



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-IX, Issue-I, January 2023, Page No.110-127

Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v9.i1.2023.110-127

Emancipation of Women, Education and Ambedkar: Discourse Analysis

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Abstract:

This study concentrates on the efforts to develop a discourse of false emancipation that encourages maintaining long-standing customs rather than rejecting set ideas and traditions that view women's enslavement as a normal occurrence. In light of the present Karnataka controversy, it might be appropriate to measure the thoughts of B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar, as a pioneer of social justice, questioned the stereotypical role assigned to women and advocated for their inclusion in all aspects of life. In a society already devastated by caste patriarchy, he claimed, poses a new obstacle forcing women to continue to live in subservience to male dominance. The paper is based on discourse analysis relating to his thought on challenging patriarchy in the light of present scenario.

Keywords: Emancipation of women, education, social justice, Ambedkar, discourse analysis.

Introduction: The driving force behind many political discussions and social movements is largely inequality in all of its manifestations including race, gender, class, sexual orientation and so on. There is a substantial corpus of research on the origins and effects of social inequality in society. The majority of research on ways of reducing inequality has been devoted to analysing laws and programmes intended to enhance the prospects of individuals at the bottom of this inequality distribution. The major domain of inequality, the one that sustains disparity in other areas, according to many academics, is socioeconomic disparity. The unequal distribution of economic resources like money, which is typically measured by income or wealth, and access to credit, opportunities to develop human capital, including education, technology, and job training, and social resources is referred to as socioeconomic inequality like access to social capital and information. The fact remains that inequality still exists despite substantial improvements in a number of institutional and legal constraints to access and opportunity. These inequalities have been perpetuated by the long history of discrimination that gave rise to them, giving the impression that they are natural patterns rather than the result of a particular social structure. There is a tendency to maintain these disparities even when the institutional obstacles that caused them, such as

slavery, the subjugation of women, the exclusion of lower castes, and unequal access to opportunities, have been removed to a large extent.

The phrase discourse analyses refer to a variety of qualitative research techniques used to examine how language is utilized in social contexts. By examining the underlying meaning of what people say and how they express it, whether in face-to-face communication, documents, non-verbal contact, or visuals, researchers use these tools to understand the world. Discourse analysis generally entails looking at language in more depth than just a sentence to see how it operates in a sociocultural setting. Discourse analysis is a broad phrase that encompasses all techniques used to analyse and comprehend discourses in relation to social interactions, not just one particular qualitative research technique. By enabling them to approach an issue from a higher perspective, discourse analysis aids academics in understanding the motivation behind a text. As it takes into account the social and historical circumstances, it is helpful for analysing the underlying meaning of a spoken or written text.

Understanding how language works and how discourse may be utilized to promote constructive social change is helpful. Unlike linguistic methods that solely concentrate on language structure, discourse analysis stresses the contextual meaning of language. It is concentrated on the social facets of communication and the means through which individuals employ language to produce particular result. Based on their own social positions and origins, social and cultural groups create symbolic boundaries on what they consider to be acceptable or respectable (Lamont, 2000; Lamont & Fournier, 1992), in other words, who are to be included within the structure and who are not as a manifestation of systemic biases and exclusions. This explains why social groups that are dominating and privileged have an unfair advantage in their access of resources, whereas others who are less fortunate have nothing. The fact remains that even in the absence of explicit legislative barriers, many historically marginalised groups such as women in general, and Dalit women in particular still have limited access to numerous opportunities. Understanding how the privileged, in this paper the common man as also the high caste men maintain inequality may be necessary for a greater comprehension of the problem. Additionally, it might call for a greater focus on the sociocultural processes that frame and mould prevailing perceptions of inequality and its causes. There is no doubt in the fact that the history of cultural norms in the family and other private spheres, as well as institutionalised sex discrimination at work, school, political arenas, and other places, are undoubtedly contributing factors to gender inequality (Andersen & Collins, 2012 cited Carter & Reardon, 2014) prevalent in society.

Power and Issue of Inequality: Inequality of power in society has always been a cause for concern. This essay would look at the concept of inequality in the light of the views of B. R. Ambedkar. The main argument here would focus on that part where Ambedkar drew direct parallels between the caste system and subordination of women. He contributed immensely to women's empowerment by mobilising caste and gender hierarchies. Ambedkar condemned the three entrenched hierarchies of caste, class, and patriarchy. He urged

women to take the lead in the society that had just undergone transformation. He emphasised the significance of a reciprocal collaboration between women and men. The caste system is hierarchical, with links between its various strata based on disparity and inequality. As a result, not all women are exploited equally, and it varies by caste. As one descends the social scale, exploitation increases; exploitation of Dalit women differs from that of high caste women. They experience humiliation, physical assault, and psychological afflictions in addition to unrecognised, unregulated exploitation. Finding out that such tyranny affects not only disadvantaged women from lower castes but also women from upper castes is not surprising. In a Hindu Brahmanical society, caste and the control of women's sexuality are thus very closely related.

One of the biggest problems facing the globe today is inequality. Due to the ingrained requirement for power hierarchies in our everyday social and political structures, it is challenging to completely eliminate this injustice in our lives. Social cohesion has started to be threatened by this imbalance. A gender-based structure of hegemonic authority known as patriarchy establishes roles for both men and women. In this system, women and girls have historically experienced oppression, subordination, and deprivation, along with other groups that do not adhere to the dominant binary norms. To effectively carry out a planned programme of action, the root causes of women's marginalisation must be addressed; otherwise, development programmes will be fruitless endeavours. Empowerment is the process of giving individuals more control over their own lives by formally or legally giving them power, as well as by approving or granting them permission thereby facilitating their lives. Along with power, a number of other ideas form the foundation of the discourse of empowerment. They include choice, agency, achievement and approaches that emphasise rights, participation and gender. Power can be used in many different ways. Power over entails a condition of either domination or subordination. The power to includes having the capacity to make decisions, handle problems, are resourceful, and are enabling; this strength results from people working together for a common cause or a common understanding to achieve the goals of the group. The power within is assertiveness, self-assurance, and self-knowledge. It has to do with how people analyse information and how they get confident after learning how power works in their daily lives. (Williams, et al. 1994 cited in Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Empowerment is, thus, a transformative process that contests not only patriarchy but also the edifices of class, race, religion and ethnicity, which govern the state of women and men in society (Batliwala 1994; Kabeer, 1994). Individuals and their own actions are still not naturally visible realities and, therefore, are perpetually moulded mostly by culture surrounding us. Qualitative researchers may look at how individuals in a certain situation use a specific word to comprehend their background or the effects of others. In the same way, scholars may dissect and examine texts written early in history to grasp the author's circumstances and gather some broad information about the culture at that time. Being the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar worked on Indian Constitution to ensure that women's rights were adequately represented in India's political discourse and laws.

Emancipation and Karnataka High Court Declaration: Coming to the question of a practice followed by a section of the population, let us now turn our attention to the recent debate concerning the issue of veil or hijab in the backdrop of empowerment of women. Muslim women are obliged to wear a hijab to cover their heads and chests, according to both the Quran and Hadith. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the hijab as ‘traditional hair and neck covering worn by Muslim women’ (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hijab#:~:text=Definition%20of%20hijab,is%20worn%20by%20Muslim%20women> accessed 21/06/2022 at 14:26). For Muslim women, the hijab serves as more than just a means of head covering; it also serves as a symbol of modesty and a reminder to uphold their faith. According to the Quran, the term hijab can signify a variety of things, such as ‘a thing that prohibits, hinders, debar, or precludes; a thing that veils, conceals, hides, covers, or shelters, since it inhibits seeing, or beholding... a partition, a bar, a barrier, or an impediment’ (Tabassum, 2006). The hijab represents modest attire and modest behaviour in addition to being a headscarf in the Islamic faith. The hijab signifies a woman’s Muslim identity as an item of clothing. Juneman (2011) also highlighted that lifestyle, social pressure to wear the hijab, institutional restrictions, and theological justifications are all the issues in this context. As a result, it should be noted that Muslim women who wear the hijab do so for a variety of reasons; and not always because they are devout. In the past, we have seen that there have been prohibitions on wearing a hijab as well as pressure to do so. Women’s freedom to express themselves and use their bodies however they pleased was hindered by both the requirement to wear the hijab and the prohibitions on doing so as a form of religious expression. Although behaviour of women in India has a significant impact on family and caste, men and women represent the idea of ‘honour’ from different angles. Female ‘honour’ depends on adherence to suitable and accepted duties and behavioural standards, whereas masculine ‘honour’ is characterised by its ability to control the bodies of women (Welchman & Hossain, 2005, p. 21). According to Chakravarti (2004, p. 582) this same ‘obsessive drive for control over women’ is at the heart of Brahmanical patriarchy. And as such it remains at the forefront of discussions about gender-specific honour. Women are, therefore, regarded as the custodians of honour, while men are in charge of it (Chakrabarti, 2004). It must be pointed out here that the veil has been seen as a threat to contemporary democratic norms in secular nations. The next question is how hijab became a widespread way of life from a peripheral practise? The issue of agency can be raised at this point. What part do personal decisions then play? Why are women required to cover their faces in order to represent honour, and more importantly, why are women constantly expected to represent honour? Women who challenge patriarchal norms suffer societal repercussions and stigmatisation. In both cases, women’s freedom is resisted and called into question. Control over women’s sexuality serves as evidence that all women, regardless of caste and religion, are oppressed in a patriarchal, caste-based society. Empowerment is essentially a bottom-up process, as opposed to being developed as a top-down strategy. This shows that empowering women is something that women must do on their own; it cannot be done to them or for them. According to the feminist adage ‘the personal is the political’; therefore, the process of empowerment is

based on raising women's consciousness. Women have the 'power to' act as agents when they recognise their 'power inside' and collaborate with other women to utilise that 'power with' (Cornwall, 2007, p. 344).

Coming back to the issue, while hearing the plea of students of Government Pre-University College for Girls, Udupi who sought permission to attend classes while wearing a hijab and a direction to the effect that it is an essential practice of Islam, the Karnataka High Court declared, 'The Holy Quran does not mandate wearing of hijab or headgear for Muslim women' (<https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/holy-quran-does-not-mandate-wearing-of-hijab-islam-does-not-cease-to-exist-if-hijab-is-not-followed-karnataka-high-court-194223> accessed 16/06/2022 at 12:20). The Court, while noting that hijab is not an essential religious practice, stated, "this doctrine can plausibly be traced to the Chief Architect of our Constitution, Dr B. R. Ambedkar and to his famous statement in the Constituent Assembly during debates on the Codification of Hindu Law - 'the religious conception in this country are so vast that they cover every aspect of life from birth to death...there is nothing extraordinary in saying that we ought to strive hereafter to limit the definition of religion in such a manner that we shall not extend it beyond beliefs and such rituals as may be connected with ceremonials which are essentially religious...'" (<https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/holy-quran-does-not-mandate-wearing-of-hijab-islam-does-not-cease-to-exist-if-hijab-is-not-followed-karnataka-high-court-194223> accessed 16/06/2022 at 12:20). The Bench remarked that there is a strong case to be made that insisting on donning a purdah, veil, or hijab in any community may obstruct Muslim women's and women's overall progress toward freedom. It must be mentioned here, that a very pertinent observation was made regarding the practise of purdah by the Chief Architect of our Constitution more than 70 years ago.

For a Muslim woman, hijab tends to be a complete way of life. To put it into simple words, Allah has explained hijab for a woman in the following way, 'and tell the believing women that they must lower their gazes and guard their private parts, and must not expose their adornment, except that which appears thereof, and must extend their head coverings to cover their chests' (al-Nabhani, 1990, p. 29). She must not consider her hijab as a formality or an unwanted burden; rather it is her honour and shield. There are two strong objections that can be countered against the hijab. Firstly, it is a religious symbol; and religious symbols should not be used in public spaces, or any such places. Secondly, it is a patriarchal symbol that limits the rights of women; hence it must be opposed forthwith. Women who follow these religious or cultural symbols are implied to be helpless or to have internalised them to the point where they will not follow anything else. Any attempt to speak from such a position is disregarded as a case of identity confusion. Gender relationships, or the attribution of particular gender norms, serve as a dividing line that is effective in the field of othering the group in question, which, in addition, is reinforced as a group precisely through this process of othering. By addressing the headscarf issue, or 'problematizing' it, in Foucault's words, it actually presents the gendered character on the lines of acceptable or unacceptable ways of presenting female bodies in the public sphere (Koopman, 2016).

The Karnataka High Court resorted to Ambedkar not once, but three times on March 15, 2022 in the much-anticipated hijab ruling in order to correctly interpret the laws of the land based on the Constitution of India, which is the supreme source of all laws in the nation. The Karnataka High Court judgement highlighted that the hijab may distract the progress of woman in general and Muslim woman in particular.

The Karnataka High Court imposed an injunction banning students from wearing religious symbols in the classroom despite the students' case asserting the headscarf to be an essential element of Islam. An impasse between female students and the college management has resulted from its ban in Udipi district of Karnataka's classrooms. The authority cited Article 133 (2) of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983, which compels pupils to dress in accordance with fellow students, while the students demanded their right to an education and the freedom to practise their faith. Due to women's higher social position and the numerous discussions of hijab discourse, the use of hijab has been reinterpreted and recontextualized, and as a result, it has come to represent modernity. This discourse analysis looks at how different views on the hijab present a fictitious conflict between Enlightenment notions of progressive secular rationalism and Islam's ostensibly patriarchal, premodern nature. It creates a situation where she feels 'less Muslim', 'lacks the power of religion that the headscarf once offered', and 'feels less loved by male Muslims around her' after taking off the hijab (Wagner et al., 2012, pp. 521-541). She feels that as a result, her standing as a revered hijabi Muslim woman in her community has been undermined. In its broadest sense, emancipation refers to any process or effort to free or liberate people as individuals or as specific groups from the social, economic, political, as well as cultural inequalities. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'emancipation' as the act of freeing somebody, especially from legal, political or social controls that limit what they can do – in this view, 'emancipation refers to the removal of various systems of discrimination that prevent individuals from seeking and obtaining what they are entitled to' (Wright, 1994, p. 211). Consequently, it is strongly associated with the fight for social change, with the goal of advancing individual liberty and wellbeing. In social sciences, emancipation is still a key notion with a normative focus. The focus on emancipation in critical theory has resulted in a rich stir in the history of critical reflection that has been used by numerous academics in a variety of social science areas. The main goal of critical theory and emancipatory social theory in general is emancipation, which is considered as a synonym of social change to advance human freedom and self-realization. It enhances and broadens our understanding of social institutions that limit and promote human agency. Although experience and discourse are not mutually inclusive, in Oksala's opinion, experience is always formed in a way that 'reflects oppressive discourses and power relations' (Oksala, 2005). This means that there is always a linguistic representational gap between our personal experience and the language we use to interpret it. It is this linguistic representational gap that creates the room for contestation and critique. Therefore, she is of the opinion that experiences may oppose discourses even if or especially because, they are conceptual full and through. (Oksala, 2016). According to Oksala (2016), experience is a key factor in sustaining and reproducing

oppressive power relations, but radical introspection into our own experiences creates a space for both individual and group resistance to and transformation of those power relations. The basically contested nature of the concept of power is explained by Lukes (1974) in a different, more radical way: Lukes contends that our conceptions of power are themselves affected by power relations. He states that how we think about power may contribute to the reproduction and reinforcement of power relations and systems, or alternatively it may challenge and undermine those (Lukes, 1974). It might help them continue to function or it might reveal their underlying operating principles, whose potency is amplified by their secrecy. The definition of *power* is *basically contested* to the extent that this is the case, making conceptual and methodological concerns inherently political. (Lukes, 2005). The claim, which is stated by many, is motivated by the idea that ideas of power are themselves moulded by power interactions that is itself a result of patriarchal domination.

There is no denying that patriarchal authoritarianism and conditioning are the main causes of women wearing the hijab. The wearing of a headscarf by a woman is seen as a sign of oppression that needs to be eradicated. She has been conditioned to think that is how things should be, which is why it is the way it is. Now one can argue that there are innumerable issues related to women like these which are due to her conditioning in the said manner. Yes, they are. But my point is since they are carried out as ingrained part of conditioning, so the claim of conditioning for wearing hijab needs to be justified stands nowhere. Well, there is no point in justifying a wrong. Each and every act of conditioning is unjust and therefore must be forbidden, be it of any religion, caste and so on. If one thinks that wearing any sort of clothing could give her a sense of security and confidence, then I would argue it to be a case of pseudo security and a false sense of confidence. According to Booth (1991; 2007), security is 'the absence of risks' or 'the state of feeling safe' (p, 319; p. 110). Booth (2007) conceptualises the connection between security and emancipation in order to 'raise people as individuals and communities out of structural and situational oppressions' that 'prevent them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do, consistent with the freedom of others' (Booth 2007, p. 112). Emancipation, in the words of Booth (1991), is the liberation of individuals from those constraints which prevent them from engaging in behaviour which they would freely choose to perform. This brings up the concept of structural violence proposed by Johann Galtung. According to this statement, violence is ingrained in the system and appears as unequal power and, in the end, as unequal life opportunities (Galtung, 1969). Social structures, not individuals, use this type of violence. The most prevalent manifestations of structural violence are unequal wealth distribution, a lack of educational opportunities, access to healthcare, or unequal life chances. It is clear then this social inequality is one way in which structural violence manifests itself. Women it may be argued suffer from a kind of false consciousness when they say that they decide whether to wear the veil or not. It is not real consciousness. Instead of indulging in those meaningless issues, our focus should be on the expansion our

arena, where women would be treated as equal citizens who do not have to wear or put on something to justify their sense of security.

What function does education then serve? Women could confront the world with more confidence if they received an education. It will emancipate and empower one. What the Holy Quran makes recommendatory cannot be transformed into mandatory dicta by a hadith that is viewed as a complement to the scripture? Without a question, the most important stake in the empowering process is the emergence of critical consciousness. The process by which critical consciousness develops whereby individuals increasingly gain understanding of the cultural-social factors that affect how their lives are shaped, and of how much power they have to alter these circumstances. A human being lives both in the present and in the past, and is capable of interpreting as well as translating. Consequently, it is crucial to have a critical consciousness; this is fundamental to all human learning (Freire, 1970). Freire (1987) encourages critical thinking in education, also referred to as pedagogy of knowing. This is what he calls critical consciousness, which is characterised by respect for people as individuals and a diversity of viewpoints. It has been noted that literacy is more than just a technical talent that can be learnt; it is a fundamental cultural action principle for emancipation, implying both a self and a normative provider (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Women must assert their right and duty to understand and shape their own experiences and rebuild relationships with others. In order to assertively create one's voice as part of or during the empowering process, education is crucial. Freire and Macedo (1987) argue, it should subsequently be considered as 'one of the major vehicles via which 'oppressed' persons could join in the socio-historical development of their society' (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 157). Education, in this view, comprises not only technical learning but also a critical understanding of social mores. This new knowledge might 'demythologize' (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 157) the false beliefs that are pervasive in society.

Social Structure and Ambedkar: The power imbalance that exists in society has long been a source of worry. The essence of this paper is Ambedkar's contribution to women's empowerment through the mobilisation of caste and gender hierarchies. Caste identities are still strong even though caste has lost some of its power in recent decades. Evidence also suggests that stigmatisation and prejudice against the lower caste groups persist (Madheswaran & Attewell, 2016). Studies have found that gender inequality affects low-caste groups more severely than high-caste groups (Islam et al., 2021). Ambedkar encouraged women to be pioneers in the newly reformed society. As a result, he emphasised the importance of men and women having a reciprocal relationship. Because of the built-in power dynamics of the social structure, caste ideology has remained constant. Senart, a French authority, defines caste as a close corporation, at least in theory, firmly hereditary: equipped with a definite historic and independent organisation (Mohanty, 2004). Senart's definition of caste includes the notion of pollution as a key component. The idea of caste has not changed because of the built-in power dynamics of the social structure. For Dalits, caste is a difficult reality since it cruelly jeopardises their quality of life and feeling of dignity. Caste-based customs and professions serve as the foundation of the caste ideology.

The caste system is hierarchical, and the connections among its many strata are founded on inequality and difference. Exploitation becomes more intense as one moves down the social ladder. There is a secret objective behind exposing disadvantaged women to such oppression; and it is not surprising to see that such oppression affects not only underprivileged women from lower castes, but also women from upper castes. In a Hindu Brahmanical society, caste and control over women's sexuality are intricately interwoven. Women are seen as the 'gateways of a caste' (Das, 1986, p. 135) and are subjected to discrimination, and it differs according on caste. Any woman who violates patriarchal standards is subjected to violence against women. Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against the oppressive characteristics of Hindu civilization. He fought for economic and social equality for women. He believed that women's comprehensive development should be prioritised, including social education, health and socio-cultural rights. He emphasised the importance of giving all sectors of Indian women a fair share, as well as preserving and protecting women's dignity and modesty. Gender identification is formed as well as maintained within a society and community. People are expected to follow the standard and accepted culture, and they are indoctrinated and structured in such a way that predetermined ideas and values are continuously reproduced which denies that gender or, for that matter, any other identity is dynamic and changing. Discursive theorists contend that discourse is used to construct genders. Such metaphorical acts help to develop as well as recreate gender identity in a broad perspective. This applies to the discourse of caste as well. According to Ambedkar, the idea of pollution or untouchability is not the key characteristic of the caste system. Instead, it is endogamy which is the primary and key characteristic of the caste system. If we look into how endogamy comes to be maintained and perpetuated in society, we can discover the origins of caste. The major claim made by Dalit feminists is that Dalit women fall into a separate category than women from other castes and communities (Patil, 2017). The issue of Dalit women, which is a core caste-based Indian reality, has not been addressed by the women's movement in India. The dominant women's movement mostly focused on the coexistence of class and patriarchy rather than the connections between caste and women. Dalit feminists contend that caste, class, and gender are all sources of oppression for Dalit women.

Women's empowerment emphasises the skills, talents and survival instincts needed to reduce the impact of disparities in broader opportunities and choices, which are critical to the ultimate goal of human development. The concept of empowerment entails the ability to influence change and make significant decisions. Empowerment is a call to action that entails a fundamental alteration in the quality of life of any material being. According to the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) 2020, the three basic measures of empowerment are intelligence; ability to live a long and healthy life; access to the resources necessary to maintain a decent level of living. The focus here is on achievements that show women's enhanced capability to question. Empowerment is used to characterize approaches based on social mobilization. A key element in social mobilization approaches is helping the socially excluded individuals realize the power they gain from collective action. Often social

mobilization approaches work 'from below' to create voice and demand for change among diverse groups of socially excluded citizens. But social mobilization can also stimulate the formation of coalitions for change between excluded groups and other better-off citizens who also want a more equitable society, or share other interests with the excluded. The real condition of women is based on the dichotomy between being in-itself, or the conditions that are trapped in immanence and incapable of freedom, and being for-itself, or the self-conscious subjectivity that is capable of freedom and transcendence. According to de Beauvoir, women have been reduced to the role of the immanent other while males have been elevated to the status of the transcendent subject. She describes herself as the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential, 'she is defined and differentiated with regard to man and not he with relation to her. She is the other; he is the Subject and the Absolute. She is the other; he is the Subject and the Absolute' (de Beauvoir, 1989 cited in Bauer, 2001). The essential to de Beauvoir understands of dominance or oppression is the contrast between man as Subject and women as other.

'Purity' and 'Pollution' – Discourses: A thorough investigation of caste, class, and gender linkages is required to address the caste system's realities in Indian society as a whole, particularly as it affects the Dalit population and Dalit women (Irudayam, Manghubhai, & Lee, 2014). The emergence of Dalit women is seen as an intolerable loss of control by powerful groups, who respond violently to anyone who questions their dominance. Men are thus categorised as respectable on the basis of honour and respect, and they are distinguished from women in society by their higher caste standing and desire to uphold their sense of personal purity. Women serve as 'gateways to caste', allowing 'caste rank' to be asserted and 'caste purity' to be questioned, claims Velaskar (1998, 2007, p. 391); It could be claimed that fighting caste necessitates fighting patriarchy. The so-called dominant classes work to highlight the connections between caste, class, and gender in order to maintain their control in the narrative about how caste and gender are deeply entwined in terms of both employment and interpersonal relationships through caste violence. In his analysis of the caste system, Ambedkar refers to castes as closed groups, citing that the only trait that can still be referred to be the substance of castes is the lack of intermarriage or endogamy. Endogamy, in the words of Ambedkar, 'was a fashion in Hindu culture, and as it had started from the Brahmin caste, it was wholeheartedly emulated by all the non-Brahmin sub divisions or classes, who in turn became endogamous castes' (Mohanty, 2004, p. 133). Significantly, Ambedkar's gendered concept of caste places a strong focus on the role that endogamy has played in the establishment and upkeep of the untouchability narrative (Rege, 2013). Here, as a result of endogamy and the need to uphold the ideological context of purity and pollution, as well as the theological background, female sexuality started to be regulated, and women were gradually marginalised (Mohanty, 2004; Rege, 2013; Still, 2014). In India, where Brahmanical patriarchy is centred on untouchability and femininity, traditional ties between families of the same caste are sustained. Ambedkar believes that endogamy is 'a key to the mystery of the caste system' and is a crucial component of the caste hierarchy (Mohanty, 2004, p. 136). He views caste

as a symbol of social stratification or, as ‘graded inequality in which castes are ordered in accordance with an escalating scale of reverence and a decreasing scale of contempt’ (Chakravarti, 2003, p. 7). Because of this power structure in society, women are perpetually at a disadvantage and are unable to stand up for themselves. The notion behind women’s empowerment is that through becoming more powerful, they will be liberated from male tyranny and rule. It is a procedure used by women to develop the capacity to regulate the issues that affect them.

Whether a given conflict or attempt is successful or unproductive is not that significant aspect of empowerment. More significant is the shift in how people view themselves and their capacity to comprehend their surroundings. A woman who is also a member of a marginal group, and has the lowest social status is already in a state of utter degradation where she has to bear the burden of being a woman, that too belonging to the bottom of the social status. The empowerment of this woman manifests itself in her awareness of the factors that have led to her oppression rather than in her ability to successfully escape it. Her strength manifests itself in the way that she uses others in her situation to put her consciousness into action. To overcome the incredible lack of resources, her power manifests as a translation of her consciousness into action with others in her situation. As with gender-based bias in many parts of the world, the caste system in India with its values, norms and social institutions may serve to sustain ongoing inequalities between groups in society. Institutions, however, also contest with one another for authority and influence, allowing room for structural change. In order to negotiate ways to achieve their own wants and goals, people and groups that are adversely affected by the dominant distributional rules under one institution frequently turn to these rival institutions. The fact that distributional norms are socially constructed means that they are dynamic and subject to negotiation and change, regardless of how unfair the rules established by a specific organisation or group of interlocking institutions may be. Thus, there is a continuous scope for change and for rethinking.

The social structure of India is complex. Caste is one of the most important elements that contribute to the national image as a socially stratified nation. Many facets of social life have a strong caste system foundation. The concept of caste serves as a legitimate vehicle for the sociocultural norms of various societies. Casteism is a serious and widespread form of socioeconomic discrimination that increases the victim's vulnerability and precarity. In addition, Dalit women experience a significant deal of social pressure due to nothing more than their caste and gender identity. Casteism, according to Ambedkar (1916), was both a system of unchecked socio-economic abuse and a set of societal tyranny against Dalits. Despite constitutional protections, they are unable to exercise their fundamental human rights. Women are frequently the helpless victims of violence in our culture, and caste oppression and hierarchy are strongly related to the abuse of Dalit women. This form of patriarchal tyranny, which is common in India and necessary to uphold the caste system that grants each person either a favoured position or marginalisation, is a horrible amalgamation of two evils manifested as caste and gender identity. The Brahmanical caste system's

lowest-born members, the Dalit women, are the ones who struggle the most. This makes Dalit women feel more patriarchal pressure (Geetha, 1992). In contrast, mainstream feminism pluralizes patriarchy while taking a one-dimensional approach and ignoring non-Brahminic feminist views. Even a sexual tragedy or an issue with untouchability have been used to characterise the abuse of Dalit women. However, it may be claimed that in these situations 'caste determines the division of labour, sexual division of labour, and division of sexual labour' (Rege, 1995, p. 2), making it impossible to address the gender dilemma without tackling the problem of caste. Therefore, the only way to embrace Indian feminist theory as a feminist movement is from a Dalit feminist perspective that challenges patriarchy's Brahmanical basis, not only as feminism for Dalits (Rege, 1995; Guru, 1995). To address this, it is necessary to criticise the dominant feminist discourse in India. As a result, Dalit feminist research is minimised, and Dalit women's agency is reduced. Ambedkar underlines the fact that castes are maintained through the sexual exploitation of women. It is only through the regulation and control on women's sexuality that the closed character of the castes can be maintained and, in this sense, he argues that women are the gateways of the caste system. It reveals the near complete internalisation of the caste, racial and patriarchal domination by the women themselves. But the very matriarchal and matrilineal remnants of the custom were in the late feudal times used to institutionalise the sexual accessibility of Dalit women for the high caste men. This accessibility of Dalit women to the high caste when juxtaposed with the forbiddance of the relation between women of the higher caste and men of the lower castes reveals a significant sexual dialectics. This sexual dialectic informs caste interactions and behaviour even today in the villages of India. It is, therefore, apparent that the caste system emerged through the imposition of several restrictions on women. Religious and customary justifications for these restrictions came to be put forth.

In India, the patriarchy, caste and class structures all contribute to the subordination of women. The caste system in India is a major contributor to the subjugation of women. Caste-based personal laws, caste panchayats, and the division of labour all place women in inferior positions. In terms of marriage, divorce, remarriage, inheritance etc., caste-based laws are designed to make women helpless and reliant on men. In this caste-based environment, the exploitation of Dalit women is particularly harsh. An illustration of how regularly these women experience rape and sexual abuse is the number of mass rapes of Dalit women that occur in states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, because the state pays no attention to these rapes of Dalit women by higher and middle caste males because they are seen as natural, these women continue to be victimised. As a result, the atrocities committed against these women are attributable to the caste system, not the class system (Patil, 1983). Since the caste system is hierarchical, Ambedkar emphasises that it is a system that exploits women, and that the more severely exploited a woman is, the lower her position in the hierarchy.

Ambedkar has done a pioneering work to improve the status of women in Indian society. His efforts to design and introduce the Hindu Code Bill in the Constituent

Assembly on February 24, 1949 are one of his most substantial accomplishments to the improvement of women's status in India. As the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly's Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution he believed it was necessary to alter the Hindu social rules established by Manu in order to free women from the age-old bondage of servitude. The Hindu Code Bill (1950), a contemporary manifesto for women's emancipation, intended, among many other reforms, to abolish the various marriage systems in India and to solely recognise monogamous unions as legitimate. Additionally, the Code aimed to grant women the right to own property. It equalised the status of men and women in all legal matters. Ambedkar emphasised that the principles of the Indian Constitution like equality, liberty, and fraternity are the source of the ideals embodied in the Bill. He added that the caste system and the persecution of women were not foundational elements of the original Indian culture. But women were completely stripped of their property rights after the subsequent stages saw the birth of Brahminic literature. He portrayed the Indian sacred marriage as polygamy for the men and lifelong servitude for the women. He emphasised that women should have the right to end such marriages on their own terms, claiming that the Constitution's dedication to equality and freedom did not allow for such a situation. In essence, the Bill's provisions were all designed to create a legal foundation for social transformation. In upper caste patriarchal society, honour and shame are conceptual concepts that are inextricably linked to a woman's sexuality. A woman's breach of caste boundaries is seen as cause for concern and embarrassment. The caste system is based on having complete control over the mentality and well-being of women. Ambedkar's writings and speeches outline the values India should adopt and the ways in which they will modernise its social and political structures. He believed that women should be treated equally in all legal matters. The areas of marriage, divorce, and family law that limit women's mobility and engagement in the public sphere are clear examples of the gender inequality that exists in societies, creating overlapping and inescapable forms of cultural discrimination and legal exclusion.

The network of invisibility, prejudice, exclusion, and inequality is continually strengthened up and down the line. According to Fraser, 'gender inequality is today being transformed by a shift from dyadic relations of mastery and subjection to more impersonal structural mechanisms that are lived through more fluid cultural forms' (Fraser, 1993, p. 175). Fraser (1993) suggests that, in order to understand women's subordination in societies, feminists will have to move beyond the master or subject model to analyse how women's subordination is secured through cultural norms, social practices and other impersonal structural mechanisms. The weight of political, cultural, and religious prejudice, not the nature of women, has kept them underdeveloped. Little will change unless males in positions of power perceive and hear women as totally human.

Emancipation and Transformation: In addition to providing the knowledge required for freedom, the exposure of social contradictions and the social structures that cause them can also serve as a guide for improving social conditions in order to promote human emancipation. This is done by providing or pointing out the practical means to achieve

freedom. Emancipation can only be attained through comprehending the true causes behind the perpetuation of structures of dominance since it is inextricably linked to social reform and transformation. According to Roy (2009), emancipation ‘consists in the transition, in self-emancipation by the actors concerned, from an unwanted and unneeded to a sought and needed source of determination’ (p. 113). The alteration of structures is necessary for emancipation. As a result, the traditional conceptualization of security as it relates to the security of women cannot be fully conceptualised without also being linked to the well-being of societies and making the welfare of individual humans, including the women themselves, its primary priority. Therefore, what is fundamental to the hijab issue or, for that matter, any other practise operating within society the main issue involved is emancipation, a social change to advance human freedom and self-realization. In social sciences, emancipation is still a key notion with a normative focus. The focus on emancipation in critical theory has resulted in a rich ferment in the history of critical thought that has been used by numerous academics in a variety of social science areas. The main goal of critical theory and emancipatory social theory in general is emancipation, which is considered to be essential prerequisite for autonomy and agency.

When one is empowered, they can take control of their own destiny and effectively advance their own goals (Zimmerman, 1993). While this empowerment may be focused on helping people build the skills, they need to work effectively within the existing power hierarchies in society; emancipation is more concerned with confronting and critically analysing those institutions. Caste and gender have been employed frequently in academic literature and public conversation. Manusmriti demonstrates that women’s sexuality is the fundamental source of evil in social structures (Rege, 2013). Additionally, Buhler (1886) made the explicit claim in his translation of Manusmriti that ‘a woman must particularly be guarded against her evil passions, whatever insignificant (they may look); for, if they are not restrained, they will inflict misery upon two families’ (Buhler, 1886, p. 128). Male family members are chosen by Manu to act as enforcers of honour. According to Buhler (1886), male family members are equally accountable for a woman’s chastity. It emphasises how important fathers, spouses, and sons are to preserving women's honour. It is to be declared in this context that the hijab or headscarf has also been portrayed as either a sign of religious devotion or a means of physical subjugation. Thus, it becomes evident, in order for the patriarchy and caste system to continue and work properly, she thus becomes a menace that must be dealt with and tamed. What becomes clear at this juncture is that hijab or caste can then change the narrative around gender discrimination to one that is more focused on agency and power by addressing the power disparity for those who are marginalised. Women’s subordination is sometimes attributed to internalisation of feelings and a sense of powerlessness, making empowerment all the more crucial. Any strategy for women's empowerment must recognise their potential and give them the tools to use it to exercise power. Hijab, when viewed through the prism of patriarchal domination, symbolises a struggle between men and women, oppression and freedom, patriarchy and liberation, limiting women to their immediate identities as patriarchy victims, depriving them of their

agency, and as a result, giving them a limited perspective on the world. Once empowered, women interact with men on an equal footing rather than in a lifelong dependent manner. Women are enabled to realise their full potential when social, cultural, economic, and political barriers to their independence are eliminated. Since women were formerly limited in comparison to males, this process of redefining themselves increases what is acceptable for each of them to become and do in such situations (Mosedale, 2005).

Many modern feminist theorists have started to look at discourse as a key medium through which gender is produced in an effort to solve the problem of the interconnectivity of broad-based cultural constructions of gender relation. Discourse theories contend that cultural constructs like gender, religion, caste, and race are best understood as contested, constructed social phenomena that intersect. Therefore, the hijab or the absence of autonomy in women is neither inherent to the hijab or to women, but rather is a product of cultural discourse and extensive social networks. The narrative of religious elites that equates wearing the veil with religious piety as well as the real exclusion of unveiled Muslim women from traditional institutions are social practises that give the veil cultural meaning. Additionally, discourse frameworks highlight the contested nature of cultural representations. Because they can be interpreted in so many various ways, cultural symbols frequently become the arena of conflict and contention. It is clear that different groups of elites have radically diverse ideas about what the hijab is and what the *Quranic* verses signify. Finally, discourse theories help academics recognise the overlapping and multifaceted nature of cultural forms. Discourses are not distinct ideologies; rather, they are culturally particular ways of perceiving the world that converge divergent points of view. Therefore, it is evident that patriarchal institutions do not give rise to gender beliefs that are uniform. Hijab thus perpetuates gender inequality in a society where some women take solace in the sense of cultural and ethnic identity it bestows. The practise hurts all women. It does not really resolve gender inequality; it only makes each and every woman—Muslim, Dalit, or otherwise—less fortunate. Given the situation, transformation of gender relations is what can be looked forward to.

Conclusion: It is unfortunate that, although moving toward a cosmopolitan society, we still like being classified on the basis of religion, caste, ethnicity, gender, and so forth. In the ultimate analysis it may be argued, that which is disputed and persistently questioned is the autonomy of women. Strategies to deal with both the culture of silence and the culture of violence must be deft enough to take into account the intersectionality of societal affiliations and structures. Caste-based oppression and religious-based problems are ignored when the overlapping nature of oppression is not acknowledged. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasise their voices, as well as to provide them the space to vent their concerns. An understanding needs to be developed that Dalit women, Muslim women, and any women, for that matter, behave in the same ways as everyone else. This realisation may be the first step in recognising the agency and independence of women. And the only way to ensure that people understand the importance of everyone's autonomy and independence; while also taking everyone's interests into consideration is through education. Through praxis,

during the course of action, consciousness is formed. As a result, one can participate in group activities without having such consciousness, and one can develop consciousness and empowerment by actual experience and learning about it. Just as learning without any experience at all does not result in this, action alone does not enhance critical consciousness. Experiential learning's significance has long been acknowledged in educational and learning theories. The empowering process highlights how crucial it is to apply this methodology to the social sphere (Freire, 1970). As Nussbaum notes, the key factor in shaping a positive future lies not only in an improvement in access to education, but the empowerment of one's mind to question, analyse and criticize (Nussbaum, 1999).

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