

Correlation between Cast and Gender in Bihar

Dr. Sangya Pandey¹, Ms. Khushbu Prasad², Mr. Shivam Raj³

¹Assistant Professor, Amity University Patna

²Assistant Professor, Amity University Patna

³Assistant Professor, Amity University Patna

ABSTRACT

This study looks into the relationship between caste and gender in Bihar, an Indian state with deeply entrenched caste structures and gender disparities. Bihar's social structure is primarily shaped by the intersection of caste-based stratification and patriarchal traditions, which influence access to education, economic opportunity, and political engagement. This study investigates how caste and gender combine to influence This study investigates the relationship between caste and gender in Bihar, an Indian state with well entrenched caste systems and gender inequities. Bihar's social structure is primarily determined by the junction of caste-based stratification and patriarchal traditions, which influence access to education, economic opportunity, and political participation. This study studies how caste and gender connect to impact the socioeconomic and political status of individuals, particularly underprivileged

Based on the analysis of secondary sources, this study explores how women from lower castes face compounded disadvantages compared to upper-caste women and men across caste categories. Caste-based discrimination exacerbates gender inequalities, leading to limited mobility, lower literacy rates, and restricted access to healthcare and employment for lower-caste women. Additionally, societal expectations and traditional norms further restrict the agency of women in lower castes, impacting their quality of life and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

By analyzing the correlation between caste and gender, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how these intersecting factors contribute to structural inequalities in Bihar. The findings underscore the need for policies that address both caste and gender as interconnected determinants of social exclusion, advancing a more equitable framework for marginalized populations in Bihar.

INTRODUCTION

Caste has a significant role in Indian society. Vedic society was divided into four classes based on the varna principle: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The four varnas are listed hierarchically. The Varna Schema were Empirically expressed through different caste groups. Srinivas defines caste as: "Caste is a hereditary, endogamous, typically localized group with traditional Association with an occupation and a specific position in the local hierarchy of castes. Caste relations are governed, among other things, by the notion. of purity and pollution, and often the highest commensality occurs within the castes" (Srinivas, 1978). Castes are communities that have a clearly defined lifestyle. own, membership is defined neither by selection or merit but by birth. Hence, Caste is a category which is kind of official in the Indian society (Srinivas, 1978).

According to Sir. H. Risley, "a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional, callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community" (Ambedkar, 1916).

The caste system organizes social and ritual preferences into a hierarchical structure. This gradation or grading conveys a sense of high and low, superiority and inferiority. The Brahmins are at the top of the hierarchy and are thought to be ritually pure or superior. The untouchables, regarded the most impure, are at the bottom of the hierarchy. The Kshatriyas fall in between, followed by the Vaishya. Thus, castes have a specific standing within the larger framework of caste hierarchy. System of food also played a crucial role in caste system in the Indian society. Food exchange, commonly known as commensality, and social interaction between castes follow established rules. Castes have limits on the kind of food they can eat, receive, and exchange. A Brahmin will accept "pakka" food, i.e., food prepared with 'ghee', from any community, but he will not accept 'kachcha' food, i.e., food prepared with water by another caste. The concept of pollution severely limits the range of social engagement on the level of social contact. One of the unique features of caste system in Indian society is association caste with the sense of purity. In ritual terms, one caste is considered purer or impure than the other. The notion of pollution and purity heavily influences the relationship between different castes. The superior classes practice various taboos to maintain ceremonial purity. Castes regarded ritually impure were subjected to a variety of disabilities. For example, they were not permitted to utilize public highways or enter Hindu temples. Some castes' shadows were deemed contaminating; for example, in Tamil Nadu, Shanars or Toddy-tappers were previously required to keep a 24-step distance from a Brahmin. Every caste has its own set of traditions, practices, and rituals. It follows its own informal norms, regulations, and processes (Ghurye: 1962).

Caste system is also intertwined with marriage in the Indian society, particularly to the north Indian society. Endogamy, or marrying within one's own caste or sub-caste, is a fundamental aspect of the caste system. Generally, people marry within their own caste or subcaste. However, there were some exceptions. In some parts of India, superior caste males may marry lower caste women. This type of marriage arrangement is referred to as hypergamy. Caste is also associated with occupation. Traditionally, each caste was tied with a specific occupation. They were classified higher or lower based on the ritual purity and contamination of their respective occupations. The highest-ranking Brahmins were tasked with obtaining and teaching sacred knowledge, as well as making sacrifices. The preceding is a description of the essential characteristics of the caste system. However, the caste system varies depending on the area of India. As a regional reality, one can observe various patterns of casting, customs and behavior, marriage rules, and caste domination.

Each caste had its own caste council or panchayat, where its members' problems were addressed. The caste panchayat regulated the behavior of the caste people based on the prescribed norms and sanctioned social behaviour. Headed by the elders of that caste, these councils had the power to excommunicate a member if he did not follow caste restrictions.

Gender as a concept is relatively a new one. Gender is different from Sex; the latter is a biological construct but the earlier is a social construct. In the beginning the term sex has been using interchangeably for both biological and psychological term but latter on it has been realize that the terms male and female can't define the complex biological, psychological and sociological concepts related to human body and brain. Hence The term 'Gender' was first used in the 1940s by John Money in a discourse intended to legitimize sex change, and it began to be used in the social sciences in the late 1960s, after which the question of gender became central to discussions of social life (Hameed & Shukri, 2014).

CORRELATION BETWEEN GENDER AND CASTE:

In Indian society caste is also a basis of division of labour and labourers hence the caste also interacts with gender in this societal structure. Women's contributions to caste and class studies are often overlooked due to a dominant masculinist perspective. In anthropological studies of kinship, women are often viewed as objects of exchange. However, the practice of male dominance and the patriarchal cultural ideology that supports it are presumed and normalized, rather than challenged. Women also featured as portals to caste, via which lower caste men may threaten caste purity and claim caste position, as well as signifiers of caste's cultural traits; this was acknowledgment that the material underpinning of caste resided crucially in control over women's sexuality (Velaskar, 2016).

Every society's overall power structure is made up of a complicated web of social ties in which both men and women are intricately involved. There are power dynamics between males and women, as well as between women from various castes and social strata. Gender, caste, and class relations of power are viewed by the critical feminist sociology method outlined here as intricately intertwined (and overlapping) axes of difference, inequality, domination, and power that are expressed in the social organization. Understanding the structural disparities between women (and men) requires an analytical or practical relationship between caste, class, and patriarchy (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993).

Even if caste has lost some of its power in recent years, caste identities are still quite strong, and a person's surname nearly invariably indicates which caste they belong to. Additionally, there is evidence that suggests stigmatization and prejudice against lower caste groups persist. Results from research like Chaudhury and Sinha (2020), Siddique (2011), and Wankhede (2016) show that low-caste groups experience gender inequality to a greater degree than high-caste ones (Islam et al, 2021).

In order to understand the correlation between gender and caste discrimination this research used intersectional theory. Kimberle Crenshaw first used the term "intersectionality" to describe how the US's antidiscrimination laws did not adequately reflect the experiences of Black women. The experiences of people who are at the crossroads of a marginalized racial identity (black people) and sex (women) are more likely to be overlooked by social movements as well as by the government and legal system, according to academics and activists. Since then, social researchers from a variety of fields have emphasized the value of an intersectional approach in comprehending the injustice, discrimination, and inequality that marginalized populations experience worldwide along several axes, such as race or disability (Jayna Kothari et al, 2019).

In the Indian setting, the understanding that one's social status and lived experience are influenced by numerous identities is not new. In India, caste is a pervasive system of inequality and persecution. People who are at the intersections of caste and other identities, such sex, gender identity, or handicap, face severe forms of discrimination. In Indian tradition, caste and gender inequalities are inextricably intertwined since controlling women's bodies preserves the "purity of caste." Because women are seen as "entry points" or "gateways" of caste mobility for men from lower castes, strong restrictions are placed on them in order to protect the caste system. Due to the police and other authorities' systemic disregard for their claims, people who are at the intersection of caste and gender are now especially susceptible to exacerbated discrimination. Dalit women are severely marginalized in Indian society, which is influenced by both patriarchal and Brahmanical beliefs, according to prominent Dalit activists and academics. In order to take into consideration, the experiences and elevate the perspectives of Dalit women, Rege has argued for a "standpoint feminist" approach. To comprehend the relationship between gender and caste in relation to gender-based violence, human rights violations, commercial surrogacy, the devadasi system, educational access, and livelihoods, a number of works have employed an intersectional approach in addition to theoretical writing (ibid).

The way social spaces are structured means that women from different castes and classes face discrimination in very different ways. When women, especially Dalit women, speak out against upper caste men's policing, they are invariably punished, and rape is seen as the worst punishment for a woman who tries to cross social boundaries (Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 2013). The way that caste and gender reshape how "woman" functions as a category under a "graded patriarchy" is frequently overlooked by India's mainstream feminist movement. Dalit feminists are forced to choose between feminism and community ties when they fail to acknowledge the systemic ways in which caste negatively impacts Dalit women. The way that caste-based sexual violence is institutionalized in society is frequently obscured by highlighting either the "difference" of caste or the "sameness" of how patriarchy affects all women. Addressing the ways in which gender-based discrimination and caste-based discrimination coexist is crucial (Rege, 2013). The vulnerability and discrimination experienced by the trans and intersex population is particularly noticeable in the context of transgender identification. Due to their caste and gender identity, Dalit transgender people experience additional discrimination (Semmalar, 2014).

CASTE BASE GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN BIHAR:

With its deeply ingrained patriarchal culture and caste structures, Bihar presents a dynamic environment where caste-based and gender-based inequality coexist. The experiences of women are particularly difficult because they are subjected to structural oppression, especially those from underprivileged castes. This article explores the forms, causes, and consequences of caste-based gender discrimination in Bihar while examining potential solutions. Bihar's social structure is still dominated by the caste system, a strict social hierarchy. In the past, marginalized castes like Dalits and Scheduled Tribes have been at the bottom, doing menial work and being shut out of chances and resources. Women's duties and status are determined by patriarchal norms, which place them in inferior roles. The combined weight of caste and gender falls on women from lower castes, who frequently experience violence and financial hardship.

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CASTE BASED GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN BIHAR:

Women face discrimination in every aspect of life, the discrimination become double folded when it happens with women of the marginalised caste. These women face discrimination on economy sphere of life. In Bihar, the majority of marginalized women work in agriculture or other menial jobs, frequently in exploitative conditions enforced by upper-caste landowners. Women are paid much less than men and members of higher castes, and wage inequities are pervasive. The marginalised caste young girls do not get enough opportunity to get proper education. Because to poverty, home duties, and societal biases, underprivileged women have restricted access to education. Discrimination and a lack of programs for skill development continue to limit employment chances. Caste oppression frequently uses sexual violence as a tactic. Their 'universal sisters' with lower caste/class and semiliterate rural backgrounds experienced sexual exploitation and caste prejudice, while educated urban middle class women experienced violence mediated through dowries and domestic abuse (Srivastava, 2007). There is a case from Bihar regarding sexual harassment of a dalit girl. Rakhi is a 16-year-old Dalit girl who attends school and resides in a Bihar hamlet. In her community, Dalits typically labor on Yadavs' farms. The victim was abducted by three Yadav caste guys, who then brought her to another district and repeatedly sexually assaulted her. Seven months after learning of the rape, her family filed a formal complaint because the accused had intimidated the survivor into keeping quiet. The accused has threatened to rape Rakhi once again after they are released on bail, and the family is still under pressure to make concessions. However, the survivor and her family are still fighting for justice.¹ Powerful landed upper caste men in Ramnagar-Gopalpur hamlet, Lakhisarai, are accused of raping seven Dalit women in August 2006. The event occurred because the women did not support the upper caste, landowner candidate. The local police only filed a complaint following the Bihar State Women Commission's intervention (Srivastava, 2007).

Women are subject to further limitations on their ability to move around physically and to participate in social and political activities. In Bihar, caste is found to be closely related to women's mobility. Women from upper castes faced stronger mobility limitations than those from lower castes, according to Rodgers et al. (2013).

A number of interrelated variables contribute to Bihar's caste-based gender discrimination, further marginalizing women from lower castes. Patriarchy is important because lower caste members are positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy due to gender norms that place them under submissive women. The inflexible caste structure reinforces discriminatory behaviors that restrict their access to opportunities and resources, hence perpetuating exclusion and inequality. Poverty and illiteracy make this vulnerability even worse because lower-caste women have fewer resources to fight against oppression or better their lot in life due to economic and educational disadvantages. Even with legislative protections, these women frequently do not receive the justice and assistance they require because of lax implementation of the law brought on by systematic corruption and caste prejudices, which feeds cycles of inequity.

CONCLUSION:

¹ <https://counterviewfiles.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/caste-based-sexual-violence-and-state-impunity-english.pdf>.

The caste system has long been an integral yet divisive feature of Indian society, profoundly influencing the social, economic, and cultural lives of its people. Rooted in the varna system and later evolving into a rigid hierarchy, caste dictates various aspects of life, including social interaction, food practices, and occupational roles, based on notions of purity and pollution. While it was originally conceived as a social classification, over time, caste became a tool for systemic exclusion and inequality, especially impacting marginalized communities.

The intersectionality of caste and gender has exacerbated discrimination, with women from lower castes facing a dual burden of oppression due to patriarchal norms and caste-based prejudices. Women often bear the brunt of caste violence, sexual exploitation, and restricted mobility, especially in patriarchal and caste-stratified regions like Bihar. Here, caste and gender biases are deeply entrenched, leading to systemic inequalities in access to education, employment, and justice. The exploitation of women as symbolic gatekeepers of caste purity further highlights how intertwined these forms of discrimination are.

Efforts to address caste and gender-based inequalities require an intersectional approach that acknowledges their interconnected nature. Structural reforms, community empowerment, and robust implementation of anti-discrimination laws are critical to dismantling these hierarchies. Furthermore, inclusive education and awareness programs must emphasize the shared humanity beyond caste and gender divisions.

While caste-based discrimination has declined in some urban and modern contexts, its lingering effects remain potent, especially in rural areas. Understanding and addressing the complex interplay between caste and gender is essential for fostering an equitable and inclusive society where every individual can realize their full potential, free from the constraints of oppressive traditions.

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