



Woman in 'Dominant caste village' society: A subaltern perspective

Renuka Chaudhary

P.H.D Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Delhi University, Delhi, India

Abstract

My article will explain how women conditions are subaltern in 'Dominant Caste village' social structure. Dominant caste villages are the unite society of mutual blood relational members of one majority caste or sub-caste. The specific social environment of the dominant caste villages produce strong practices of caste 'Social Laws'. The 'dominant caste village' and 'caste social laws' both make the women condition deprived, marginalized, excluded and she face injustice.

Keywords: Caste, Dominant Caste Village, Caste Social Laws, Subaltern

Introduction

In Indian orthodox Caste society women status mainly found as a reproductive body and household labour. The framing of the Caste society as a village structure (social-geographical) increases the circumstances of women exploitation. Dominant caste village is a one dominating *Jati* or *Gotra* community villages where they have their caste 'social laws' of social relation, endogamy, patrimony, patriarchy, food relations, social custom and culture, strong kinship web and occupation hierarchy- to unite their caste community society. The caste social laws play a big role to create a 'complex' feature in the dominant caste villages. Here it is interesting to observe that, how that dominant caste village environment effect to women of these villages. And here my main research question emerges - "What is status of women in 'Dominant caste villages'?" In India there are more than 3500 castes and around 35000 sub-caste. Caste and sub-caste have their own separate social structured villages in both rural and urban areas. We can find it in every Indian state. It is interesting to understand that how the Dominant caste villages patriarchal community influenced women at the large level. How culture, custom, social norm stigma, social relation, social laws of caste have important role here? This paper will face all these questions and try to solve this 'anthropological puzzle'.

In My first section I will discussed briefly to 'subaltern' and "dominant caste villages". My second part of paper discuss about the women in dominant caste villages and effects on women by caste social laws in these complex society villages. The third part of paper discuss deprivation, marginalization, injustice and exclusion of women in these societies. I also try to find that how these variables subalternize to the women in 'dominant caste village'. My conclusion give a light on reasons behind it, the total subaltern condition of women in present time, possible ways of solutions, and emerging new questions.

As my methodology, I used normative, anthropological and ethnographical study based texts and articles in context of caste, dominant caste villages, caste social laws and women in caste.

What is 'Subaltern'

As a discipline 'subaltern studies' started by "subaltern studies group (SSG)" which is a group of South Asian scholars and post imperial societies. The Italian social theorist Antonio Gramsci began using the term 'subaltern' first time to signify those made subordinate by hegemonies of power of state, class, patriarchy, gender, race, and so on. In context of 'women' was using by Simone de Beauvoir at the gendered subjectivity of the "second sex" (1949). Guha (1988) has defined the regular use of the term "subaltern" by the Collective as "a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way" (p. 35). A later engagement with cultural and social theory (Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyan Prakash, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are representative) filtered through the lens of subaltern subjectivity more generally and applied to trans-global issues of theorizing culture and historiography.

Women study in context of subaltern view is not new. In India women have been subaltern since Manu time. The *Manusmriti* norms also follow by present caste societies. Medieval time make it worse. In British time liberty came as "law" form, but today this only work as structural level not on societal root behaviour level. In the dominant caste villages woman right and autonomy bound and control by their father, brother, husband and son. The Caste community of village heavily influences to 'family level act' in context of women. My section "women in Dominant caste villages" will try to fully cover this.

Dominant Caste Village

Jati (Caste), an Indo-Aryan word, meaning a category of related persons thought to be of the same physical and moral substance, though the word can also mean genus, species, or race and other allegedly natural types. The customs and practices of *Jati* hierarchies vary from region to region. *Jati* have their own community rule of 'roti-beti sambhand', endogamy, patrimony, specific occupation, social life limits for base on gender and age, kinship customs extra. The 'caste'

another meaning by scholar “as a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system” (Béteille 1965, p. 46) ^[1]. The other use of the word 'caste' is to specifically define the social organization found in traditional regional societies in India and within adjacent Hindu and related populations in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Leach 1967; Hutton 1969; Dumont 1980;). Clearly there has been a long debate in the literature over whether the caste system is a unique social phenomenon or simply one manifestation of general processes of social stratification. Max Weber, for example, stated categorically that “... caste is the fundamental institution of Hinduism” (cited in Leach 1960, p. 2) ^[4].

The Dominant caste villages is a one domination *jati/gotra* community in a particular small geographical area, here they strongly follow their *Jati* 'social laws' of social relation, endogamy, patrimony, patriarchy, social relations, social custom, written history in manuscripts by their priests '*Bhaat*' and culture. There are more variables which make a caste society more complex! Mandelbaun's (1956) saying that civilization generally means culture which includes the use of writing, the presence of cities and the development of occupation specialization such as culture are more complex (p.203). The 'use of writings' in dominant caste villages, moderating to the complexity of caste culture. The writing tradition in dominant caste villages, practices as '*Bhaat ki pothi*' custom. The *Bhaat ki pothi* is a manuscript text (written by '*Bhat*') about people history of specific caste villages. It has all entries of every family of particular village with name, *gotra* and gender. The '*Bhaat*' are the priest families of specific castes, every *gotra* villages have their separate *bhaat* family and this is their family duty to record history and other information of that village- caste. This culture is highly practices in north Indian castes (one example, youtube, Raveesh report on gurjar, kalkaji gadi village in delhi). All these speciality create complexity in the dominant caste villages as relation, structure, purity, marriages and in 'kinship web'. This complexity is a unsolved trap for a woman in dominant caste village society to get her autonomy, right, opportunity, capability and resources.

Women in “Dominant Caste Village”

As I early said that *jati* have their own community rule of '*roti-beti sambhand*', endogamy, patrimony, specific occupation, social life limits for base on gender, age, kinship, customs extra. The 'caste' another meaning by scholar “as a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system” (Béteille 1965, p. 46) ^[1]. And the my definition of “dominant caste village” have features of one domination *jati* society, which have their own laws of social relation, endogamy, patrimony, patriarchy, food relations, social custom and culture to unit their society, strong kinship web, occupation hierarchy, separate segments of group extra. Finally I have following

features in Dominant caste Village, which effect to women as well:

- Endogamy
- History
- Social relation
- Culture and custom
- Patrimony
- Patriarchy
- Separate segmental division

Endogamy is the stable feature of a caste system. This caste law includes some kind of life mate selection and marriages restriction. Same *gotra*, Parents *gotra* and inter caste marriages are restricted in caste social laws. Natrajan (2005) ^[5] in his article do anthropological research of potter caste and said that endogamy and patrimony are the oldest strong rules. He said “on the issue of interpreting the customary rules of endogamy and patrimony The elders, however, have the backing of most potters, and contest the leaders, especially. The leaders of the CPCC explain their to build a coalition with the larger organizations, the CPO and the AIPO as stemming from the growing necessity for a Potter community to move beyond the Jhariya caste to establish links with other Potter castes in the region and nation. But in a context where the exchange of bread and daughters is strongly proscribed between various Potter castes, the CPCC leaders quickly run into problems with the elder Jhariya potters who oppose their move to extend the boundaries of endogamy. This raises the issue of who are Potters, since that is tied to whom one can marry” (P.235). This also helps us to understand 'elder backing' contribution on new generation participation in honour killing of their siblings cases. But here it is important that slowly with the time the restriction of endogamy and inter-caste marriage are accepted in case of their son/boy. But If this decision taken by any daughter of them, the acceptance is not only harder even its murder-able by their community of Caste society and family. This shows the endogamy perspective towards girls/daughters of community. A scholar in Indian Hindu caste context says that “Sexualised body is the site on which dominant power hierarchy dictates its rules. Consequently; it becomes impossible to view a body outside the parameters of sex, enforcing the compliance and control of an individual (Rana, 2014, p.712) ^[6]”. She is only the instrument of caste racial purity, surviving and living of *jati*. She deprived of her rights of self-decision. That's why we maximum find a women face under the “*onna, duppatta*” with no freedom to choose her way of life, decision regarding education, occupation or marriages. Caste society policies of social laws are behind their surviving strategies. Social relation, web of kinship and culture-custom -play important role to make caste village community strong, unite, long living and complex. The peoples of caste society in dominant caste villages have more close relations comparative to isolated peoples in normal society. The laws of festivals, marriages, special days, child birth ceremonies, extra custom in caste, only fulfil with their caste kinship members which called “*kunba*”. The dominant caste villages gives most suitable environment for caste social laws. Example when the young boy attend first time any other same community's

brother marriage (*baraat*), a function hold by his family and the boy's mother have a lunch or dinner to her native "*kunba*". It's a must ceremony. Like these ceremonies, shows the importance of member of kinship in caste societies villages. Even the invitation of marriage to any member, only given by the "*Naai*" (a caste), this work for *Nai* is ancestral and a part of '*Jajmani Vyavastha*'. The role of "Mama" and 'natal family' in 'girl/boy' marriages, Rituals of marriages, festivals, birth can't even start without "*kunba*" in dominant caste society. Who's mate would be who? Decided by "cross-check" (because 99% every villages of same caste have minimum 2-3 relations in mutual in single region villages. Example -*Gurjjar* villages of Delhi-ncr. They do informational cross check by their relatives in any particular villages in which their family member would be marry by them) of villages mutual relations. This anthropological example shows "Social Relational Power" of dominant caste village societies. These type of relational practice bring their caste society so close and build the base for unity, purity and dominative structure for control and long livingness.

Berremman said that "the Indian caste system is not individualistic; it emphasizes its totality, The most striking similarities among caste systems are the social relations and patterns of interaction. There are numerous rules and restriction on marriage, on sex relations, on living together, on eating together, on sitting together, and on a variety of other forms of interaction symbolic of social inequality (Berremman 1967, p. 64)". For the women all these practice, web of social relations emerges as a mentally boundation and torture to break stereotype mentality of their subjugation. Any radical or liberal ideological step (example - succession demand, higher education demand/will, late marriage, inter-caste or same *gotra* marriage, career choice, more participation in public sphere) of her make a reason to exclusion by society and family. If in case of family don't have strong will to exclude their daughter/ daughter in law, but the "Social Relational Power Web" oppressed them for it. The male don't face this problem because their steps are naturally accepted. Even inter-caste marriage done by male member of society have easy acceptance. And it's a radical step for a female to break the "*char diwari seema*" and demanding liberal rights in public sphere and personal sphere too. If she take this decision herself, after this she could faces financial, emotional, supportive crises in her struggling life.

Deprived, Marginalized, Injustice and Exclusion: Subaltern Women in "Dominant Caste Village"

In upper said section I discussed about the circumstances of 'Dominant caste village' and situation of a woman, but at this section I am telling the main context of their subjugating and subaltern status in under heading of deprived, marginalized, injustice and exclusion.

Deprived

Women are deprived in 'Dominant Caste Village' by their opportunities, capabilities, rights, resources, self-decision making power, freedom, social justice and development. The opportunities of "education, career, health, nutrition, property right, suitable circumstances, resources, self-freedom of use to public- private sphere" are directly

negatively influenced by social norms, culture, community mentality, custom, patriarchy, endogamy, patrimony and social relational power. Sen (1992) says 'high mortality rate of female in south Asia. comparative neglect of female health and nutrition, especially-but not exclusively-during childhood, would seem the prime suspect. Considerable direct evidence exists of neglect of female children in terms of health care, admission to hospitals, and even feeding'. His idea directly fit of women condition in Dominant caste Village and reason behind it I discussed my early part of paper. Scholars say's in a report "Culturally determined gender ideologies define rights and responsibilities and what is 'appropriate' behaviour for women and men. They also influence access to and control over resources, and participation in decision-making. These gender ideologies often reinforce male power and the idea of women's inferiority (Reeves and Baden, 2000)". Culture is sometimes interpreted narrowly as 'custom' or 'tradition', Gender analysis has revealed some evidence of bias against female members of households in the allocation of intra house resources distribution such as income, food, nutrition, health care and education. Patriarchy structures work to the benefit of men by constraining women's life choices and chances. The roots of patriarchy are often located in women's reproductive role and sexual violence, interwoven with processes of capitalist exploitation. The main 'sites' of patriarchal oppression have been identified as housework, paid work, the state, culture, and sexuality.

Marginalized

Women in 'Dominant Caste Village' marginalized from/ in social structure, social laws, endogamy, social mentality, public share, rights and culture. Main reason of this is that, women identify only from her body, sexuality and reproductive power. Her priory identification is not her work or mental power or rationality. So Women sphere and space are become limited. Its strongly follow because of the community power of unity of relations and economical distribution. If women try to break this marginalized area, caste complex structure threatened to her. "Women are generally expected to fulfil the reproductive role of bearing and raising children, caring for other family members, and household management tasks, as well as home based production (Reeves and Baden, 2000) [7]". Rana (2014) [6], who try to told us about women subaltern status in Hindu society by using novels study. Say's " Mulk Raj Anand has this to say about the status of women in India: Obviously woman in India has sometimes been exalted as a doll or kept down and oppressed. most Hindu men do not find anything wrong with this state of things. Foucault (1980) suggests that power operates through the construction of particular knowledge. And it is through the constructed knowledge of sexuality that control over an individual is exercised. Male and female bodies have different social values depending on their location in the power structure. The discursive construction of 'male' and 'female' behaviour proceeds from there. The stereotyped image of a man as 'strong' and 'determined' who has made his fortune with his sincere labour is given wide currency in a patriarchal society. In Patriarchy, a woman is almost always a 'product'-a good possession for her husband's family. Sexualised body is the site on which

dominant power hierarchy dictates its rules. Consequently; it becomes impossible to view a body outside the parameters of sex, enforcing the compliance and control of an individual. That power structure, then, ensures 'normal' sexual and gender development. In the Hindu society woman comes to be defined by her series of duties. In the process, what gets lost is her own self as she prepares to play the roles of a daughter, wife and a mother under the supervision of men. On the other hand as Rana (2014) [6] says in his work that "*The Road* novel, Rukmini's mother is irritated to find her daughter's apron dropping off the head which is a clear violation of the Hindu code of ideal behaviour on the part of a woman. In *Coolie* novel, Munoo's mother works hard for her family and dies a slow death while Rukmini, in *The Road*, clearly points to the boredom involved in the life of a woman caught in domestic slavery (Rana, 2014,716) [6]". We can also say that Caste is not merely the opposition between pure and impure but at a fundamental level it incorporates other kinds of oppositions such as domination and subordination, exploitation and oppression, based on unequal access to material resources, rights and opportunities.

Injustice

Indian constitution gives every citizen the fundamental rights to various kind of freedom and equality but the women in Dominant caste Village, she derived from her basic fundamental rights and there are not strong agency and institutions which could break the wall of these dominant caste villages and give the rights to women. The women are not much capable to ask their right because they don't have their own money, educational back and family support. Even they feel happy which situation they are because at-least they have their family. It may be loose from her hand if she will asking their rights. Thus their human right, legal right, health care, mental satisfaction, marriage decision all depend on their family and norms of their community society. Sen (2001) also talk about *Freedom as the foundations of justice*. He defines inequality of capability, opportunity, freedom, health, property in family very rationally. Other scholar also say's

"Parents reluctance to educate daughters has its roots in the situation of women. Parents have several incentives for not educating their daughters. Foremost is the view that of girls brings no returns to parents (Desai, 1994)".

"found that girls in India are discriminated against in several ways – fewer months of breastfeeding less of nurturing and play, less care or medical treatment if they fall ill, less of "special" food, less of parental attention. 'it's a regular practice to breastfeed girls for a shorter time than boys so that women can try to get pregnant again with a boy as soon as possible. As a result, girls miss out on life-giving nutrition during a crucial window of their development, which stunts their growth and weakens their resistance to disease stated that India's population still leads traditional lives in rural areas (Sen and Shivakumar, 2001)".

"Religious laws and traditions still determine the lives of many people, particularly women. Even if women are formerly entitled to own land and resources social and religious factors make many women refrain from this right in order not to cause distortions within the family (Lind, 2006)". above scholarly argument beautifully expressed the women

struggle since infant and the dominant caste village society make it as a worse Injustice.

Exclusion

She is excluded from her maximum kind of freedom, her public relations, public sphere, opportunity, capabilities, life possibilities and resources. If she try to take some radical decision (radical in eye of her caste community) she also can excluded by her family, blood relation, her childhood and from her all caste community. In complex caste society the women always have condition that "if want to have some 'radical' must lose something special". In the dominant caste villages '*kunba/biradri nikala* (kinship exclusion), *hukka band* (relational exclusion), *jaati nishkashn* (caste/sub caste exclusion), *ganv pravesh rok* (no entry in village) and honour killing are the main social forms of exclusion. If woman in dominant caste village break the social laws of her caste, she would be excluded.

Conclusion

Generally feminist scholar stated that the women subaltern in Indian society but my argument of "subaltern" have specific ground and context which is "Dominant caste Village". A society bounded by their own social rules, laws, norms, custom, culture, social relation leaded by patriarchal ideology. In these society women are subaltern because she deprived, excluded, marginalized and facing injustice. And However the ideological and human right development increases his arms in modernization era, the dialects of new female generations with Dominant caste Village as contradictions emerging more. The solutions what I see! Are;- 1. The demand of the time should understand by Dominant caste Village and the "change" should be accepted by them for their surviving long history livingness 2. In the Education there should be awareness program for these specific community and the dominant caste villages by the government. 3. The role of Gram panchayat, sarpanch should be "liberal medium" in society not as "orthodox patriarchal Khap Panchayat" and government should keep an eye on this despite of using this Dominant caste Village as 'vote bank' in "election politics". The women should start the struggle for their own rights and development. The change's first step would start here.

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