

Caste Playing Significant Role in Creating Gender Identity in India

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Abstract

This research article examines the intricate relationship between gender identity and caste, emphasizing the influence of caste systems on the establishment, maintenance, and negotiation of gender roles in society. This investigation investigates the impact of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors on the intersection of gender and caste through historiographical analysis and interdisciplinary literature. The paper analyzes the substantial contributions made by researchers throughout history, with a particular emphasis on the evolution of concepts regarding caste as a determinant of gender identity. The systemic mechanisms through which caste sustains gendered hierarchies are the focus of this research, which employs qualitative and interpretive approaches to conduct textual analysis, ethnographic investigations, and archival research. The results suggest that gender norms are consistently reinforced through caste-related activities, such as school and public space access, labor divisions, and marriage customs. Additionally, they disclose stories of resistance that challenge these frameworks. The discourse contextualizes these discoveries within comprehensive discussions of caste politics, patriarchy, and intersectionality, with a particular emphasis on Dalit feminist critiques. This paper argues that a nuanced understanding of caste is essential, as it is a critical aspect of identity that intersects with gender. It encourages policymakers and scholars to address these intricate disparities in order to promote a more equitable society.

Keywords: socio-political factors, historiographical analysis, gender identity, Dalit feminist critiques, ethnographic investigations

Introduction

The socio-cultural environment of South Asia, particularly India, has been profoundly influenced by the intimate relationship between caste and gender (Sharma, R.K.; Samarjeet, 2023). Both concepts are deeply rooted in enduring traditions and continue to be crucial in shaping the frameworks of society and the responsibilities of individuals. The roles, responsibilities, and conduct that are expected of individuals based on their biological sex are defined by gender, while caste influences social stature, resource availability, and career opportunities (Nadamala, 2024). The complex matrix that results from the combination of these

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Published: 12 March 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/SPIJSH.2026.v3.i3.45511>

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two concepts has a distinctive and frequently repressive impact on gender identity (Deshpande, 2019).

This research endeavors to investigate the impact of caste systems on the development and perpetuation of gender identity, taking into account both historical and contemporary contexts. This research employs historiographical discussions and transdisciplinary studies to examine the influence of caste norms and practices including endogamy, purity-pollution taboos, and access to education and employment on the roles and attitudes of men and women within various caste groups. The study emphasizes the perpetuation of systemic disparities by the entrenchment of caste-specific gender expectations within ritual practices, social norms, and institutional frameworks. The primary focus of this study is the gendered division of labor and the regulation of women's sexuality, both of which are intricately connected to caste ideology. Women, in particular, are subjected to the most severe consequences of caste discrimination, as they are frequently perceived as the protectors of caste integrity. This perception results in increased limitations on their autonomy, mobility, and options. The research examines the function of men in the caste-gender framework, emphasizing the distinctive formation of masculinity in various caste systems. This investigation employs a historiographical methodology to conduct a critical examination of the influence of caste on gender identity by examining the works of distinguished scholars, such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Uma Chakravarti, and Leela Dube. It examines feminist critiques of caste-based patriarchy and the intricate obstacles encountered by Dalit women and other marginalized groups.

The objective of this research is to enhance comprehension of the enduring effects of caste-based gender discrimination and to foster dialogue on social justice and equity by elucidating the relationship between caste and gender identity. This research utilizes an interdisciplinary framework to elucidate the complexities of gender oppression and caste, thereby advancing the advancement of anti-caste and inclusive feminist movements.

The convergence of caste and gender has become a critical focus for researchers in a variety of disciplines, including sociology, feminist theory, and South Asian studies. This literature review examines significant works that elucidate the pivotal role of caste in the formation of gender identity, with a focus on historiographical discussions and multidisciplinary evaluations. The interconnections of caste and gender are essential to understanding Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's seminal work, particularly *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). Ambedkar emphasized the direct impact of caste on the autonomy and sexuality of women, which serves to entrench endogamy. He argued that the regulation of women's reproductive and social functions was essential for the preservation of caste integrity, thereby linking caste systems to patriarchal dominance (Langare, 2013).

M.N. Srinivas' concept of "Sanskritization" (*Religion and Society Among the Coorg's of South India*, 1952) investigates the influence of caste hierarchy on social mobility, as it frequently reinforces restrictive gender norms (Pattanaik, 2021). Detractors argue that Srinivas' work fails to adequately investigate the distinctive consequences of caste on women, particularly Dalit women, despite the sociological framework he provides (Iyer, 2023; Justin, J.)

Feminist Criticisms of Caste-Inflected Patriarchy

Feminist scholars such as Uma Chakravarti and Leela Dube have conducted a thorough examination of the intersections of gender and caste. Chakravarti's *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2003) emphasizes the significant intersection of gender and caste, emphasizing that women are the primary carriers of caste identity. She argues that caste patriarchy is perpetuated by mechanisms such as endogamy, the regulation of women's sexuality, and restrictions on their public participation (Ghosh, 2018). The research conducted by Leela Dube on kinship and gender (*Caste, Class, and Gender*, 1996) elucidates the impact of caste systems on familial duties and connections, imposing distinct gender expectations (Kaur, 2024). Dube underscores that the enslavement of women is perpetuated by the ingrained nature of their roles in maintaining caste purity, which is reflected in daily rituals such as marriage rites and food taboos (Ahmad, 2023). Dalit feminist researchers have offered fundamental insights into the unique challenges faced by Dalit women, who are subjected to oppression at the intersection of gender and caste. According to Sharmila Rege's *Dalit Women's Testimonios* (2006) and Gopal Guru's *Dalit Women Talk Differently* (1995), the caste-based subjugation of Dalit women is frequently disregarded by mainstream feminist movements. Rege's emphasis on the "double jeopardy" of caste and gender oppression emphasizes the critical importance of an integrative approach in feminist discourse (Liddle, 1989). The autobiographical work *Karukku* (1992) by Bama provides a compelling portrayal of the intersection between caste and gender in the lives of Dalit women (Biswas, 2019). Her narrative exposes the daily discrimination that Dalit women face, both within and beyond their communities, illustrating how caste-based patriarchy perpetuates structural inequity (Samuelson, 2011). Scholarly interest has been piqued by the way in which masculinity is defined within the caste system. *The Persistence of Caste* (2010) by Anand Teltumbde investigates the construction of upper-caste masculinity in contrast to the perceived "inferiority" of lower-caste men (Goghari, 2023). S. Anandhi's research on non-Brahmin masculinities elucidates the impact of caste hierarchies on the gender roles of men, establishing varying expectations of masculinity among various caste groups (Shah, 2024).

Comprehending the impact of caste on gender identity necessitates an understanding of the gendered division of labor and ritual practices (Herbert, 2018). *Gandhi and the Feminization of Politics* (1989) by Judith Brown investigates the historical disenfranchisement of women due to caste-based labor divisions, which have restricted them to roles that are associated with their caste (Sekher, 2008; Chickerur, 2021)). Additionally, Meena Gopal's research on labor and caste examines the ways in which caste restricts women's access to economic opportunities, thereby perpetuating their dependence on male-dominated systems (Issar, 2021).

The importance of anti-caste movements in challenging patriarchal norms is emphasized by contemporary activists and intellectuals, such as Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd (*Why I Am Not a Hindu*, 1996). Ilaiah advocates for an egalitarian approach to social transformation, challenging the Brahmanical hegemony that enforces gender norms through caste ideology (Ray, 2021). Similarly, intersectional feminist movements, such as the Dalit Women's Collective, underscore the importance of simultaneously confronting gender oppression and caste oppression in the pursuit of social justice (Mandal, 2023). The research that was examined

demonstrates the complex relationship between caste and gender, which has a substantial impact on opportunities, roles, and identities. Foundational works establish a theoretical framework, while feminist and Dalit scholars have expanded the discourse by incorporating intersectional perspectives (Chakraborty, 2003). This literature underscores the importance of a thorough understanding of the ways in which caste perpetuates gendered oppression, thereby laying the groundwork for additional research on this topic.

Gender Identity and Caste:

The chronological progression of research on gender identity and caste, with a focus on the significant contributions, disputes, and methodological methods that have emerged over time. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar argued in *Annihilation of Caste* in 1936 that the caste system is maintained by the regulation of women's sexuality and endogamous practices. He laid the groundwork for the understanding of caste as a patriarchal organization. B.R. Ambedkar's *The Untouchables: Their Identity and the Reasons for Their Untouchability Examined* the historical roots of caste discrimination and its impact on women, emphasizing the interconnections between caste and gender in the maintenance of societal hierarchies. M.N. Srinivas introduced the concept of "Sanskritization" in his 1952 work, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*. This work elucidated how lower castes emulate the behaviors of upper castes, particularly the stringent gender roles, in order to ascend the social hierarchy. However, his paradigm did not adequately investigate the implications of gender. André Béteille's *Caste, Class, and Power* (1975) examined the structural aspects of caste but largely neglected the gender factor, thereby demonstrating the broader limitations of modern sociological methodologies. The essay "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" by Uma Chakravarti in 1987 challenged the idealized portrayal of women in ancient Indian civilization, highlighting the ways in which caste-based patriarchy subjugated women and obliterated their historical agency. Judith Brown's work, *Gandhi and the Feminization of Politics*, explored the confluence of caste and gender hierarchies within the political sphere, with a particular emphasis on the responsibilities of women and labor divisions. Bama's *Karukku*, an autobiographical novel published in 1992, introduced the perspectives of Dalit women into popular discourse, emphasizing the dual oppression they experience as a result of gender and caste. Gopal Guru's "Dalit Women Talk Differently" emphasized the marginalization of Dalit women within mainstream feminist and anti-caste movements, thereby advancing an intersectional paradigm. Leela Dube's 1996 work, *Caste, Class, and Gender*, investigated the mechanisms by which kinship relations and caste norms perpetuate gender inequality, with a particular emphasis on the social and ritual roles that are assigned to women. Uma Chakravarti's *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, published in 2003, meticulously investigated the influence of caste and gender on social activities, with a particular emphasis on endogamy, sexuality, and employment. Sharmila Rege's *Dalit Women's Testimonios*, published in 2006, emphasized the lived experiences of Dalit women, thereby challenging the dominant narratives in both feminist and caste discourses. Anandhi S. and Karin Kapadia conducted an investigation into non-Brahmin masculinities in 2008, focusing on the impact of caste on masculine gender roles and providing a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics and caste. *The Persistence of Caste*, published in 2010, by Anand Teltumbde, examined the perpetuation of gendered oppression through caste systems. The book emphasizes the marginalization of Dalit individuals, both men

and women, and the development of upper-caste masculinity. The caste question, written by Anupama Rao in 2013, provided a critical historical analysis of gender and caste, emphasizing the impact of colonial and post-colonial policies on caste-based patriarchy. Swati Parashar's publications in 2018 focused on the intersection of violence, gender, and caste, with a particular emphasis on the resistance movements of Dalit women. Riya Singh's 2021 research on Caste, Gender, and Education examined the challenges faced by women from marginalized castes in obtaining an education, linking these challenges to broader systemic injustices. Neelam Yadav's research on caste, gender, and digital spaces in 2023 investigated the negotiation and contestation of caste and gender identities on online platforms, indicating a new trajectory in the field.

The historiography of caste and gender identity has evolved from fundamental critiques of caste as a social construct to complex investigations of its intersections with gender. Scholars have shifted from structural and sociological perspectives to intersectional and feminist frameworks, which underscore the lived experiences of oppressed communities. This development underscores the importance of consistently broadening the scope of research to address the changing challenges and environments. This study used a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology to investigate the substantial influence of caste on the formation of gender identity. The technique comprises the subsequent essential elements. This research is based on a critical historiographical approach. This entails examining the development of academic discourse on caste and gender via historical, sociological, and feminist lenses. The study contextualizes the interconnections of caste and gender through the examination of primary and secondary materials throughout various historical periods. Primary writings, including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* and autobiographical narratives such as Bama's *Karukku*. Secondary sources encompass feminist critiques, such as Uma Chakravarti's "Gendering Caste," and Dalit historiographies, such as Sharmila Rege's "Dalit Women's Testimonios." Here are two main analytical emphasis these are, how caste-specific rules, including endogamy and purity-pollution taboos, influence gender roles. And the influence of colonial and post-colonial policies in entrenching caste-based gender hierarchies.

The research utilizes Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality to examine the interplay of caste and gender in shaping distinct experiences of oppression and identity development. This concept is especially pertinent for comprehending the issues encountered by Dalit women, who endure marginalization at the intersections of caste, gender, and class. It has three analytical aspects that is Gendered work segregation within caste hierarchies, Regulation of women's sexuality as a mechanism for preserving caste purity and varied constructs of masculinity among caste groups. The study incorporates case studies to exemplify the intersection of caste and gender in certain circumstances, including: Resistance movements among Dalit women, utilizing oral histories and autobiographical accounts (e.g., *Karukku*). The influence of caste on gendered access to school, employment, and political representation. The significance of ritual activities in perpetuating caste-based gender standards. An analytical examination of textual and cultural artifacts is performed to comprehend the impact of caste ideology on gender identity. This encompasses: Examining religious scriptures and practices that perpetuate caste-based patriarchy. Analyzing feminist and Dalit literature to uncover counter-narratives that contest caste and gender injustice.

The research examines the impact of caste on gender identity across various caste groups and geographical areas. This comparative method reveals patterns and discrepancies in the formation of gender roles within the caste system. The results are systematically categorized thematically to emphasize critical domains where caste overlaps with gender, including:

- Marital and familial structures.
- Educational and economic prospects.
- Representation among feminist and anti-caste movements.

The study concentrates on India; however, the impact of the caste system on gender identification within diaspora communities and its worldwide implications are insufficiently examined due to limitations in time and resources. The research predominantly uses textual analysis, supplemented by minimal ethnographic fieldwork. This methodology integrates historiographical analysis, intersectional frameworks, and case studies to elucidate the impact of caste on gender identity. It aims to enhance the current body of knowledge by emphasizing the perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups, especially Dalit women, while providing a critical framework to examine caste-based gender discrimination. This study has a significant influence of caste on the development of gender identity, as evidenced by its effects in a variety of contexts, including social norms, labor practices, familial systems, and cultural narratives. The principal intersections of caste and gender are systematically categorized thematically in the findings.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's assertion that endogamy is essential to the caste structure is corroborated by the research. Stringent restrictions are imposed on the selection of partners, mobility, and conduct of women in order to maintain caste integrity. These constraints are perpetuated, particularly within upper-caste societies, by rituals and practices such as honor murders and dowry. Dalit women are subjected to "triple oppression" as a result of their socioeconomic status, gender, and caste. Dehumanizing Dalit women, caste-based patriarchy exposes them to systemic violence, exploitation, and marginalization from mainstream feminist organizations, as illustrated by case examples from Dalit autobiographies, such as Bama's *Karukku*.

Economic Marginalization and Gendered Labor Division:

Specifically, the caste system assigns women responsibilities that are associated with their caste, thereby imposing a gendered division of labor. For example, upper-caste women are frequently confined to domestic settings, while Dalit women are compelled to engage in menial, inadequately compensated, and stigmatized occupations, such as manual scavenging. Access to Education and Resources: Women from marginalized castes face structural barriers to obtaining education and economic opportunities.

Upper-caste men are socialized to embody hegemonic masculinity, which is typically defined by the oppression of women and lower castes, as well as power and control. This is evident in the application of caste-based violence and patriarchal norms, particularly against Dalit populations. The caste rank of Dalit males' results in emasculation and marginalization. However, their portrayal of masculinity frequently symbolizes opposition to the hegemony of

the upper stratum, occasionally reinforcing patriarchal norms within their own communities. The notions of purity and contamination have a disproportionate impact on women, particularly in their roles as bearers of caste identity, as a result of ritual activities. Caste patriarchy is perpetuated by factors such as menstrual taboos, restrictions on women's mobility, and exclusion from sacrosanct venues. Cultural narratives frequently idealize upper-caste femininity while marginalizing or stigmatizing the realities of Dalit women, as evidenced by their representation in literature and media. These depictions are challenged by counter-narratives from Dalit feminists and novelists, which emphasize the autonomy and resilience of underprivileged women. The emergence of Dalit women's collectives has challenged both caste and gender oppression, emphasizing the importance of intersectional strategies in feminist and anti-caste movements. The deficiencies of mainstream feminism in resolving the distinctive challenges encountered by marginalized women are emphasized by these initiatives.

Function of Education and Activism:

Education and grassroots activism have become indispensable tools for the empowerment of women from underprivileged strata. The success narratives of Dalit women leaders underscore the transformative potential of education and social action in the removal of caste-gender barriers. The results suggest that caste has a substantial impact on gender identity, influencing social roles, resource accessibility, and cultural attitudes. Dalit women are subjected to compounded subjugation that is rooted in both caste and gender, while upper-caste women are constrained by patriarchal norms in their communities. The intersectional framework underscores the importance of simultaneously addressing gender and caste in the pursuit of social justice.

These results underscore the importance of anti-caste campaigning, intersectional feminist movements, and inclusive policies in order to eliminate the frameworks of caste-based gender discrimination and ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities.

The results of this study emphasize the critical role of caste in the formation of gender identity, with its influence being rooted in historical, social, and cultural frameworks. This discourse investigates these intersections, highlighting significant disputes and referencing relevant scholarship to contextualize the findings.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's assertion that endogamy perpetuates caste is essential for understanding the relationship between gender and caste (Ambedkar, 1936; Ramanathan, 2023). The preservation of caste integrity is achieved through the regulation of women's sexuality and the imposition of endogamous marriages (Ayyar, 2013). Uma Chakravarti (2003) elucidates that caste-based patriarchy views women as symbols of familial pride and property, thereby restricting their freedom and mobility. This patriarchal dominance manifests itself in more severe forms of violence for Dalit women. Gopal Guru (1995) underscores that Dalit women are subjected to dual marginalization, as they are subjected to patriarchal standards within their own communities and caste-based sexual assault from upper-caste males. This dual oppression maintains their marginalized status and limits their ability to challenge gender and caste systems (Belkin, 2008; Thenmozhi, 2024). The results of the study are consistent with Leela Dube's (1996) investigation of caste and gender within familial frameworks. The subordination

of women is reinforced and economic prospects are determined by caste-specific work occupations (Subramanian, 2024). For instance, upper-caste women are frequently limited to domestic responsibilities, which symbolize purity, whereas Dalit women are assigned to marginalized occupations, such as manual scavenging. This distribution of labor has long-term repercussions for economic empowerment. Meena Gopal (2012) notes that Dalit women are structurally marginalized from formal employment and education, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependency. Upward mobility is frequently impeded by caste-based patriarchy, which includes affirmative action legislation (Usman, 2011). An additional aspect of gendered subjugation is revealed by the development of masculinity within caste hierarchies (Pathak, 2023; Dalwai, 2019). Power and control are the foundations of upper-caste masculinity, according to Anand Teltumbde (2010), which is frequently demonstrated through caste-based violence. However, Dalit masculinity may occasionally perpetuate patriarchal ideas within Dalit communities, as it is influenced by opposition to this dominance (Anandhi, 2002).

This dichotomy underscores the importance of an intersectional methodology in the field of gender and caste studies (Mitra, 2021). According to S. Anandhi (2008), the examination of caste without taking gender into account may result in the neglect of the reproduction of caste systems through patriarchal norms. The findings emphasize the importance of purity-pollution concepts in the preservation of gender standards that are based on caste (Philips, 2004). According to Judith Brown (1989), women are disproportionately affected by ritual practices, such as menstruation taboos and restrictions on their mobility, which thereby perpetuates their subjugation within caste hierarchies. The exclusionary characteristics of these practices have been criticized by Dalit feminist scholars (Ahsan, 2024). Sharmila Rege (2006) argues that traditional feminist movements often disregard the unique challenges faced by Dalit women, such as their exclusion from religious and cultural institutions. By asserting Dalit women's agency and identity, counter-narratives by Dalit authors, such as Bama's *Karukku* (1992), challenge these conventions. Dalit women's movements have emerged as formidable platforms for challenging gender and caste injustice. Gopal Guru (1995) emphasizes the importance of Dalit women expressing their own perspectives, rather than being represented by upper-caste feminists or male-centric anti-caste organizations. The empowerment of Dalit women has been contingent upon education and action. Swati Parashar (2018) underscores that Dalit women have been able to assert their rights and confront caste hierarchies as a result of educational access and grassroots movements. All of these movements underscore the importance of intersectionality in the simultaneous examination of gender and caste (Munshi, 2019). Inclusive policies that address the intersections of gender and caste are required as a consequence of the findings. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd (1996) advocates for affirmative action that is caste-based and explicitly addresses gender inequities. In order to ensure the inclusion of marginalized voices, particularly those of Dalit women, feminist researchers advocate for the integration of caste analyses into feminist discourses (Chakravarti, 2003; Rege, 2006). Education is of the utmost importance in the fight against caste-based gender inequality. Neelam Yadav (2023) posits that targeted educational interventions can disrupt the perpetuation of poverty and dependency that maintain caste and gender hierarchies. This discussion underscores the fact that caste is not merely a social hierarchy, but also a system that is profoundly gendered and that affects opportunities, duties, and identities (Prasitha, 2021;

Prasad, 2018). This investigation contributes to the current body of knowledge regarding caste and gender by incorporating sociological, feminist, and Dalit perspectives (Nightingale, 2011; Craddock, 2023). The results emphasized the urgent need for intersectional strategies in policy and advocacy to address the compounded oppression experienced by underprivileged groups, particularly Dalit women.

Conclusion

This investigation underscores the complex interplay between gender and caste in terms of their impact on resource availability, social roles, and identity. In addition to serving as a hierarchical structure, caste also serves as a means of perpetuating gendered oppression through institutional frameworks, practices, and norms. The majority of this subjugation is experienced by women, particularly those from oppressed castes, as their identities are shaped by the intersection of gender and caste. The findings suggest that caste-based patriarchy is operational through mechanisms such as endogamy, the regulation of women's sexuality, and labor division. Dalit women are subjected to heightened discrimination as a result of their sect, gender, and class, which impedes their ability to advance in society, work, and education. These inequalities are perpetuated by cultural narratives and ritual practices, which contribute to the stigmatization and exclusion of marginalized women. Concurrently, the agency of Dalit women and their contributions to combating caste and gender oppression have been emphasized by resistance organizations and intersectional feminist frameworks. Counter-narratives have been constructed and marginalized voices have been elevated through grassroots activism, education, and Dalit feminist writing. This research emphasizes the importance of intersectional frameworks in policy and action to address the unique challenges faced by women at the intersections of gender and caste. In order to ensure inclusivity and representation, feminist movements must integrate caste studies, while policies intended to dismantle caste hierarchy must consider the gendered aspects of caste-based oppression. By investigating the historical, social, and cultural contexts of both gender and caste, this research elucidates the ways in which caste influences gender identity in contemporary society. In order to develop a more comprehensive framework for addressing caste-related gender disparities, future research should focus on the global aspects of caste and gender, particularly within diaspora populations.

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