CHAPTER-3
CASTE HIERARCHY
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Caste is undoubtedly an all India phenomenon in the sense that there are everywhere hereditary, endogamous groups which form a hierarchy, and that each of these groups has a traditional association with one or two occupations. Every where there are Brahmins, untouchables and peasants, artisans, trading and service castes.\(^1\) In the ancient times, Brahmin was at the apex of the hierarchical organization of caste and that the king upheld the institution with the help of their civil power. Brahmins were the intellectual and spiritual leaders and it was believed that learning and spiritual knowledge were esoteric virtues and their cultivation needed exclusive attention. Manual labour, therefore, became taboo for the Brahmins. It also became taboo for the \textit{Kashatriyas}, with whom the Brahmins shared power and who were their rivals and equals. The aristocratic order of the \textit{Kshatriyas} could not be sustained by mere force. So the Brahmins framed elaborate rules lying down not only the status and grade of the various social and grade of the various social and cultural groups but also prescribing distinct rituals and ceremonies for each.\(^2\)

The Indian society was divided into four castes (varnas). Our traditional caste system is a type of social stratification in which an individual's social status,

that is, his or her prestige and honour are determined by his or her birth into a particular caste. Moreover, this status is directly linked to the position of his or her caste group within the hierarchy of castes. In other words, a person’s status is determined by the status of the group to which he or she belongs.³

The belief of Hinduism in the division of all humanity into four varnas and the peculiar social organizations that Hindus evolved, facilitated the absorption of a major part of foreign invaders into the Hindu caste system. By the time, the Muslim conquest started, the stratification of the caste system had been completed. Rules and regulations regarding the life and conduct of various castes had been elaborated until they covered all aspects of life. There was no equality before law. The inequality resulting from caste was supposed to be ordained by God, and the law-makers, therefore, prescribed without any compunction different kinds of punishment and taxes for men belonging to different varnas.⁴ Later on, as a result of racial admixture, geographical expansion and growth of crafts which brought into existence new vocations, the original castes (varnas) broke up into various smaller castes and sub-castes⁵ (jatis). Each jati was endogamous and had a traditional occupation associated with it. The members of a jati had a particular style of life and enjoy specific rights and privileges or were subjected to certain duties and disabilities. There

³ Jayaraman, Raja, Caste and Class : Dynamics of Inequality in Indian Society, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1981, p.9
⁴ Singh, Ekta, op.cit., p.201.
were many jatis in any one cultural region.\textsuperscript{6} There was very little scope for acquiring status outside the caste system because it was only caste which regulates inter group behaviour and attitudes.

The caste system thrived and persisted for many centuries primarily because of low level of economic existence of the Indian people. The pre-capitalist economy on which it rested was primarily based on the village autarchy, the absence of appreciable development of exchange relations and extremely weak and meager means of transport. The caste system lost whatever usefulness it might have in the past under the new social, economic, and political conditions ushered in by the British conquest of India.\textsuperscript{7} The policy of non-interference in the social system, of British rule gave scope for the revolt of the castes that were not quite comfortable under the Brahmin supremacy. With the incoming of the modern industrial organization and the growth of industrial cities, large number of people congregated in cities of mixed population, away from the influence of their homes and unobserved by their caste or village people.\textsuperscript{8} The caste system prevented the lower castes from owing land. As a result, they constituted in pre-British India 'a large rural proletariat' who, beside following their prescribed menial professions, were only supposed to work on the land owned by the higher or middle orders of the caste hierarchy. It will not therefore be an exaggeration to say that the doctrine

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\item \textsuperscript{6} Jayaraman, Raja, op.cit., p.9.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Desai, A.R. op.cit., p.227.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ghurye, G.S., \textit{Caste and Class In India}, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1957, p.184.
\end{itemize}
of caste was to legitimize a system of surplus extraction which prescribed fixed role for everybody, but also provided minimum security for all, if they followed their own hereditary calling.\(^9\) It was believed that the occupational mobility and differentiation would be increased under colonial rule, which replaced customary production relationship with contract and then is supposed to have detached caste from the economic system. Frequent transfer of landed rights as well as new opportunities in trade and professions introduced a competition in the society that was previously believed to have been non-competitive. The growing urban industrial culture seemed to threaten the traditional social milieu so seriously that the social reformers in the late nineteenth century started believing that caste system would wither away automatically.\(^{10}\)

But this expected explosion never took place, as this occupational mobility and differentiation had been extremely limited and therefore could not fundamentally alter the existing social structure. A feature of rural life in many parts of India is the existence of dominant, land owning castes. For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizeable amount of the arable land locally available, have strength of numbers, and occupy a high place in the local

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\(^{10}\) Ibid.
Thus, the caste system divided the whole society into a large number of hereditary groups, distinguished from one another and connected together by three characteristics. Separation in matter of marriage and contact, whether direct or indirect (food), division of labour, each group having, in theory or by tradition, a profession from which their members can depart only within certain limits; and finally hierarchy, which ranks the groups on relatively superior or inferior to one another. For modern common sense, hierarchy is a ladder of command in which the lower rungs are encompassed in the higher ones in regular succession. Now hierarchy in India certainly involves gradation, but is neither power nor authority, these must be distinguished (An organized body of priests or clergy in successive orders or grades – A body of persons or things ranked in grades, orders or classes, one above another). It can be seen that the term concerned religious ranking. Caste hierarchy entails another factor which is connected with tolerance. No doubt the tendency to imitate and in particular to imitate superior, is encountered more or less everywhere. But in India it is carried to an extreme that is probably unique and it is often spoken as ‘Sanskritisation’ that is imitation of Brahmans, adoption of features which are Brahmonical or associated with the Brahmans.

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13 Ibid., p.65.
14 Ibid., p.192.
The Britishers brought with them a casteless culture and a literature full of thoughts on individual liberty. With the introduction of English education many of the intelligent minds of the country came in closer contact with the religion of the rulers and with some outstanding personalities amongst them. As a result some Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Devenderanath Tagore started movements, which aimed at liberalizing religion and practicing the brotherhood of man. At the same time, some capable Hindu minds thought of remodeling Hindu society after the pristine ideals supposed to be enshrined in the Vedas. Swami Dayanand preached that the four-fold division of the Hindu people should be substituted for the manifold ramifications of contemporary castes. The one important innovation that Arya Samaj carried out in its programme of reconstruction was that even the fourth class of the Hindu society, viz. the sudras, could study the Vedas.

But attempts at any fundamental organizational changes was more vehemently resisted. The custodian of Hindu society had begun to provide various arguments in justification of the caste system. Since these reformist attacks against caste system were believed to have been inspired by the western concept of 'equality' as against the ideology of 'hierarchy' enshrined in the caste system, there were attempts to prove that equality itself was an irrelevant notion. It was argued that there was nothing unnatural in the caste system,
since segmentation in one form or another had been present in all societies, in western societies more particularly, at every period of history. The institute of caste system stood at the root of the social set up of the people of northern India, giving it a unique character. Instead of moving with times, changing and becoming simplified, as it did elsewhere, in India on the contrary, it assumed a complicated form. The universality of caste and the pride of birth and descent, carried to the extreme, were the controlling factors of the Hindu society. "To a Hindu, caste was as much as necessity as food to eat, as raiment to wear, as a house to live in" wrote an eminent writer in 1880. Hierarchy in India is grounded in the Hindu religion and in the caste system. Thus, hierarchy operates at the levels of ideology and social relationship. Hierarchy in India is fundamentally, a religious concept, and is much more important in the religious than in the secular (economic and political) sphere.

Although, the caste system has survived for centuries but not without modification. It was subjected to many challenges over the years both to the position of the dominant castes and to the structure itself, but although the challengers established oppositional movements and changes in relative ranks, they did not succeed in eradicating the hierarchy as a whole. The system’s resistance to revolt is thought to lie traditionally in the unit of manufacture and

17 Bandhopadhyay, Sekhar, op.cit., p.6.
19 Quoted in Dua, Shiva, p.126.

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agriculture. In the villages craft workers manufactured all the tools needed by the peasants in exchange for a share in peasants' produce, so that the community was entirely self-sufficient, but the individual never became independent of the community. In this cultural autonomy of the system, the upper caste never tried to impose their strict rules of conduct on the lower castes, in fact they forbade the lower castes from following the upper caste lifestyle, and used the differences to distinguish the lower orders from themselves. Protests certainly there were during colonial period, but the Hegemonic Hindu culture had in such a way set the limits for imagination of the lower orders (castes) that they could not ultimately think of subverting the ritual hierarchy of repudiating its moral-behavioral codes, their protests as a result were also either gradually co-opted or marginalized.

**Caste And Suppression of Women**

Women had been focal signs and subjects in processes of social mobility and efforts towards raising the status of caste groups. It is well known that in the system of hierarchically graded birth status groups, changes had often taken the form of collective efforts on the part of a caste group to raise its ascribed status through the adoption of practices and beliefs of a ritually higher group.

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21 Liddle, Joanna & Joshi, Rama, *Daughter of Independence Gender, Caste and Class in India*. Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1986, p.58.

22 Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar, op.cit., p.8.
Women had been critical to the process of Sanskritization, the adoption and appropriation of symbols of a higher caste status by middle and lower castes and simultaneous discarding of practices and customs that are signifiers of a low ritual status. In actual, control over women was one of the factors that a caste must observe along with vegetarianism and teetotalism before it could claim to be ritually higher and pure caste. Specifically, this control involved two major aspects. One was women's disinheritance from immovable property in the form of land, and their exclusion from the productive economy, involving removal from public life to the domestic sphere of the home in the form of seclusion or purdah. The second is the far greater control exercised by men over women's sexuality, through arranged marriage, child marriage, the prohibition of divorce, and strict monogamy for women, leading to sati and a ban on widow remarriage including infant or child widows. A lower caste that had improved its economic position could attempt to move up the hierarchy over a number of generations but economic power alone was not sufficient. The caste had also to adopt the cultural attributes of ritual purity, which meant constraining women's freedom. This pattern of social mobility accompanied by increased control over women was not restricted to Hindus. Amongst Muslims, the Ashrafs were the former ruling groups whilst the non-Ashrafs were the lower caste converts from Hinduism. The control over Ashraf

24 Liddle, Joanna & Joshi, Rama, op. cit., p 59.
women was severe, and similar controls were imposed by non-Ashraf men when they improved their economic position.  

Special terms are used in many Indian languages to indicated women as a separate caste or sub-group, for example in Hindi the term *aurat jaat* is used. The especial terms naturally evoke the inferiority of women as a separate sub-group. The converse, *mard jaat*, or men’s caste’, evokes machismo as a much desired manly trait, which sets men apart from mere women in matters of courage, skill, dominance, aggressiveness and overall superiority. Women and men are seen to occupy separate spatial and psychological dimensions of existence. They are subject to different prescriptions of conduct, work roles and ritual functioning. Jaat, in common perception, is thus seen to subsume both women and men as distinct subgroups with gendered patterns of existence.  

There are various reasons for gender role differentiation. Anthropologists proposed that historically men and women have different roles because of their biological differences. Smooth functioning of the family and its continuity necessitated the assignment of different roles to men and women.  

Women were restricted to the role of reproduction and home-making to a large extent. Men held to be the bread winners”. Consequently, men enjoyed supremacy over women both in family and in society. Contrasting this

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25 Ibid.  
scenario of male supremacy over status and wealth, the contribution of women to family and community had largely gone unnoticed.\textsuperscript{28}

The term \textit{women caste} was generally used as a derogatory term to justify patriarchal definitions of women’s place in society, deriving from a biased view of gender difference. It evoked an entire range of myths and stereotypes attributes of women to explain little understood aspects of the world of women. Those women who were indoctrinated to such terminology might use it to acknowledge overtly the wholesale inferiority of women as the weaker sex.\textsuperscript{29} It is no exaggeration that women in general were suppressed and exploited in the name of cultural practices and myths in almost all traditional societies, Hindu law maker, Manu asserted that ‘since a woman is weak, she is unfit to enjoy freedom’.\textsuperscript{30} She should always be kept under a man’s protection. It can be noted that inferiority of women is not inborn, rather it was enforced on them by cultural practices and consequent attitudes prevalent in community. The attitude of community was guided by the traditional image of woman formed on gender biase. The depiction of woman as frail, weak, sentimental, dependent on men by comparing them with a creeper and assignment of a fixed role in society was based on gender biase. Expressions like “frailty thy name is woman”, “helpless (abla), barren (bojhh) old maid, deceitful (chhalna), unpredictable and mysterious (nari charitamdevo na janati), gate to hell, virgin,

\textsuperscript{29} Bhandari, Snehlata, “Adhunik Stree Samaj Aur Seva Bhav”, Chand, July 1935.
\textsuperscript{30} Quoted in Sudha, D.K. 28., p.3.
corrupt (kulta), eaves dropper etc. are all linguistic manifestations of the gender bias created by men.31

Gender however, remained an independent variable. Within each section of Indian society the position of women varied and the norms of patriarchy hold different meanings. Moreover, in the political game between caste groups women had been largely ignored, as the men played out their games of power. The norms of patriarchy had assumed that women’s role was within the domestic sphere and that men had to represent the community outside in the political arena. The patriarchal form of family organization and its associated ideology did not emerge as a universally accepted or natural way of living, but was the sense of a struggle, in which the patriarchal form gained dominance (except in some parts of Australia).32 This struggle revealed the historical roots of women’s resistance to male domination and provided the basis for a distinctive view of women as strong and powerful. During colonial rule, traditional patriarchal Indian social structure started changing slowly. Liberal social attitude of the Britishers brought about many changes in the Indian way of life. One of the significant changes was change in the attitude of our people towards women. English education brought in western ideas which declared supremacy of reason over belief in individual conscience over external

authority. It gave birth to new conceptions of social justice and human rights. This actually paved the way for social reforms in India.33

The movements for the uplift of women, started in the nineteenth century, did not attack the prevalent patriarchal system in any way. Rather, the attempt was to improve the condition of women within the frame of patriarchy. The term patriarchy meant, not only the system of familial organization in which the father as head is vested with primary rights, but also all the extant economic, social political and cultural systems which 'naturally' grant the first place to men rather than to women.34 However, efforts were made to improve the lot of women within the framework of patriarchy so that as wives, mothers and daughters they could have a better deal inside the family. But this was not a result of some sudden outbreak of generosity on the part of men. The social reform movements arose out of the conflict between the needs of an emergent 'educated' urban middle class and the norms of the older, feudal joint family system – in fact the reforms were an attempt to change the patriarchal system and bring it in live with the material needs of the urban middle class.35

35 Ibid.
In the early twentieth century, with the emergence of women as rudimentary intelligentsia, there was a qualitative change in approach to the ongoing search for a new woman. In contrast to the nineteenth century social reformers, who treated women as objects for reform or uplift, these radical women, not in the sense of subverters of tradition, used media for projecting the persistent social blindness to the contentious issue of gender-relations and nature of women’s oppression. The women caste, had been bearing tyranny, ignorance and monopoly of men for centuries, raise the voice, in this new era of national awakening, for their liberation. It was an important and praiseworthy event of human history. It was an obvious reaction to break up the stratagem of subjection which was spreaded by men for women. Although members of all major religious communities were represented in the Indian women’s movement but high caste Hindus appeared to have been numerically dominant. The women’s movement grew out of the process of male associational politics in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. For the educated elites, the questions, of ascendance and new cultural identity were of central importance. To resolve these issues the elites developed ideologies, engaged in a variety of public activities and created communications networks.

38 Everette, J.M., op. cit., p.44.
through conferences, publications and associations. They sought to justify their position of social leadership to the British rulers above them, to the lower castes below them, and to the traditional notables large landlords and orthodox religions leaders. These urbane educated Indians argued that they deserved greater political power because of their enlightened social leadership. The process of class formation wherein the upper castes (primarily, Brahmanical caste groups) sought to adjust to the colonial situation and grasp the opportunities provided by it to form a professional middle class and, simultaneously, the contestation of such a process from the non-Brahmana castes. Thus Brahmana power was eroding, being transformed, challenged and being re-assembled. The stresses experiences by the Brahmanas through these developments added to the strains of a traditional elite group seeking to define itself in relation to the colonial rulers on the one hand, and to the common folk from which it must distinguish itself on the other.

The rise of the middle class had a contradictory effect on the position of women. Similar objections on women’s activities to those prevailing amongst the rural upper castes are also imposed on women of the urban middle class, and similar discrepancies between the objections imposed on upper and lower

39 Ibid., p 45.
Caste women in the villages seem to occur between middle and working-class women in the towns. Although, in cities the number of women taking outside employment increases, but the vast majority of educated middle class women were still confined to domestic activities.\textsuperscript{41} The British had not allowed women to enter the new administrative occupations, so women began to move into other professions serving the Indian community, especially in medicine and teaching. As a result, women from the middle class began to see new possibilities for change in women's position. This posed problems for the traditional organization of society, and because of their crucial position in the organization and maintenance of the social hierarchy, women had the potential to undermine the entire social structure.\textsuperscript{42} It was no accident that the women's organizations developed out of the middle class, nor it surprising that the changes they demanded met with resistance, since many of the demands fundamentally challenged the organization of the social hierarchy, particularly those concerning personal law.

The personal laws of all communities as they were somewhat reluctantly reformed in the colonial period were replete with such contradictions, repeatedly demonstrating the anxiety of the state prevent any serious dislocations of patriarchal familial arrangements. If some of these contradictions were reveled in the passage and implementation of the acts

\textsuperscript{41} Saraswati, September 1931, p. 329.
\textsuperscript{42} Liddle, Joanna & Joshi Rama, op.cit., p.73.
relating to smaller communities, they were brought center stage when legislation pertaining to the majority communities was initiated in this period. That the range of contending interests-orthodox, liberal nationalist, revivalist nationalist, and colonial – hardly placed the question of women’s rights at the center of their concern may be best seen in the initiatives taken to transform Muslim and Hindu personal laws in the twentieth century.42a

The lower castes women worked as midwives, these women along with the men of their caste, shared the essential task of removing pollution of upper and clean castes. In many parts of our country, the bond of contract which tied labourers to their master was understood to include the services of both the husband and the wife. The cultural recognition of the significance of women’s work in the continuity of caste –linked occupations was clear. In order to pursue these traditional occupations, women had to be trained from childhood and had to be socialized into accepting these occupations as proper work which, within limits, was destiny.43 It had been also found that parents in lower castes opposed the education of girls to avoid a potentially uncomfortable situation in which the daughter developed a distaste for the traditional occupation of her caste. It then became difficult to get her married into an appropriate family. Not formal education, it was the capacity and willingness to

42a Nair, Janaki, Women and Law in Colonial India, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996, p189.
43 Sudha, June 1935
do traditional work which made a girl useful in the husband’s family. So, the necessity of continuing with occupational work was an important basis for marrying within the caste. Sometimes, men in the influence of education gave up their traditional occupation on account of its ritual status or inadequate returns, the entire burden of occupational work often fell on the women. They had to take on the responsibility for continuing caste-based occupations and maintaining the household. When men migrated to town leaving behind their families, women continued their contribution in terms of services or craft, but for want of male help they faced the choice of losing their clientele or coping with a doubled work burden. In such situations women had to work under the authority of their husband’s kin who surrounded them within the family or neighborhood. Thus, women’s contribution to occupational continuity was carried out within patrilineal limits and under the impositions and controls of caste.44

Unlike most low caste women, many upper caste deserted wives who were forced to earn their own living could neither seek nor get any employment outside the house and generally employed themselves in spinning cotton and grinding corn. The few occupations available to upper caste women were especially threatened by colonial intrusion.45 For example; the destruction of the handicraft industry due to large scale flooding of the Indian market with

44 Dube, Leela, op.cit., p5.
foreign mill-made cloth had a severely adverse effect on women. So, it can be easily observed that whatever little employment was available to women, was available to lower caste women because they had fewer restrictions on their mobility and suffered from fewer ritual caste taboos regarding the kind of work, they were allowed to do. In certain ways, the upper caste pardanashin women, if widowed or abandoned by their families, were rendered even more vulnerable than lower caste women.  

During the time period under review, neglecting the real needs of the low caste women from poor families, most of whom were compelled to earn a living, they were to be trained according to the model of a Victorian house-wife, even though they came from castes wherein women could not be merely housewives and mothers. So, women of the lower castes started taking education just as were men of the upper castes, in the hope of employment. But it was difficult to embrace new economic and social relations, urbanization and educational requirements with traditional rituals and practices, resulting in a certain hesitation in the way the upper castes adopted themselves. This led to the formation of class fractions with the fractions sharing a similar material relationship but responding in contradictory ways to the social and cultural changes under way. The Brahmana community

46 Chand, October 1929, p.735.
in particular and the upper castes in general were thus split into two groups with a militant orthodox majority acting militantly in defiance of an unaltered tradition and an articulate minority advocating certain limited social changes especially with respect to women’s status. Thus the upholding of tradition was identified with an upholding of Brahmanical patriarchy by the orthodox, and a moderate transformation of Brahmanism and tradition was patriarchy who advocated especially the lifting of the ban on widow remarriage for child widows and introduction of education for women.48

The upper castes looked upon indiscriminate extension of women education with disfavour. They considered education as their sole birthright and privileged, any extension of it to the lower castes as destroying that distinction which they formerly enjoyed. According to the upper caster people, “education unfits the lower castes (or women also) for their position and occupations in life and makes them discontented”.49 The failure to educate women, was one of the causes of India’s decline and was neglected in the material and intellectual impoverishment of contemporary Indian society. The link-up between the decline of education to women or to lower caste people and the decline of people was a common argument of social reformers. For the upper caste or new middle class education was the third eye --- the instrument by which a new mode of understanding social relations was acquired. Further,

48 Ibid., p 184.
49 Madhuri, December 1929, p842.
this was as essential for low caste women as it was for low caste men. But men followed traditional attitudes and in their opinion, women should forever be kept in obedience, should not be given any knowledge, should not be well educated, should not know about religion and should not also mix with men.\textsuperscript{50}

That is why, women even from the dominant castes had not been involved in any struggle for their rights, despite the fact that they did not have no share in most of the privileges of their caste. The increasing power of men in all castes had rendered, women were powerless, so that these women lived extremely dependent and precarious lives.

Although women’s life was characterized by unending drudgery and powerlessness, and they had been facing diversified economic and political marginalisation but powerful new middle class had a belief that Indian women would win the battle of equality. This myth had primarily grown out of some visible improvement in the life of women from the urban educated middle class and elite families during the time period under review. In actual this belief was strongly influenced by the idea that all social disabilities concerning women would removed after independence by making changes in the law, by enshrining the principle of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex as a fundamental right in the Indian constitution and by allowing women access to education and employment in professions.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Chakravarti, Uma, op.cit, p.168.
women’s struggles had left an inspiring legacy and tried seriously to challenge the power relations in rural areas. Because of the heavy odds against them, however, they had remained infrequent and short-lived. Firstly, rural poor woman, too overburdened with work and domestic responsibilities, marginalized by the ‘modernizing’ economy and politics, with little power even within their own caste, found it difficult to sustain their struggles, and organizations for a long time. Secondly, women often faced enormous resistance from their own men if they took organizational tasks. Since these struggles and women’s local organization began to raise their heads, so, they were brutally crushed by the rural elites. The poor women’s struggle which, was sporadic in nature, challenged the social exploitation by rich peasants or other economic exploiters, within no time inevitably came into confrontation with the repressive machinery of the state which moved in to protect the interests of the exploiters by crushing the struggle. The people from lower castes were not provided any real protection and support by the government machinery in their struggle against the powerful class / caste in the villages.

The high caste elites appeared to have retained their control on local society by adjusting themselves to the changes in the political structure of the country and in the organization of its social production. So, social relations in India up to the early twentieth century followed the old dominant hierarchic

53 Ibid., p 39.
pattern with no radical change whatsoever. The most important challenge to the structure of caste society, which it successfully absorbed into itself, was provided by the fact of economic mobility, which threatened to disrupt the linkage between caste and class. The Hindu caste system always had that flexibility to recognize and accommodate changes in the distribution of political and economic power in society. But attempts at any fundamental organizational change was more violently resisted and to fortify their position against the challenge of women’s struggle, the custodian of Hindu society had begun to provide various arguments in justification of the caste system and women as a class.54 The women of the castes which were at the bottom of the social structure had internalized the concept of hierarchy which had set limits to their range of imagination. This made that lower caste women were the more favourable upholders of caste restrictions and disabilities than their social superiors. It was the result of a forced acculturation process through which the common people’s mental world had been hegemonised by the dominant culture of the high caste elites. Lower caste people under the hegemonic influence of the high caste elites tried to follow patterns similar to those of high castes in their treatment of women within the family.55 The essential characteristics of this family structure were: the lower labour participation rates of women in

54 Prabha, September 1923, p.191.
55 Ibid.
work field, restrictions on women’s participation in decision making, as well as on their movements outside the home, high value placed on sons and discrimination against daughters, land ownership passed on by one generation of males to the next, articulation of the subservient position of women as the sole toilers in all areas of domestic work, whose main purpose in life was to bear sons. Women in all castes were kept, as much as possible, not just within the walls of the house but within the women’s section of the household.56

An important factor which also prevented women acquiring greater mobility and venturing into outside field was fear of sexual violence and loss of social status especially for the women belonging to higher castes. As sexual and other forms of violence perpetrated by high caste peasants were regularly used to demoralize women of lower caste and destroy their sense of dignity. The cultural apprehension of the vulnerability of women and the emphasis on their purity and restrained behaviour which entail limited interaction with opposite sex, were important components of management of female sexuality in a caste society. Women need to be controlled, their sexuality contained, at all time and this was sought to be achieved through mechanisms of proper social control, idealization of familial roles, and an emphasis on female modesty. The idea that the honour of a man resided in the woman and would be lost, by the

57 Dube, Leela, op.cit., p 12.
latter's improper sexual behaviour, was a common one among Hindus as well as Muslims and contributed to the goal of early marriage. Within the marriage female sexuality could be controlled, preventing the possibility of bringing dishonour to the family.\textsuperscript{58} In the caste system, the women of a caste played a vital role in the perfection of the purity of the caste. If men of ritually low caste were to get sexual access to women of higher status then not only the purity of the women but that of the entire group would be endangered since the main threat to the purity of the group came from female sexuality, it became vital to guard it.\textsuperscript{59}

The men of dominant castes had been open to hypergamous union with women of different castes, often much below them in status. The ruling castes used their privileged status to ritually sanction their marriages with virgin girls of different clean castes. Men of dominant castes also had mistresses from different castes. The ritual status of these men was not questioned as long as they did not establish a household and eat food cooked by their mistresses. It was only if there was an open and long term liaison with a very low caste women that these men ran the risk of being ostracized. The power and privilege of their family could serve to cover their indiscretion.\textsuperscript{60} It was always

\footnotesize{\begin{align*}
59 & \text{Ibid.} \\
60 & \text{Madhuri, September, 1927, p. 218}
\end{align*}}
possible for men to return to the caste fold through atonement for what they had done. This often took the form of a purificatory bath and the ritual atonement of the offence. Even orthodox Brahmans in such cases discarded the old sacred thread, had a purificatory bath and put on a new sacred thread. On the other hand, if a woman ‘astray’ and the matter became public knowledge, she was banished, declared dead to the family and a mock shraddha (funeral rites) was performed for her. Thus, sexual involvement was a much more serious matter for a woman since the act affected her internally while it affected a man only externally.61 In the case of inter-caste sexual relations a man opened a door to external pollution which could be washed off easily but a woman opened a door to internal pollution which polluted her permanently. The contrast was expressed culturally by likening a woman to an earthen pot which is easily and permanently defiled if used by a polluted person within the caste or by a lower caste person and a man on the other hand, to a brass pot which is not easily polluted and in any case, can be restored to its original state by scrubbing, washing and if necessary, by putting it through fire, a purifier par excellence.62

As already explained, the women’s question in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revolved around issues such as sati, child marriage, purdah and widow remarriage. It is significant that these issues concerned

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61 Prabha, August 1923, p.113.
the control of women’s sexuality, and that most of them affected only the higher castes. Control over women’s sexuality was essential to the development of the patriarchal caste hierarchy, both for the maintenance of the caste and for the legitimation and control of inheritance. There were also drawbacks in this control over women’s sexuality. One of these was the hardship entailed to generation of women in all those castes that aim at raising their position in the social scale. Any caste that wished to rise, found it essential to conform to the marriage of girls before they reached the age of puberty and the forbidding their remarriage even if widowed in infancy. But, on the other hand low castes were more liberal in the sphere of marriage and sex than those of higher caste. Post-puberty marriage occurred among them, widows did not have to shave their heads, and divorce and widow marriages were both permitted and practiced. During the process of rise of caste in the hierarchy, the ways of the caste became more Sanskritized and it adopted the sex and marriage code of higher castes which resulted in harshness towards women. So we can say that, though in the Brahmanical texts, various codes of sanctions and customs regarding man woman attitude and behaviour in society were rigidly laid, but primarily these affected the life and labours of the high caste women only. There existed theoretical equality regarding man-

63 Vishal Bharat, June 1935.
64 Joana, Liddle & Joshi, Rama, op.cit., p60.
woman relationships in the high caste whereas among the low caste and tribals, there was practical equality. However in actual social reality, lower caste women constituted a lower segment in the society and suffered from dual disadvantage of being lower caste and being women. Overall, the significant symbol of the low status of women in society was that the women of lower castes were accessible to men of higher status, while there was a very severe punishment for men of lower castes who dared to approach any women of higher groups.

**Gender Role Ideology**

One feature of Hindu society during the time period under review has been the marked tendency for every caste to form its own associations comprising all members of the caste speaking the same language. In the old regime the caste-panchayat or council was usually restricted to the confines of the village or the town. In the large majority of the cases, the caste consciousness was limited by the bounds of the village and its organizations did not extend beyond the village area. The main function of these new organizations was to guard the social status of the caste in the hierarchy from actual or potential attacks of other castes and sometimes to try to regulate certain customs of the caste.\(^{65}\) The community aspect of caste had been made more comprehensive, extensive, and permanent. More and more of an

\(^{65}\) *Chand*, June 1935.
individual's interests were being catered for by caste, and the needy who were helped by their caste funds naturally owe much to their caste and later in life looked upon it with feeling of gratitude and pride. They felt it proud duty to strengthen the caste-organization, remembering their obligation to it. Thus a vicious circle had been created and the feelings of caste-solidarity were so strong that it can be truly described as caste-patriotism.\textsuperscript{66} Attitudes of exclusiveness and distrust, enshrined in the old vernacular proverbs, between caste and caste, still maintained even in the minds of the educated. Caste associations commanded the services of even the most highly educated persons to further their object of helping the members of their caste. Caste had thus become the center of an individual's sympathetic impulse and generous activities. In the desire to help one's caste-fellow many forgot the principles of social justice, and were led to do, consciously or otherwise, injustice to the members of other castes. Hardly any caste accepted its accredited status or conceded the precedence of another caste, though it might demand such precedence of a caste supposed to be lower than it in the old hierarchy.\textsuperscript{67}

In spite of social reform movements, a large number of those belonging to the lowers castes in Hinduism, were attracted towards Sikhism or the Christianity. They could not, however be free from the taint of caste even under Sikhism and Christianity.\textsuperscript{68} Those who maintained that it was because of

\textsuperscript{66} Ghurye, G.S., op.cit., p214.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p 216.
\textsuperscript{68} Madhuri, December 1929, p 839.
this peculiar system that the Hindus were able to withstand the pressure of Islam and Christianity and save their religion and their community from disintegration forgot one crucial fact. They forgot that this peculiarity was also a source of weakness and it limited the achievements of the community. All achievements of India and all her successes were confined only to the upper castes.\textsuperscript{69} The masses constituting the lower castes were made to work for the advancement of society but were excluded from being partners in the process of history-making. The upper castes could do such a thing because they were socially powerful and could commander the vast majority of the lower castes to work for them as dictated.

During 1930s, politically active respectable women characters gained greater social acceptance and we can find positive images of independent-minded women volunteers. By way of nationalist participation women tried to solve the problem of gender and caste oppression. Inequality between men and women was one of the most crucial disparities in all existing castes. Women tended in general to fare quite badly in relative terms compared with men, even within the same families. This was reflected not only in such matters of education and opportunity to develop talents, but also in the more elementary field of nutrition, health and survival.\textsuperscript{70} Indeed, the mortality rates of females tend to exceed those of males until the late 1920s, and even the late 1930, in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid, p. 841.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Sudha, January 1933, p 930.
\end{itemize}
some states, and this as we know from the experienced of other countries—was very much in contrast with what tended to happen when men and women receive similar nutritional and health care. The ratio of females to male population in India has been low for a long time and this ratio has been declining since 1911. Even though, women were swept in the high tide of the struggle for independence, but they also launched an independent movement of their own fight for their rights. They proved their extraordinary capacities and projected a free, strong and courageous image of Indian womanhood.

Woman is an individual first and any other position like daughter, wife, mother etc. comes there after. As a person she had to play different roles in society in different walks of life and in variety of situations. In higher castes, women expected to be involved in different activities outside the four walls of the house. As a person, she wanted to develop her own personality, aspirations and ambitions and also wanted their fulfillment. But a woman did not have many options to exercise, she could accept only the patriarchal structures and played her role as daughters, sisters and mother. Her glorification as a dutiful wife might lead to her murder in private or as sati in public and as a mother to her real and symbolical suicides, as the role on more occasions than one hindered her self realization, for she did not live but existed on the terms of

72 Chand, October 1931, p.750.
others. These terms became thick layers on herself. The roots of women’s inequality and of their resistance in India by looking at what we see as the major influence on the formation of gender relation, that was, the development of the patriarchal form of family organization and the impact of gender division.

Gender hierarchy was also retained through discrimination against and harassment of women who entered the fields of education and employment and through the assignment of priority to males. Men priority was reinforced by the retention of the idea of women’s subservience to men, justifying the continuation of male hierarchy and control. Women’s access to education and employment in competition with men was compensated for by introducing the idea of female inferiority to male in those fields. Attempts were made to maintain gender division by segregating education and employment as far as possible in terms of women–only schools, colleges and professions, and of confining women to ‘female’ subjects and jobs, particularly those which represent an extension of traditionally female nurturing roles such as teaching and medicines. This separation was reinforced by retention of the stereotype about women’s domesticity, discouraging any change in the organization of domestic sphere. And the derivation of men’s social position from the action of the women was retained, except that now her professional achievements

73 Chand, April 1927, p.583.
74 Joanna Liddle & Joshi, Rama, op.cit, p239.
brought honour to the men, as well as her sexual purity.\textsuperscript{75} This was reflected in the change from opposition to pride at women's emergence from seclusion to professional employment and in the demand for educated and professional wives for men of the middle class.

Gender was not as straightforward a concept as many people believed in the contemporary caste system. It is distinct from sex, the physical and physiological features that differentiate females and males.\textsuperscript{76} As opposed to being a biological designation, gender was a social construction—the differentiation and institutionalization of the expected characteristics, norms and behaviour associated with being female or male in any specific social context. Gender also referred to the rank ordering of this social division, and subsequent statuses, on interlocking social levels. The distinction between female and male sphere operated in the family, the economy, religion, political system, education of institutions and culture. It also interacted with other system of social differentiation such as caste, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Because of gender deformity, men and women were neither equal nor complete. Gender deformity operated at both individual and social levels that reinforced each other. Male and female were shaped not only at the micro level of everyday social interactions but also at the macro level of social institutions.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{76} Vishal Bharat, June 1929, p 809.
that regulated and controlled the practice of gender. The Britishers were successful in using the women’s cause to maintain colonialism and demonstrate national superiority. They, therefore, had an interest in liberalizing women’s position whilst maintaining and emphasizing women’s subordination, the former to conform British superiority, the latter to reject demands for self-rule. The gender division was linked to economics by this process, since it was precisely this contradictory approach that was required to protect British financial interests in the colonies. So gender divisions helped to maintain colonialism, and colonialism helped to preserve gender.

Social system, cultural norms and values were important determines of women’s role and position in society. The social framework (which was based on gender division in all castes) influenced social expectations of the sexes both as individual and in relation to each other. The emerging values and norms must be seen in relation to the societal traditions for these shaped the attitude and behaviour of members of society. Social structure could stimulate certain trends of change but at the same time, it was also an impedient in their path. Changes in the normative structure in the organizational forms of society were many a time at variance with each other and did not act in harmony. The higher caste model of hierarchy delimited the scope of women’s activities due to which full and equal participation of women in society was blocked.

78 Madhuri, Nov. 1925, p. 709.
imposition of gender ideology exerted the greatest pressure on women’s role and status. Along with this, types of family organization and nature of institution of marriage provided the major contours of the socio-cultural setting in which women were born, brought up, and lived their lives. A boy was the perpetuator of the patriline and a girl was to be said “a bird of passage”, “another’s property”, “a guest of parents house”, “a thing to be presented for a consider” and the like. Discrimination as explained earlier between sexes in allocation of scarce resources in various fields was linked with the greater desirability of the son. Even after marriage, a woman remained an inferior partner. The women of all castes (especially of higher castes) confronted constraints due to distinction between men’s sphere and women’s sphere and between masculine roles and feminine roles. The position of women in different phases of society and struggle during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been influenced by historical and ideological factors.

The social ideologies during the time period under review had been fast changing and so they had been influencing perspective on status of women. Assumptions about women were derived by and large from the ideologies of the traditionally dominant caste hierarchy or gender division where men had dominated the powerful public sphere excluding women from power and production. Though it was claimed that originally human society was...
matriarchal, which with her in capacity to look after the herds, became matrilineal and gradually when animal and agriculture production became dominant source of human substance, became patriarchal.\textsuperscript{81} It was basically human physiology that relegated women to a secondary role in society, in power structure and production. Gradually she lost her status as individual too in comparison to man. Naturally, it was assumed that the unequal relationships between men and women are inborn, and hence, something that can not be changed by human efforts.\textsuperscript{82} Not that the importance of anatomy and physiology was denied but was emphasized only in relation to the bare minimum of the facts of human life. Social thoughts and feelings about sex and gender and, even theories concerning the importance of anatomy and physiology were all to be treated as social and cultural facts. The radical feminist argued that the unequal, hierarchical, and exploitative relationships between men and women was caused by socio-cultural historical factors. Norms, values and roles were culturally determined and socially transmitted. From this perspective gender roles were a product of socio–cultural–historical factors rather than of biology. So, it was argued that individuals learned their respective male and female role in and through the society.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Jain, Shashi Prabha & Singhal, Sushma, \textit{The Gender Revolution}. Radha Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p 34.
\textsuperscript{82} Gokul Ji, Radha Mohan, “Nariyon Ka Bhoatik Gathan”, \textit{Vishal Bharat}, June 1930, p 845.
\textsuperscript{83} Jain, Shashi Prabha & Singhal, Sushma, op.cit., p 40.
Gender roles were differentially perceived and evaluated by every society. These roles were taught and learnt in a complex set of relationship in the family and reinforced within the socialization process of each society. In all castes or societies men and women were consigned to gender specific roles where the values and norms were different for a man and a woman. Most anthropological studies on gender roles have indicated that the public domain i.e. economic and political fields were concerned area for men whereas women were supposed to be ideal for private domain i.e. family and household. However, in some lower castes the distinction between public and domestic was not valid as their economy was based on the household itself as a unit of production.\textsuperscript{84} Though, the concept of gender was socially constructed but it changed with changing socio-economic conditions and there was a complex interaction between relations of power between women and men and changing historical, material and ideological circumstances. The notion that women’s liberation movement was influenced by the western cultural is a further mystification of women’s history in India, serving to emphasis the Indian form of male domination over the Western forms and perpetuating the myth of western superiority in gender relation. In India, imperialism also helped in maintaining the gender division through the association of the west’s economic exploitation of India with the gender ideology, giving men priority in scarcity. This contributed to the deterioration of women’s educational and employment

\textsuperscript{84} Madhuri, September 1927, p 232.
prospects, which made it harder for women in particular to complete their education, find a job, and organize their home and work life, because of the additional pressures faced by women in the home and at the workplace. This in turn reinforced the idea of women as less competent and reliable than men.85

In society, despite variations in arrangements and expressions, there was institutional denial to women for creative and free self-expression and empowerment in public sphere. There were alternative valuational modes of recognition of women’s role, work and contribution in societies. Structural and cultural denial of public power eventually became an instrument of exploitation, domestication, suppression and inequality of women as a gender category.86 Her creative potentials were curbed due to her socio-cultural construction which focused on her body, temperament, role specificities and household chores. In a historical framework, her contribution in the intellectual, aesthetic, religious and other spheres of creativity are not as fruitful as that of man. This is because of a different set of values and role specifications as explained earlier, which made women different and a category apart.87 The system of hierarchies and stratification have been universal features of all societies irrespective of their level of evolution and nature of

85 Liddle, Joanna & Joshi, Rama, op.cit., p.240.
86 Chand, February 1937.
organization. The basis of stratification depends upon what society values or is conditioned to value. The women placed at the lower category of social stratum thus tended to experience and suffer the equality of lower placement as a gender category. They are part of generalized lower social category of caste-rank hierarchy and being women suffered further as a gender category within the social stratum. In actual operational terms, her position, role and activities revealed not merely doubleness of hierarchical hierarchy, but summation of matrixed totality of situational position as the whole became more than just the sum of its part.  

At this stage it would be fruitful to examine the socio-economic impact of colonial rule, "with its new agrarian and industrial relations accompanied by a vast and expanding administrative structure, existing forging dominant groups" was responsible for a new Indian middle class that was fast Westernizing. This class was extremely aware of its modern nature, was eager to get rid off its 'pre-modern' elements and tried to redefine most of the social-relations. In the backdrop of the social reform movement "a new set of patriarchal gender-based relations" were being created that were essential for a bourgeois society. Patriarchy therefore came to incorporate certain contradictory ideas by giving women new responsibilities and opportunities for education and transforming them into the bearers of Indian tradition. So we can

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88 Ibid., p.60.
89 Kumar, Radha, History of Doing, Kali for Women, New Delhi 1993, pp 7-8.
say that women’s consciousness up to some extent did not derive exclusively from their biology or even from their everyday lives in the narrow sense. It also derived from their communities and the larger society’s model of womanhood, from structural opportunities for women as women and for working people as members of a class, from prevailing family and political relations and more. On any given occasion women might act out of their complex sense of their identities, rights and responsibilities as women. But even then that sense would also derive from their sense of themselves as members of a class, a nation and a larger culture.

The relation between castes and patriarchies was complex and variable. The lives of women existed at the interface of caste and class inequality, especially since the description and management of gender and female sexuality was involved in the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality. The compulsion of colonial rule to extract surplus create classes, conducive to it rule and to produce legitimate ideologies, led in past to an aggravation of existing unequal relations within many sections of Indian society. A complex inter-relationship of constant and collision between indigenous patriarchal norms and those held by British administrators was visible in the colonial regulation of agrarian relations. British while granting

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90 Sudha, January 1933, p 930.
certain right to widows in the interest of revenue extraction, these widows were discouraged from availing of those rights.

Significantly, the attitude of the British officials were determined by a conservative response to the feminist agitation in England which finally won the reforms in the married women’s property law after a long struggle. The British officials perceived the control over property and money by women as both unfair to men and as socially dangerous, a perception which was shared locally.92 Ideologically, cultural imperialism has introduced the notion of female inferiority which had no part in Indian culture, where female power and its containment was stressed. The inferiority notion added a derogatory component to the gender ideology, serving to worsen women’s position. In many parts of British administrated region, there were clear indications that colonial intervention in the agrarian economy generally intensified the oppression of the majority of rural women of all castes. So, the history of British culture impact was not all that simplistic as it was made out to be. It cannot be explained in terms of “a single, monolithic, colonial discourse with fully hegemonistic capabilities” that gives the colonial discourse a totalizing power, especially in a past colonial set up, with a view to keep its hold intact over past colonies.93

92 Ibid.
Although females were segregated into the domestic sphere mainly in the upper castes but this separation did not imply an inferior evaluation of the domestic sphere, since that arena was crucial to the maintenance of caste purity. The notion of women's inferiority made a degraded position for women abroad when added to the imperialist ideology of western racial superiority, for the context of imperialism created a notion not only of women's inferiority to men, but also of Indian women's inferiority to western women. The construction of ideas about gender and national inferiority, the distribution of disadvantage in scarcity down to the female sex within families, and the conflation of male domination with evaluation of cultural difference, were all processes by which imperialism helped to maintain, and was maintained by, the divisions of gender.94

However, as we have seen that, it was men who first took up the cudgels of women's reform in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. From the 1920s the women also shared the onus of responsibility. This definitely denoted a shift in the emphasis from preservation of Indian cultural and tradition to the demand for new laws and their implementation to promote equality between sexes. By 1940s a further shift was clear and the ideology of equal rights gradually replaced the ideology of separate sphere.95 Geraldine Forbes has optly described the women's movement of the early twentieth

94 Liddle, Joanna & Joshi, Rama, op.cit., p 240.
95 Nair, Janaki, Women and law in Colonial India, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996, p 214.
century and their active participation in the national movement: "feminist demands for equality with men were never fully integrated into the nationalist programme even though nationalism was feminized". The feminism is no monolithic perspective, and the theoretical basis of its analysis, i.e. just what it is that underlies women's oppression, has important consequences for the strategies adopted to achieve a social structure which is free of gender hierarchies. The feminist programmes of action would differ according to the structure of subordination on which primary emphasis was placed. Thus some feminisms paid attention to transformations in the economic base as the answer to ending the subordination of women. Other feminisms see patriarchy, the rule of men, as "historically preceding and more fundamental than class division", requiring focused attention on transforming the family, house work, sexuality and all spheres which determined gendered positions in society.

At the same time, there were also historical connections between feminism and lower caste movements for Hindu reform, such as the Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati (who founded the Aryan Samaj in Punjab in 1875), like Phule was an advocate of women's education, he made it clear, however, that this education together with everything else, had to be defined and circumscribed by a reformed Hindu caste society, which would rule in India.

97 Nair, Janki, op.cit., p13.
The thrust of his efforts was towards sanskritization and conversion. The legal remedies had less of an impact on encouraging the remarriage of upper caste widows, and were more effective in transforming, in a very material sense, the control over the property of the widow. For example in Haryana, (then the southern part of Punjab province) colonial rule out of political and financial interests, sought to reinforce the local customary form of widow remarriage (Kerewa) in order to ensure male control over inheritance and property, reform organizations like the Arya Samaj found common ground with them and legitimised the custom as Vedic practice. The impact of caste and foreign domination on the formation of the social classes had a contradictory effect on the position of women in the middle class because the legal remedies related to property rights, ironically, made remarriage more difficult for widows belonging to castes and tribes that had never placed restrictions on their remarriage. The class structure appeared to build on the existing gender divisions within the caste system, reinforcing women's subordination through changing its form. But it also allowed a small number of women from the urban, educated middle class to survive independently of the patriarchal caste system in the higher level of waged work.

It is being realized that in order to understand the construction of gender difference-through ideologies, concepts and behaviour—and their

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98 Kumar, Radha. op.cit., p192.
100 “Samachar Sangarh” in Chand, October 1929 and April 1930.
relation to class and colonial economy, it is necessary to press against the boundaries of established disciplines and also to use unconventional sources. Hindi journalism played an important role in constructing a certain image of woman, drawing upon certain idioms, metaphors and language. Intellectual evolution in colonial India was firmly rooted in cultural struggles. The superimposition of caste hierarchy on a subordinated society, reform movements constituted the cardinal themes of contemporary women’s journalism. We can see that the resistance of women in India did not arise primarily from the liberalizing influence of British imperialism (since the effect of imperialism was contradictory), nor from the direct influence of the British women’s movement (although that was one intervention amongst many), but from the powerful influence of the women’s own cultural heritage, and their particular position in the social class structure which provided economic opportunities and potential independence from the existing relations of gender and social hierarchy.\(^1\) As depicted in the various articles published in the contemporary journals, the early women’s movement in India did not recognize its own concerns as class-specific, in that its demands focused on issues which did not assist lower caste women. It had a very clear analysis of one of the major location of women’s subordination as resting on the personal relations of the patriarchal family. Since women’s subordination was entrenched in the social hierarchy of caste or gender, it became essential for women to confront

\(^1\) Liddle, Joanna & Joshi, Rama. op.cit., p72.
not only male supremacy but also the hierarchies of caste and gender. It was not enough to oppose male dominance on its own, since male privilege would remain, bound up with the social structure, if both were not resisted together. At the same time, it was not enough to change caste system alone, since the social and economic structures were not identical with the gender hierarchy, and there was no guarantee that the demise of the former would eradicate the latter.

No caste was free from the social prejudice against women and the feeling that they were inferior. Therefore while the toiling were exploited as a weaker sex by the dominated traditional gender and caste hierarchy, the women in their turn, even within a particular caste were oppressed and exploited by men. That is why Hindi journals did not restrict themselves to treating women’s issues only from the view point of problematic gender relationship or form an anti-male point of view. Rather its approach was to look such problems as social questions, and to seek ‘reforms’ in the interests of revolution. Women constitute half of the society. They do not belong to any particular caste or class. They are in all castes and in all sections of the people. So what was called the ‘women’ question was not question of one section only. It was ultimately the question of the entire society and on the other hand, it was

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102 Talwar, Vir Bharat, op.cit., p.211
an integral part of the entire social phenomenon. Human society cannot move forward without stirring half of the body, the women. Thus it was in the social and national interest to draw womenfolk into the social and political movement. During the 1930s and 1940s the leadership of the nationalist movement became more egalitarian and less hierarchical in its world view. The Indian national congress had become a mass based organization under Gandhi, who focused on the plight of harijans. It is likely that, under an hierarchical social system, as in India, opposition to the women’s movement tends to be confined to a smaller group than in a negalitarian system, as has been the case in the most and that the modes of political mobility under the former encourage the development of corporate feminism rather than liberal feminism.103

103 Everette, J.M., op.cit., p 43.