not possible. Caste system made a huge difference between upper and lower caste woman because of that Dalit woman had to raise their voice separately. For Dalit woman Patriarchy hit with deprivation and untouchability-based exploitation. Dalit woman is considered as impure, polluting and

unacceptable by the society. So, the situation of upper caste woman and their patriarchal structure is can't be compared with the multidimensional oppression of Dalit woman. An upper caste woman needs only the solution of gender issues for her upliftment but on the other hand a Dalit woman needs multiple solutions for her betterment.

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