CHAPTER I
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INTRODUCTION

The status of women in Indian society is one context, woman has been given an exalted status to be respected and honored, in other contexts she is also characterized as being a sex symbol, enticing males, sensuous and temptress. Similarly, on the one hand, she is shown as symbolizing power or ‘Shakti’, on the other, as weak, docile, fragile, and needing protection of man at all stages of life. Thus, she always has to be dependent on man due to the assigned weakness of her nature. The myth and ideology of subordination has been effectively translated in practice and become an integral part of reality. The various forms of inequalities and discrimination against women are seen in some principal areas and practiced in various ways. Women have limited access to those provisions and needs which assure a good quality of life to an individual, such as education, health, and financial assets. Their role and influence in decision-making, both at home and outside, is, by and large, restricted, with greater share given to man.

Women are considered to be the ‘symbols’ of honor of their family or community. Sexual ‘purity’ in case of women is to be maintained at all cost, while the males enjoy relative flexibility in sexual attitudes and conduct. Early marriage or child marriage is a practice that is supposed to maintain this purity though it results in several disabilities for women. Since the symbol of honor and prestige of a family or community resides in women, they are

the first to be targeted in any situation of conflict between two groups. During war times the women of the vanquished side are considered to be the legitimate possession of the victors. Human history is replete with such examples in which women have been the worst sufferers in the aftermath of war and became victims of mass scale kidnappings, rape, torture and forced marriages. Women have also been used as a means of taking revenge or teaching a lesson to the rival group. In caste and communal conflicts in India women are often raped simply to terrorise the other group or to take revenge.

1.1 INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM

India's caste system is perhaps the world's longest surviving social hierarchy. A defining feature of Hinduism, caste encompasses a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity. A person is considered to be a member of the caste into which, he or she is born and remains within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste may vary among regions and over time. Differences in status are traditionally justified by the religious doctrine of *karma*, a belief that one’s place in life is determined by one’s deeds in previous lifetimes.

Traditional scholarship has described this more than 2,000-year-old system within the context of the four principal *varnas*, or large caste categories. In order of precedence these are the *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), the *Ksyatriyas* (rulers and soldiers), the *Vaisyas* (merchants and traders), and the *Shudras* (laborers and artisans). A fifth category falls
outside the varna system and consists of those known as "untouchables" or Dalits, they are often assigned tasks too ritually polluting to merit inclusion within the traditional varna system. Within the four principal castes, there are thousands of sub-castes, also called jatis, endogamous groups that are further divided along occupational, sectarian, regional and linguistic lines.

1.2 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN INDIA

Caste and class are two different phases of social stratification. Caste, an age-old social institution is entwined with the life of Indians. One's position, high or low in the social hierarchy is invariably decided by one's birth. On the other hand, class refers essentially to differences in life standards caused by economic factors divide Indian population. A wealthy person who belongs to the lowest caste in the traditional framework can now belong to the upper class. In modern India, thus, a peculiar situation seems to have emerged. However, caste still remains the basic and dominant criterion of social stratification.

1.3 CASTE

Indian society is stratified into a number of segments on the basis of caste. This stratification involves the unequal distribution of rights and privileges among the people. The rights of privileges determine their status, as a result, inequality-high or low, superior or inferior-comes into existence. The different groups of society thus are linked with one another by the

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relationship of superiority and subordination. Caste no doubt ranks the status of people and forms a hierarchy which becomes a social scale to place an individual or a group.

1.4 CASTE FACTORS

The caste system has the following factors in its operationalization;

- A hierarchical grading with the Brahmins at the top (not the royalty)
- Integration of division of labour in hierarchical service relationship eventually leading to fixed traditional occupation.
- Ideas of purity and pollution, the high caste who are ritually pure are liable to be polluted by the low caste by means of contact through food and sex.
- Caste determined by birth but one can be rejected from one’s caste.
- Caste is endogamous.
- Restrictions on Commensality between members of different castes.
- Association of caste with particular geographical locations
- Application of sanctions within castes to maintain the caste customs.
- Interdependence of one caste on the other for economic, social and spiritual needs.
- The labour divisions which minimizes competition in one caste group, creates a sense of solidarity between members of a caste.
- The religious foundation of the caste system: Where the religious scriptures laid down the caste rules, theories from karma are drawn to support the reasons for some being born high and some low.
- Higherarchy which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to each other
- Division of labour—each group having in theory or by tradition a profession and the interdependence which results from it.
- Separation in matters of marriage and contact whether direct or indirect.  

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1.5 CASTE AND WOMEN

Increased control over women is one of the factors that a caste must observe along with vegetarianism and teetotalism, before it can claim to be ritually pure. Specifically, this control involves two major aspects. One is women’s disinheriance 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. These structures were enforced most severely by the higher castes, particularly the brahmins, but some of the lower castes also adopted them. 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 freedom⁵.

1.6 COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Conflict has been defined in many ways depending upon the suitability focus and the group interest. Communal conflict is a struggle of values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain desired values but also to neutralise or

⁵ Rama Joshi and Joanna Liddle (ed), Daughters of Independence, Gender, Caste and Class in India, New Delhi: Kali for women, 1986, Pp-59)
injure or eliminate their rivals. It is viewed as the active striving for one's own preferred outcome which if attained, precludes the attainment by others of their own preferred outcome, thereby producing hostility.

Irrespective of the course, various forms of conflict were experienced by majority of the societies throughout the world. Indian being multi-cultural, multi-religious and a multi-linguistic society is not an exception, to be free from any of these conflict. Indian history could be traced out without caste (or) communal conflict every now and then, incidence of caste conflict particularly between the untouchable with other communities. Governmental effects such as reservation policy and the welfare measures to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes population and other privileges through the constitution have in no way bettered the SC, ST communities. Similarly the minorities' protection with legal support has also resulted in developing hatred, envy, dislike and enmity among the members of religious groups and between the caste groups and this trend is now raising. The communal conflict involves various reasons namely, social factor, religious factor, economic factor, political factor etc.


1.7 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING FOR CONFLICT

1.7.1 Social Factor

Indian social structure is based on religion. There are four *varnas* and every respective *varna* has its own norms and values from birth to death. Caste is also responsible for division of labor in the rural areas. A study that was conducted in the village of Sripuram in the Tanjore district reveals that “Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas not only live in different parts of the village, historically they have occupied different position in the economic structure of the village, with Brahmin as land owners, non-Brahmins mainly a tenants and Adi-Drevida’s as agricultural labourer”. This set-up have paved the way for communal conflict. Suppression by the dominant group over the subordinate race, caste minority religion is also a cause for conflict between the groups.

1.7.2 Religious Factor

Religion plays a vital role in human life, each religion has its own value and worshipping religion has its own value and worshipping practices, though all the religion tell the similar principles. It has a different means to practice. The religious and racial fanaticism's, psychological attitude such as hatred, envy, also somehow leads to conflicting situation. The very recent incidence of Rama-Janma Bumi-Babri Masjid incident shows the religious hated of two religious group. In the state of Gujarat, there is always a disharmony between the Hindu and Muslim population. In Tamil Nadu state, at Kanyakumari district, Mandaykadu conflict become a major issue between, Hindu and Christian people.
1.7.3 Economic Factor

The agrarian society gradually change its nature because of westernization, urbanization and industrialization. The migrated people from rural areas have a chance to work in the cities, here the economic dependency state is facing a change. Economic independence of one group is also another cause for conflict. According to Karl Marx, "Conflict is a natural consequence of economic contradiction between classes occupying different positions in the means of production in the stage of capitalism. This contradiction is recognised by the working class who will wage a class war against the earliest class thus resulting in conflict".

1.7.4 Political Factor

Discriminatory policies and programmes favouring and disfavouring certain group is one of the causes for caste conflict. Constitutional (or) legal measures to prevent the incidents of communal violence have not become successful as they were anticipated rules of law and order degrees and others could curb the violence only temporarily. The book Harijan-upper class conflicts-reveals the fact that, "The constitutional safeguards, provide to the Harijans (or) at least as section of them to achieve higher education, better condition of living public employment, political representation and so on raised the general level of consciousness and awareness of Harijans, they also might have led them to demand for various things like equal say in the community affairs, equal opportunities in economic and political affairs, better condition of living assertion of their basic and political affairs, better
condition of living assertion of their basic and democratic rights so on. The caste Hindus who on the other hand have enjoyed a superior status all the time, may have disliked and therefore recent the progress achieved by the Harijan, developed Harijan might pose a threat to their dominance. They may work against granting the Harijan, their rights and privileges create obstacles in the way of development.

1.8 CASTE CLASHES

The clashes between various caste and religious groups were neither a strange nor new phenomenon in Tamil Nadu. With a wide variety of castes and sub castes, some being treated as not being human at all, friction was bound to arise with the war of attrition quick on its heels. Many communal and caste clashes that took place in the state had been wiped away by the waves of time. But the clashes that took place after the country attained independence, have left deep scars, some of which had not totally been erased, with scabs still sticking to some of them.

1.9 FACTORS INFLUENCING CLASHES

- Denial of rights public and private sphere.
- Caste hierarchy
- Absence of Land holdings.
- Customs and rituals
- Division of Labour
- Inter dependence for economic, social and spiritual needs
- Illiteracy
- Powerlessness
• Ideas of purity and pollution
• Maintenance of power relationship
• Less political participation/reservation
• Traditional stereotyped roles

1.10 COMMUNAL CONFLICT ON WOMEN

Although crime remains a crime whether committed against a person belonging to one caste-group or another, crimes committed against women have attracted much attention. The violent activities are directed against particular groups. The upper caste men against the lower caste women. The lower caste men against the upper caste women. Because of the status inconsistency, men groups are likely to engage in conflict and in that the sufferers are from the lowest state of the society (women). Women are at the bottom of the class as well as the caste hierarchy and they constitute the weakest and poorest section of the society. The problem of violence against women in the country has deep-rooted. Women suffer from various disabilities. The offences committed against women are of different types using abusive/filthy language against them. Individual and group assaults also have been found to be common. Threatening/harassing, waylaying, destroying crops and throwing them out of their village have been done by the caste Hindus. Arson, loot, molestation, rape and murder have attracted much attention. However, there are numerous other offences which are not reported or do not come to light. D.R. Singh, "Crimes against Scheduled Caste Women" in The Indian Journal of Social Work, April, 1983 Pp-69
1.11 THEORIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1.11.1 Traditional Marxism

The core of marxists social analysis is the emphasis on the role of human production theory in the human conscious action upon nature which creates not only products but society and human nature itself. In production exploitative relations are created through extraction and appropriation. Surplus of labour and these relations determined all other forms of social oppression including male domination over women.

Marx and Engels in their work 'The Germany ideology' stressed the importance of both the production of commodities and the production of human life. The latter is described as a natural social relation and women as producers of life. The first form of property was considered to lie in the family where wife and child are slaves of the husband. Engles used the frame work of production of commodities versus production of life to explain the basic division between pre-class tribal society based on kinship and class society based on exploitation of labour and the territorial state.

Gail Omvedt⁹ explained economic exploitation generated by the rise of class division defined in terms of control of private property. Engles asserted that there was in pre-agricultural societies a basic equality between men and women though there were a gender division of labour in which men were mainly 'producers' (as hunters, agriculturalists, and herdsmen) and women

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⁹ Gail Omvedt Violence Against Women-New Movements and New Theories in India New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990, Pp-10
were “reproducers” (in the home). Since productivity was low and reproduction was more crucial, women had a higher social status. In addition, since the paternity of a child was usually unknown, mother right (matriling) prevailed and women had a dominant role in the family as well. However, as agriculture and herding, developed and with a surplus over the means of production, and form they were able to establish their control over women in the family. At the same time, contending classes arose. (Those who owned the means of production versus those who were increasingly deprived of such ownership) and the state developed to contain their conflict. Thus classes, the patriarchal family and the state developed to contain their conflict. Thus, classes, the patriarchal family and the state are seen as preceding state; violence is seen as a result of (and secondary to) economic exploitation; and economic exploitation is seen as resulting from the rise of class divisions with class defined in terms of control of private property.

For traditional marxism, women’s liberation is not a fight of women against men, but of women against the entire exploitative system. The argument is as follows: once private property is abolished (through the establishment of collective ownership of the means production), the exploitation and the oppression of women will automatically or almost automatically, come to an end. As opposed to struggles against violence in the family, collective struggles against public forms of patriarchy and violence are stressed. The framework of left party analysis of “Women Question” in India is based on the struggles on economic issues, wages, the organizing of
the unorganized, the participation of women in social production and property rights.

1.11.2 Radical Feminism

Radical feminism developed in the last 1960’s in bold reaction to traditional marxism and confronted the changing forms of patriarchy in contemporary capitalist society. Their approach stress on the conflict between men and women (dialectics of sex) as the primary contradiction in human society. Patriarchy thus seen as the first form of social exploitation and violence plays a central role in it. Radical feminism has many forms of thought standings of thinking. "Transcending biological male-female differences to reach an androgynous ideal, seeing modern technology on a liberation tool for women from the burden of child bearing and the “cultural feminism”. Cultural feminism accepts the difference between men and women as irrevocable, men as naturally more prove to violence and women as naturally non-violent nurturing and peaceful”

Male violence has been a central feature of women’s activism and feminist theorizing for many years. The issue of violence against women has become an important focus for feminist theory and action. At the core of the radical feminists approach is the view that violence is both a reflection of unequal power relationships. Radical feminists see male violence as a mechanism through which men are able to control women and maintain their supremacy. Annacampbell argues that men in fact hold an instrumental view of violence whereby violence does indeed have its own social and material
rewards which include social control, normative approval and masculine identity.

Kelly defines sexual violence to include physical, visual or actual act that is experienced by the women or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and or takes away her ability to control intimate contact. This definition encompasses a wide spectrum of behaviour including, rape, sexual assault, beating and sexual harassment. Radical feminists argue that they are thus mechanisms through which women are socially controlled.

1.11.3 System Tension Theory

Tension in the broad sense, of which "stress" and "strain" are manifestations under conditions of felt blockage, is ever present in one form or another throughout the socio-cultural system-sometimes as frustrations, aggressions or normative deviation; sometimes as conflict and competition or upheaval and destruction. As Herbert Thelen puts it: (1) Man is always trying to live beyond his means. Life is a sequence of reactions to stress; man is continually meeting situations with which he cannot quite cope. (2) In stress situations, energy is mobilised and a state of tension is produced. (3) The state of tension tends to be disturbing, and man seeks to reduce the tension. (4) He has direct impulses to take action.\(^\text{10}\)

\(^{10}\) Ram Ahuja "Towards a Theory of Violence Against Women" in *Violence Against Women* Madras: Center for Development and Women's Studies, 1995, Pp-79
1.11.4 Patriarchy Theory

This theory developed by Dobash and Dobash maintains that throughout history, violence has been systematically directed towards women. Economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support a patriarchal social order and family structure. Dobash’s central theoretical argument is that patriarchy leads to the subordination of women and contributes to a historical pattern of systematic violence directed against wives.\footnote{Ibid; Pp-83}

1.11.5 Symbolic Interaction Theory

Applying Blumer’s views on violence, it could be said that it (violence) is not always the result of the provocation by the victim. The offender uses it because he considers it as the only means to achieve his end. In other words, violence seen as means to ends, is preplanned. It is not a mere reaction. ‘The Symbolic Interactionist’s view that it is the individual’s decision to act so as to maximise his “effectiveness” completely, ignores the constraints prescribed by the existing social structures.

1.11.6 Exchange Theory

Richard J.Gelles feels that the exchange Theory is the best theory of violence because it integrates the key elements of the diverse theories of human violence. This theory explains the growth of resentment, anger, hostility and violence when the “principle of distributive justice” is violated.
The aforesaid issues and problems are sociologically viewed to the significant. But, the feministic implications which are very crucial is found left out obviously because research areas were also monopolized by androgynic perspectives. Today such issues are being challenged by feminist providing platform for Knowledge based and also fill up the gap in the knowledge system more so attempting to solution seeking efforts. This research is chosen based on the above three principles highlighting the feministic issues implied in the caste conflict.