

Gendering Caste and Casteing Gender: A Study of Social Sickness in Uma Chakravarti's Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens

Thushara Thoty

A fourth-year law student at NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, India

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ABSTRACT

Gendering Caste: Through feminist a lens (2018) is a feminist critique of Indian caste system written by Uma Chakravarti, who is an Indian historian and teacher. She is known to the readers as the founding mother of Women's Movement in India and a feminist scholar in the subcontinent. The article aims to deal with the feminist experiments of gendering caste and casting gender with reference to marginalised Dalits, against the backdrop of Brahminical hegemony, patriarchy and their practice of untouchability. While analysing the infamous social practices, it traces the genealogy and history of harassment and discrimination of Dalits in this brahmin-oriented society, where gender and caste are often linked together in everyday life – in order to target the helpless Dalits and vulnerable women. It also focuses on the feminist's observations on Hindu social practices, which target gender discrimination in general and the practice of caste/untouchability in particular – in ancient, pre-during- post-colonial India. Understanding the deep-rooted caste and its mysterious divide between the high caste brahmins and the low caste Dalits, has been a recurring and nagging theme in Humanities as well as Social Sciences. It records how the caste system has taken a socio-cultural construction promoting brahmins to the heights of honour/celebrity by giving approval to their fallacious practices on the one hand and pushing Dalits into the depths of degradation by branding them as untouchables, especially focusing on how women are used, misused, abused and seduced in this evil caste system on the other hand.

Key Terms: Gender, Caste, Hegemony, Patriarchy, Untouchability, Atrocity, Judiciary.

The terms like 'high' caste and 'low' caste are untrue and the grand adjectives are empty, dead and misleading. One is dominant and the other one is dominated; one maintains purity and the other brings impurity; one has got all rights and enjoyments and the other is put to responsibilities and restrictions. Brahmin has been placed on the top and Dalit has been crushed to the bottom; one is right and acceptable and the other is wrong and unacceptable.

The high caste Hindus continue to dominate and enjoy their position and power in this social stratification - as they owned education, land, temple, art, industry, natural resources, etc. after plundering and looting the marginalised communities. The generational exploitation, discrimination and robbery must be put to an end on war-footing, as the caste virus deteriorated the social health of the marginalised people. Viramma, a Dalit woman from Tamil Nadu strongly resists and questions the false reading of purity and pollution (the binary oppositions) and ridicules the false, inhuman and predatory brahmin-oriented practices. The term 'Brahmin' itself is not real and their elitism and purity are unfounded.

The primitively introduced caste system in India/subcontinent came into existence, forcibly imposed its various sociocultural inequalities on marginalised groups - segregating, distancing and isolating the Dalits. Caste system has been born and brought up as a Hindu devil (which attained immortality) in communally polarised India and nowhere else its presence is seen in the world except racism. India has obtained this patent coercively and the caste system has been imposed and promoted systematically as a legitimate act. Whereas in Britain, they have a class system which can be repaired and also people can overcome from racism (in America, Britain, etc.) but escaping from the shackles of caste system, in all senses, it has become more or less an impossible task. Indian society has been built on the crude lines/foundations of caste and its progress and future entirely depend on it, as defined and executed by brahmins and their refutable ideology.

Geographically, socially, politically and culturally - the casteist India has been divided into Dalit colonies and non-Dalit colonies. In the non-Dalit colonies or Agraharas, the entry is prohibited for Dalits as they do suffer from Dalit phobia. Chandra Bhan Prasad, who is a Dalit intellectual writes in his book Dalit Phobia: Why Do They Hate Us?

If Americans could develop Bolshevik phobia because Lenin's Bolshevik revolution threatened capitalism, if people could be phobic of England or English because the British once ruled the world, or if people could be Jew phobic because Jews are considered a very special people, or if people can be phobic of new ideas, there is every reason to believe that non-Dalits can also develop Dalit phobia. 1

Indian society has been divided on caste lines since its birth. Caste is a social and coercive construct and is malevolently designed for production and reproduction as desired by the caste Hindus. Besides practicing the inhuman act of untouchability, they also commit various caste atrocities on Dalits, which have been dangerously multiplied recently and unfortunately such cruel misdeeds have become an everyday phenomenon in Indian society. In order to keep Dalits under their control, the caste goons or gangs carry out theft, murder and rape regularly and most of the times they get the required institutional help and cooperation apart from the overwhelming social support from non-Dalit communities. All the non-Dalits stand united in order to show their solidarity by providing the moral, financial and institutional support to harm the helpless Dalits as a compelling or prescribed social programme.

The upper caste power and control permeated throughout Indian caste society, Dalit men are murdered and their girls and women are raped every day. On 14 September 2020, in UP, the 19-year-old Dalit girl's gangrape, physical assault, mutilation (like cutting off her tongue) died after two weeks battling for her life. The body was cremated in the wee hours of the night secretly by the state police without informing/allowing her parents to perform final rites in order to suppress the truth, which is unwarranted and unprecedented. The 'great' UP court 'failed'/could not find the caste perpetrators/rapists, but arrested four culprits and out of the four, the three are acquitted. The only one culprit awarded life imprisonment for 'culpable homicide', but not even considered to be a murder. No mention of rape.

The court's observations have captured the quintessence of the caste-oriented institutional style of functioning. Irrespective of rural or urban in Indian judiciary system, thanks to the poverty and vulnerability of these poor Dalits, they never ever get justice. Justice for upper caste culprits, upper caste murderers and upper caste rapists is always fully ensured and guaranteed as the law is wholly executed by the upper caste people. In order to succeed in perpetrating crimes against Dalits, the helpless Dalits are put under constant bloodcurdling intimidation, blackmail, coercion, threat, etc. Undoubtedly, the police as well as judiciary need self-retrospection in order to become self-reliant so to bring the dreadful culprits to justice.

In the most gruesome manner, Dalit students' suspensions, rustications and suicides in national/central prestigious institutions have become 'common' nowadays. The Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud keenly observed the 'adverse effects' of the lack of academic or institutional 'empathy' on Dalit students and he also expressed his unhappiness over 'elitism and exclusion' while welcoming 'empathy and inclusion'. A dialogue with Dalit students will certainly address and prevent their suicides. Why are the majority of students' suicides from marginalised communities only? The unfavourable/harmful approach of some of the non-Dalit faculty and the University administrators (known as 'anti-Dalit') in national/central institutions of eminence, who believe in taking harsh and arbitrary decisions against students from marginalised communities - must be stopped forthwith, opined the CJI. The suicide of Rohith Vemula at Hyderabad Central University in 2016 and the rustication of three Dalit students at EFL University in 2014 are a few striking instances to quote.

Social discrimination should not be part of the educational institutions and teachers in the universities should think about the naked "social realities" of Dalit students, who come from oppressed and depressed background. Such helpless students should not become victims of casteism in the hands of biased caste teachers and hypocritical administrators in educational institutions. Commenting on the suicide of a Dalit student, Darshan Solanki, a chemical Engineering student at IIT, Bombay on 12 February 2023, a couple of IIT alumni (Rajesh Golani, researcher and Rajendran Narayanan, a faculty) observed that:

Metaphorically speaking, in a 100 metre race, people like us were running downhill, and many others from historically marginalised backgrounds were doing so uphill. In most cases, not only our slopes differ but also that some of us were just running 50 metres downhill while many others had to run 500 m uphill and the only metric to compare our abilities was the time taken to complete our races. This is what ranks or grades do. The argument of using ranks or grades as a proxy for merit is like using a person's body temperature as a sole, metric to assess health, ignoring one's age, gender or other pre-existing health conditions. 2

Caste is a man-made, irreparable, irresistible social disaster, which is inconspicuously conspired against Dalits. As long as caste exists, the suffering and humiliation of Dalits will be continued. Without practicing caste along with its evils, the caste Hindus do not have survival. If at all, the caste system is annihilated from India and its sub-continent, the life and survival of caste brahmins would become miserable and impossible.

According to Hindu scriptures there are four varnas (categories): brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and sudra. The cunning caste Hindus later introduced 'untouchables' as the fifth varna. All the four varnas are allowed to enjoy the social benefits/fruits but it is deliberately denied to the untouchables. To quote Manu (as cited in Chakravarti, 2018). "the name of a brahmana should have a word for auspicious, of a kshatriya for strength, the name of a Vaishya for wealth, and the name of a Sudra should breed disgust". 3 Two kinds of castes are in existence, one is equipped with land and property and the other is without them (as their lands and property are looted or confiscated). The caste people retained the ownership, readership and leadership since its inception. Access to land is denied to Dalits, education is denied to their children and in addition to that they are forced to look after the live- stock and work on the fields of high caste people as bonded labourers. The generational exploitation and robbery of Dalits has been true and is continued ad infinitum.

The great Manu (is still omnipresent and operational with renewed power and commitment) drafted special rules for Sudras: if Sudras dare to listen to **Vedas** (scriptures) violating the brahmanical codes, it is written that the violator's 'ears to be filled with molten lac' and if he attempts to recite them, 'his body had to be split.' 4 And if they did not oblige to the dictates of the caste Hindus Hutton (as cited in Chakravarti, 2018). 'their homes, goods and granaries were burnt and their livestock looted.' 5 The scriptural caste conventions, then, now and forever dictate that Dalits should be always available for their (brahmins as well as its allied caste Hindu men) predatory physical pleasures, which has been mandated. There is no escape for these deprived Dalits to escape from the albatross to their neck, which is a five- letter word known as C-A-S-T-E.

Women's condition has been made worse than the cattle/animals as they are dehumanised, degraded, degenerated into abominable conditions. Brahmins gained monopoly over the classical knowledge which is considered to be (a)scared. In order to save the innocent and helpless girls from backward classes and Dalits, Phule and Ambedkar stressed on the importance of education for children of the oppressed classes. For them, education is the only weapon to resist the Brahminical domination and exploitation. In this caste system, women of all castes are victimised including - in a sense, women from high caste too. India has been a highly stratified and rotten society stinking with caste system, practice of untouchability and discrimination between the sexes. Exploitation of the helpless women from these low caste communities, has become a common and acceptable key feature in everyday Indian society.

Many feminist theories have been brought in force both at home and abroad and introduced women's studies in universities to protect the rights of women. In order to exploit the society (as a whole) the caste -Hindus established the fabricated connections 'between class and gender, class and caste, and caste and gender' both deceptively and coercively for reproduction of the established divisive system unfailingly. To strengthen further, caste is traditionally linked with endogamy which can be used to subordinate low caste and gender. Endogamy is cleverly used to maintain segregation among castes and sub-castes in the subcontinent. At this crucial juncture, a feminist re-examination of the subcontinental history has begun. Levi-Strauss, the French anthropologist clarifies that 'true endogamy' does not allow couples to marry outside their community.

Judith Butler, an American theorist of gender, identity and power, in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), she argues that gender and sex are not either natural or 'real'. According to several feminists, gender means masculinity/femininity which is a cultural construct, but sex means male/female which is said to be real. Butler clarifies that 'gender is not to culture as sex is to nature' – which means neither 'gender' nor 'sex' is real.

Understandably, it is no way real or permanent or fixed. She further enlightens pronouncing that ‘gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or a “natural sex” is produced and established as ... “pre-discursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts.’ 6

The imposition of endogamy has boosted the caste system for a systematic cultural reproduction without any social hurdles. ‘Women are adopted as wives of the vansa in exchange for daughters of that vansa who are adopted into other vansas by a corresponding change of gotra-affiliation’. 7 In this cruel practice, women lose their identity, but man’s position is retained intact and further it is doubly strengthened. Women are used to support and strengthen man’s family by giving birth to sons (only sons) and they also maintain the ‘social status, economic production and social reproduction’, etc. by allowing themselves to subordinate to their husbands as well as other male members of the family. That’s how ‘caste hierarchy’ or ‘brahminical patriarchy’ continue to maintain its domination, but at the same time women are subjected to subordination and exclusion by selling their gender and sexuality. They are the centuries-old practices of classical India/subcontinent, but in kaliuga (modern world), women and lower castes broke the evil customs and practices and resisted the Brahminical patriarchy. For generations together female sexuality has been cruelly controlled for the sociocultural reproduction by their men.

By linking caste with gender and class, it has been hypocritically maintained in upper caste circles. Today’s ‘primitive’ cultures reflect the pre-historic societies which were known as hunting-gathering societies. During that period, men were confined to hunting and women have to look after home – which is now ‘contested’ from feminist point of view as it created sexual division of labour and hierarchy between the sexes. Two types of images are introduced: men are ‘priest-kings’ and women are ‘Mother Goddess’, the sexist image, which are famously /alluringly worshipped throughout the Indian society. In the name of religious worship, the men and women dance seductively during the festivals, such indecent performance/act has nothing to do with spiritual worshipping of the mother goddess. Sexual identity - in male or female is only ‘performative’ – not fixed. Butler enlightens thus: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.’ It is clear that gender is not he/she or male/female or masculine/feminine. The critic, Philip Auslander explains clearly that ‘[g]ender is not being but doing; it is not who you are but what you do.’ 8

Rig Vedic (related to Indian ancient Sanskrit hymns) and later Vedic society is known as golden era with women’s support to the patriarchy through endogamy and volunteered to be their slaves. For their sacrifice, as a token of recognition, the caste-Hindus hypocritically introduced female deities like Sita, Arundhati, Savitri, Anusuya, etc. who are famously known as ‘pativratas’ or chaste women. To promote the cruel caste system, the heinous act of untouchability has been imposed inhumanly, but for Buddha it is true that masters may become servants and servants may become masters. He ridiculed the inhuman practice of caste Hindus, enslaving women and others. Uma Chakravarti as a feminist, draws the differences between Hindu texts and Buddhist texts: ‘In Buddhist texts there is no established link among endogamy, occupational specialization, birth-based hierarchy, with attendant privileges and disabilities.’ 9

According to Manu (a)dharmashastra (the ancient Hindu law), Hindus are born from the god’s mouth, arms, thighs and feet. Brahminism began during Gupta’s period around 300 A.D., the practice of untouchability came into existence in fifth century and (a)historical shift taken place- from ‘tribe to caste’. The combination of class-caste-gender-endogamy fetched honour and reverence for high caste men, but women are used only to protect and preserve the so-called honour and reverence for men, by which they became secondary in this patriarchal society. Thus, the caste-based and birth-based hierarchy are made possible for brahmin men to dominate women. Here, wife gets motherhood, but she is further enslaved. Manu exposed women branding them as angry, fickle, mean, impure and called them liars, who have ‘indiscriminate love for ornaments’, ‘innate sexuality’ and have got bad conduct. He further accuses women as ‘adulterous... insatiable’ and ‘as greedy cows seek pastures anew ...’ 10 These helpless and naive women do fasts for the health and progress of their fathers, husbands, sons. They are subjected to discipline as to keep them under their men’s control, which is hypocritically known as ‘stridharma or pativratha dharma’ by observing chastity, wifely fidelity and wifely duties. These helpless caste women are in collusion with their men to carry forward the cruel caste practices and prejudices. Under such oppression, it is a common practice for a woman to be a dependent on her father as a helpless child, on her husband as a helpless wife and on her son as a helpless mother.

The traditional Hindus have got monstrous social ills to practice such as ‘[t]he pre-pubertal marriage of upper caste girls so that the unpolluted womb of the wife was the sexual property of the husband before she began to menstruate, immediately ... consummation ceremony would be completed’ 11 in order to ensure the caste purity. Widowhood in Hindu society is a vicious punishment, and if she is childless- it is further considered to be an infamous ‘social death’. If she has not become a ‘sati’, she is forced to cohabitate in a levirate union. The other disgusting practice is: the Rajput bride enters her husband’s house along with a daroga bride who married to a daroga man forced to work in her house and also does ‘sexual services’ to the men in the house. And the children are born to such a ‘concubine’, belong to the caste known as ‘khoswal rajputs’.

According to Prof. Kanch Illaih, Dalits become workers by birth and they achieve ‘work ethic’, whereas high caste women have no labour work to do except reproduction of brahminical patriarchy - enters into ‘sexual labour.’ In order to demolish the atrocious Agrahara (Brahminical) practices, he strongly proposes that all the castes ‘should be Dalitised’ on war footing. Another nefarious practice is sexual slavery of devadasi (a Dalit devotee of god, who is forced to be a prostitute for Agrahara men), in which the low caste woman becomes a temple dancer attaining the status of ‘nityasumangali’ (never becomes a widow as she has several caste-husbands) and becomes a ‘scared’ concubine freely available for all her caste patrons, the cast-Hindus who are the licensed criminals by birth, caste and practice as well as the products of temple and Vedas.

Hinduism is around 4000 years old and untouchability has been in existence since 400 A.D. Bhakti movement with resistance and struggle began challenging the caste system, ridiculed wife washing husband’s feet with ‘scared waters.’ Kalavve rightly erases the difference between brahmins drinking milk and Malas and Madigas (the two major sub-castes of Harijans)) eating beef. During the British Raj, the Arya Samaj came into existence powerfully. Adi-Dravida/Andhra/Karnataka in South India are Dalit castes, which are enslaved by Aryans. Dalits women as well as the helpless women from the marginalised communities are not allowed to wear blouse/jacket/upper cloth, which is known as breast-cloth controversy, a sexist practice imposed and practiced by caste-Hindus. They are forced to exhibit their breasts to upper caste men which has become a norm and a form to show reverence to the sexist brahmin exploiters. If they failed to do so, they have to pay tax in the name of ‘breast tax’, which is usually equal to the size of their breasts is known as a gendered act/punishment. They were not allowed to wear upper cloth covering their breasts, expecting them socially and sexually ‘as to ensure their constant availability for predatory upper caste men.’ 12

In order to abolish the devilish caste system, the inter-caste/religion or love marriages are encouraged and brought it into practice as a form of resistance, an alternative to the existing brahminical caste system which has proved disastrous and dangerous as such marriages rewarded with death to the Dalit boys who married girls from non-Dalit communities. The murders of Pranay and Nagaraju in Hyderabad are living examples in which, the in-laws played the role of killers. Saranya, a Dalit girl (24) and her husband Mohan, a Naicker (21) where hacked to death recently in Kumbakonam, Tanjavoor district. Whereas, several Bollywood actors, cricketers and sports persons, professionals of national and international importance – have chosen their spouses from other than their caste and religion, but never led to murders. The murder, violence, rape and other atrocities happen to people at the lower rung of the Hindu society as they are socioeconomically poor, weak and low.

The young couple Chetna 17 (Patil) and Roushan (Dalit) fell in love and the case is brought to police station as well as to the court. They were custodially beaten and tortured before sending them to the central jail as the girl was a minor. ‘After she turned 18, the charges made by parents/police against the couple were dropped ...’, 13 to which young people make fun of police and judiciary as to see at 17 they were criminalised, but at 18 decriminalised. In the case of custodial rape of Mathura, the High Court ‘upheld the charge of rape’ but when it went to Supreme Court, to our dismay ‘the charge was dismissed’ as the trial court did. 14

In a similar case like this, the elopement of a Jat girl and a Dalit boy, the girl’s father (who is well-connected) lodged a complaint and the police picked up the Dalit boy’s brother and was beaten up. As a feminist advocate, Uma went to the police station and she narrates her unpleasant experience: ‘the police official was to bark at me’ and she further noted that he was talking about ‘a shared set of norms.’ The girl is not under 18, the officer refused to consider the girl’s 10th class certificate and then she went to the SC/ST Commission for justice, which happened to be another impotent and useless institution in deserting the Dalit victims. As a

caste/gender-centric society, India is known for its traditional, conservative, patriarchal and discriminative practices, which continue to promote intolerance and hatred unchecked.

On the grounds of suspicion of sheltering Veerappan, a tribal 'hero'- Vachati an Adivasi hamlet which is close to the forest, was attacked by police, massacred and raped 18 tribal girls. It is understood that there are everyday gangrapes of Dalit women and girls by upper caste men, the culture has been continued, in a sense, as it is accepted and practiced by the caste people, the police and judiciary do not take such criminal acts seriously as there has been a strong nexus between the upper caste Hindus and the police as well as judiciary. With regard to the institutions like police and judiciary only caste men and women sit as officers and judges and see that Dalits neither get justice nor their children enter these institutions. For instance, music/law is an upper caste family-centric industry, in which they conduct an incestuous business.

In the 2005 Khairlanji atrocity case (Maharashtra), Priyanka and Surekha, the mother and daughter were 'stripped, battered, paraded naked, raped and killed by a mob goaded by the entire village ...' 15 In the most horrific manner, the rapists inserted rods into the genitals of Priyanka and tortured her. Shamelessly, in the High Court judgement, the criminal acts of 'stripping, parading and rape disappeared.' To quote Ambedkar: 'The Hindu has the police and the Magistracy on his side. In a quarrel between Untouchables and the Hindus, the Untouchables will never get protection from the police or justice from the Magistrate. The police and the Magistrate are Hindus and they love their class[caste] more than their duty.' 16 As cast-Hindus, they have retained economic power over the helpless Untouchables - the victory is always theirs forever. It is understood that the police and Magistracy are in constant collusion and follow/practice 'the remnants of Manu's ideology rather than Dr Ambedkar's Constitution.

Michel Foucault, a French socio-political activist, known to the intellectual world since 1968 'May events' talks about the relation between 'knowledge' and 'power' which are closely connected. He undermines our commonsensical understanding of history, which is dangerously erroneous. As he is influenced by Nietzsche, he writes 'Truth is undoubtedly a sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long backing process of history.' 17 (taken from the 1971 article: "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History".) That is why only intellectuals would perceive what is the truth behind the truth, but unfortunately such people are prosecuted and persecuted by the institution. For him the term 'power' is always double-edged, as it works on not only from caste people point of view but also Dalits' point of view. Power is not one sided and it is nobody's permanent weapon – that's why resistance and revolution exist and successfully operate against the exploiter. From the history of Indian context, it seems Dalits are not properly organised or educated to go for revolution against caste as well as caste custodians/institutions – as serfs did against the Tzars in Russian revolution. As the serfs were highly socially disciplined, they were educated and organised by Chekhovian theatre dramatizing the naked sociopolitical realities of the day in Russian society.

The culture of practicing crimes against low caste persons and their gender/sexuality has sadly become an everyday-phenomena. Ambedkar is the real hero and social activist for Dalits and helpless people, whereas Gandhi's pretentious role has been questioned. Gandhi removed his shirt, as Ambedkar wore a three-piece suit. When Ambedkar demanded for the grant of separate electorates for Dalits, Gandhi went on his fasting unto death against the proposal, in order to engineer the socio-political downfall of Dalits. Not surprisingly, Kasturba Gandhi came to Ambedkar and pleaded with him for the life of her husband as a caste-Hindu woman, (stridharma) traditionally supporting the caste ideology which reinforces the brahminical hierarchy, supremacy and domination. In rural India the abominable 'two glass system' a caste practice in public places still exists ad infinitum. Ambedkar was forced and blackmailed by the Gandhis to compromise, which is against his conscience as well as his helpless Dalits.

The 99% of Dalits have been landless workers, scavengers, human shit carriers and toilet cleaners for centuries. Mulkaraj Anand's Untouchable (1935) neatly deals with the toilet-temple dichotomy/conflict, which shows the historical Brahmin-Dalit great divide. If at all real justice to be done to Dalits, the temples should to be handed over to Dalits to run and the toilets to be given to Brahmins 'constitutionally' for cleaning them for the rest of their lives. Literally toilets have 'shit', but the temples possess huge cash, tonnes of gold, innumerable assets, property, hundreds/thousands of acres of land and cows which are liberally gifted to the brahmins in order to make them as the owners and legal heirs. The cast brahmins own it ancestrally without

producing or labouring, but continue to carry out the everyday booty. Gandhi's image on the currency notes (from ten rupee note to two thousand rupees note), has been falsely promoted. It is the people's money, but systematically misused as if it is his own/family/community property rather than the hard-earned money of a common Indian. According to Manu, the wealth is treated as Arya Vaishya's personal wealth rather than national property.

Brahminism imposed socioeconomic slavery on Dalits for generations. The Indian market, which is modelled and run on 'Bania- Brahminical' hegemony, imposed slavery on workers or common people who are socioeconomically weak and low. Dalit feminists began voicing against the Brahminical oppression and exploitation in contemporary India against the backdrop of black movement in USA and Maoism in India - formed the Dalit Women's Federation to address the issues of caste, gender and women sexuality focusing on 'the three-way oppression' of marginalised women:

(i) as subject to caste oppression at the hands of the upper castes; (ii) as labourers subject to the class-based oppression, also mainly at the hands of the upper and middle castes who form the bulk of landowners; (iii) as women who experience patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men, including men of their own caste.¹⁸

India is unable to overcome from the cruel social clutches of the caste-centric, brahmin-centric and veg-centric hell. Political parties have also been formed based on caste foundations. The country never had a Dalit Prime Minister. No Dalit temple, no Dalit hotel and even public toilets are owned by non-Dalits. Modern matrimonial columns support the caste system further through an in-born endogamy, which is endemic. Confirming to the Brahminical caste practices and exploitative politics, people may get some meagre benefits from caste rulers. The caste -based electoral politics (in which the upper caste people have enjoyed all socioeconomic privileges for generations without having any opposition or resistance from the marginalised communities) which is in force to keep the 'caste alive' for ever. Despite the caste oppression, women have developed several alternative non-violent resistances such as the Manipuri women's protests against the institutional oppression. The Armed forces have begun to commit cruel atrocities on Manipuri women for decades. Their excesses began in 1974 by raping a helpless Tribal woman Rose, to Manorama, who was raped and murdered in 2004 in the backdrop of ethnic violence/cleansing. Records reveal that there have been 1528 women victims of the Armed forces during the last five decades. The women's groups are taken to streets and have continued to protest against the institutional oppression. Their banners complain 'Indian Army Rape Us' and 'Indian Army Take Our Flesh', etc. In the history of human society 'rape' is a sign of man's victory and the Armed forces do rape helpless women quite commonly, which has become the state's culture. And in wars and genocides, rape is a mandate and is committed lawfully as it is a 'weapon of war.'

The Tsundur incident (1989-91), in which the 22 Dalits were murdered alleging that a Dalit boy 'brushed against' a couple of caste girls intentionally. In another incident, a 'Reddy' girl eloped with 'Golla' boy, in which Muthamma (a 'Golla'/BC woman) has helped them. The Reddy community (elites in Shudras) mocked and instigated the Golla men, who in turn, striped and paraded her naked. Commenting on the heinous issue, the Kannabirans said that 'the insult is double-edged.' ¹⁹

Dalit/Tribal/marginalised women's resistance has been continued despite adapting resilience. It does not mean that the cast-based exploitation or oppression is discontinued. Resistance, as a sociopolitical weapon, it does not have any folds and it is a direct weapon to question and counter the exploiter. Unwittingly, by the standards of the majority, resistance has been seduced by power, as 'literary criticism ...has been seduced by – 'literature' as a specially privileged object.' ²⁰ In the same manner, the helpless Dalit women are taken for granted by the caste criminals for sexual slavery. Phoolan Devi, a poor Dalit girl was raped by caste men. To take vengeance, she became a revolutionary (not dacoit) and triumphantly/ victoriously gunned down the '23' high cast-criminals, and a film Bandit Queen was made on her, which could have been 'Feminist Queen': a fair justice to the victim.

In another incident, Bhanwari Devi, a Dalit woman was gangraped by high caste men in Gujarat and as if it is not enough, she was targeted by high caste men and women abusing her that she got 'bad name to Gujarat,' which is a good state, despite a horrific slaughter took place in 2002 known as the 'Gujarat Genocidal massacre', in which thousands of humans were victimised. The state captures the quintessence of a slaughter

house, but the charge of rape was rejected by the learned judge. Uma points out that ‘...as judicial pronouncements simply because of the power of the position occupied by the honourable judge.’²¹ The ‘honourable’ state machinery’s indifference and widespread apathy toward the victims has been clear. To add the insult to the physical and social injury, recently the 11 high caste gang-rapists and killers were released under a ‘state remission’ in Gujarat and they were received by their kith and kin with garlands, sweets, etc. celebrating the state release of the rapists. In a way, the state seems to be trying to preserve the cast codes of Manu, rather than Ambedkar’s constitution. It is high time for us to streamline the sociopolitical system and ensure that the state stands morally, ethically and institutionally corrected.

In all senses, Uma Chakravarti’s *Gendering Caste: Through a feminist lens* records a despicable account of the unending struggles and sufferings of Dalits in the hands of cruel caste Hindus. Their patriarchal domination, hegemony, etc. has been practiced systematically since 400 CE under the cruel ‘Laws of Manu’. Even after independence, the practice of untouchability continues to be alive as the brahmins and other caste people are constantly in collusion with non-Dalit police and judiciary. The high caste people have become the most powerful as the largest portion of property: land, water, gold, mines, industry, institutions, etc. are in their hands for centuries. Besides, they are morally supported by their ‘slavish’ women, who are ready to do anything for their caste men, who are criminals. They have committed all kinds of atrocities on helpless Dalits as they got moral support from their women who have been ready to perform the way they want. Without their cooperation, help and support - their caste men would have not dared to kill the Dalit men and rape their women. In some senses, the upper caste women are equally cruel as their men.

The upper caste people never learnt lessons, but continue to resort into murder, rape, blackmail, intimidation, coercion, etc. with the moral support of their women. Land, property, education, employment, business, art, film, industry, etc. have been denied to Dalits. If at all, Dalit children enter the premier institutions, which have been the caste people’s territories, their success is at stake and sometimes their survival becomes dangerous. Now-a- days, Dalit students are hesitant to go to the so-called ‘premier’ institutions for studies, where they are greeted with humiliation, discrimination, horror, etc. Some of the caste faculty (not all the faculty) stand accused of aiding and abetting helpless Dalit students committing suicides. Primarily, it is not the institutional eminence and academic standards are to be drummed, but humanity, empathy, equality, indiscrimination, inclusion, etc. are to be promoted apart from education. Refuting the ‘distinction between high and low’ in postmodern era (theoretically), but the idea is not put in practice in everyday life.

Uma’s book traces the genealogy and history of harassment of caste, gender, endogamy, customs, traditions and other brahmin-oriented practices which are systematically linked together in the given social stratification - only to target the helpless Dalits. With regard to the institutions like police and judiciary only caste men and women sit as officers and judges and see that Dalits neither get justice nor their children succeed in such institutions. For instance, music/medical/ law is an upper/high caste family-centric industry, in which they conduct an incestuous business.

It is commonly observed that the upper caste people have developed a Dalit phobia as they belong to the ‘other’, hence the ‘othering’ (a false image/notion) is being practiced and propagated. They also believe in carrying out custodial murders and rapes in police stations, as if this is not enough, the police/army jawans go to Dalit/tribal villages, kill the SC/ST men and rape their women and girls. Kawasi Hidme, an Adivasi minor girl was arrested in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh in 2008, under suspicion ‘chained, beaten, raped and tortured in police custody, and kept naked during detention.’ (The Hindu, Magazine, 28 November 2021, p.3) Refuting all the charges, she was acquitted after seven years. Truth/justice prevailed over state/police tyranny. It is worth to quote Arundhati Roy’s precious words – ‘[w]e are not born to face lathis and bullets’ (The Hindu, Magazine, 7 July 2024, p.5), who won the 2024 PEN Pinter Prize. Of course, Arundhati does not claim to be an ‘activist’, but the 2005 Nobel Laureate, Harold Pinter has been certainly a life-long political activist and pacifist, who urges us to continue to fight against oppression. In Indian context, our fight is against caste men, their unthinkable/unreasonable women (not all women), temples, Sanskrit knowledge (anti-Dalit forces) and the reproduction of the notorious traditions/cud the remnants of kings and queens/rulers of the classical period (which has been in vogue in twenty first century) to shatter the emerging Dalit voice and visibility.

Data Availability: The data was collected from the book *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* by Uma Chakravarti published by SAGE Publications India Ltd, New Delhi, 2018.

Ethical Considerations: This study consists of a textual analysis and critical review of a published book and related literature. Everything in the article is to maintain values, care, commitment and vigilance.

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