

## PATRIARCHY, CASTE AND CLASS

Gabriele Dietrich<sup>■</sup>

### 1. Different Approaches and Their Interaction

The situation of Dalits, women and workers in the unorganized sector has often been dealt with as if we were dealing with sectoral problems of marginalized sections in society, which needed some welfare measures of social uplift in order to be integrated into the mainstream of development, sharing in the benefits brought about by economic growth. Government policies have looked at things from this angle, and often demands of movements representing these different sections have also raised issues which amount to social welfare measures. Reservations in education and jobs are part of this process. We can call this the **social welfare and mainstream approach**.

There is a related stream which focusses mainly on **political representation**. The demand for reservations, be it for Dalits or women in the political process, is part of this position. NAPM has in the past taken clearly a stand for reservations. However, Dr. Ambedkar's important demand for separate electorates which is today taken up by several Dalit movements, has not been seriously discussed.

There is also the related problem that reservations perpetuate a vested interest in caste identities and are in conflict with the avowed goal to overcome the caste system. Likewise, there are feminist groups who feel that reservations for women are discriminatory of women's capabilities. In the same way, broad alliances of women's groups hoping to push through the bill for 33% reservations for women in parliament met with a lot of resistance by conservatives who raise the well known "maintenance for quality" remark against women.

The Gandhian position of fighting untouchability but maintaining caste in the form of *varna* for the sake of "bread labour" has watered down the struggle against caste considerably. Eulogizing women as mothers and nurturers and supreme *satyagrahis* has concealed patriarchal structures in the

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<sup>■</sup> Dr. Gabriele Dietrich, Centre for Social Analysis, Madurai, India.

Gandhian movement itself. The experiences of Dalits and women's movements therefore need to be taken very seriously.

Another attempt is focussed on exposing human right aspects related to these marginalized sectors. This is based on the realization of enormous violence unleashed against Dalits and women on a day-to-day base and the violation of human dignity of workers in the unorganized sector, where labour laws become very difficult to apply. Women's organizations have raised struggle for recognition of women's rights as human rights and Dalit organizations have raised their voice to criticize Western human rights concepts pointing out that Dalit struggle is not about human rights, but about the very right to be recognized as human beings. However, denial of the very right to life is common in case of women as the history of infanticide and foeticide shows very clearly. So the differences are not so great. We can call this the **human rights and humanization approach**. The struggle here is to a large extent against degradation and escalating violence and the attempt is to put down degradation and destruction of self-esteem, to regain wholeness, collective identity as well as legal protection and political representation. In both the above mentioned approaches there tends to be lack of critique of the prevalent development model and lack of awareness how NEP affects women, Dalit women and men and female and male workers in the unorganized sector.

There is a need to connect the social question with ecological and developmental dimensions and vice versa.

There is a tendency in **ecological movements** to shun away from the social question and to leave the situation of caste and patriarchy in their own midst unanalyzed. There is vast difference **between deep ecologists** who focus on nature in her integrity and neglect social factor (humans appear primarily as part of nature here) and **social justice oriented environmentalists**, who see nature as "environment" for human beings which needs to be cared for, for the purpose of human nature.

However, even here patriarchy and caste often do not get analyzed in-depth and women as well as Dalit women and men figure in the broad category of "people" whose access to natural resources is in question and who may be instrumental in sustaining the resources. Workers in the unorganized sector are exposed to such vast occupational health hazards that awareness of wider ecological questions sometimes appear like a luxury or an irony.

Many Dalit movements feel that the ecological question is a Brahmin hoax and that they cannot be concerned with water conservation as access to wells

has been denied to them on grounds of untouchability. This neglects the historical fact that Dalits have been very important in handling irrigation. Today, in Dalit struggle for *panchami* lands, the access to water and agricultural knowledge is very important.

Historically, critique of the hegemonic concept of development has not been on the agenda of most Dalit movements for the simple reason that Dr. Ambedkar himself had great faith in modernization and education and in the values of Western democracy derived from the French Revolution and Enlightenment. Getting access to education and jobs as far as possible was seen as most important together with struggle against untouchability. Dr. Ambedkar himself, having started as a trade unionist, focussed more and more on cultural struggles and finally tried to resolve the cultural-social predicament by conversion.

The anti-Brahmin movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have historically taken somewhat different stands in religion and culture. The *Satyashodhak Samaj* inspired by Jyotiba Phule tried to project a Maratha-Knubi-Mahar-Mang alliance which turned against the militarized version of Shivaji and depicted him as a peasant leader. This was connected with a lot of popular rural reform of religion. Phule, having absorbed a lot of Aryan invasion theory via the missionaries, revived popular religion as a counter movement.

The Tamil Nadu anti-Brahmin movement inspired by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker took a heavily rationalistic and atheistic stand in order to throw out Brahminism, and also used Tamil as a medium to assert popular subaltern identity of OBC-s, Dalits and women. The language question in Tamil Nadu therefore has to be seen as a means for such popular forms to participate in the political process in a national level without being colonized by patriarchal, Sanskritic Brahmin elite culture.

In both States, alliances between Dalits and OBC-s have been very difficult. The difficulty of such alliances is also visible in UP where BSP has once again embarked with the BJP as it cannot ally with the Samajwadi Party.

It will be necessary to analyze concretely what are the rifts which prevent such alliances, who creates them and who benefits from them and what are the means to overcome them. Our contention is that such rifts have to do with competition within the capitalist system under NEP while alliances need to be built in a parallel political process which focuses on access to resources, water

as a common property resource, self-rule by *grama-sabha* along the lines of Bhuria Committee Report.

## 2. Some Conceptual Reflections

As the vast number of workers (93%) work in the unorganized sector, and the sector is divided by patriarchy and caste, it is imperative to understand how patriarchy and caste are connected in the institution of the family and how the access to resources is mediated by such divisions. As patriarchy and class are also connected with the problem of colonialism and neo-colonialism, it is important to see all the linkages.

### 2.1. The Discussion of Patriarchy

Patriarchy as a concept has first been developed in major ways in the Marxist discussion by Frederick Engels: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. The connotation of the concept is that there is the rule of older males over women and weaker men in a class society. This is achieved by man's control over women's sexuality and offspring and institutionalization of hereditary property and institutions of the State. The interesting point in this theory is that it sees the linkage of property, patriarchy, family and State and proposes that such power relationships are grown historically and can therefore be overcome.

Critics of this position have pointed out that it is class reductionist, puts too much weight on property relations in a monocausal way, neglects factors of violence and of sexual division of labour. Feminists have worked out appropriation of women's sexuality and fertility by violent means as a root cause for slavery. They have also pointed out that Engels tends to project the Western middle class concept of the housewife back into what he calls primitive society. There have been a lot of discussions on whether there ever was matriarchy in earlier historical formations. However, most feminist anthropological research seems to indicate that there were societies which were more egalitarian and had matriliney and matri-locality. There was no matriarchy in the sense of women ruling over men in a class society and even in matrilineal and matri-local societies a lot of control has been in the hand of maternal uncles (mother's brothers).

Interestingly, patriarchy as an analytical category was pushed out of use in the process of globalization. In the early and mid-seventies, there was a concerted attempt of "mainstreaming" women and "integrating" them into the development process. In that situation, "gender" was pushed as a category.

allegedly to move from "women" towards the relationships between women and men. However, as "gender" itself is a gender neutral category and does not help to really analyze the power relationship between sexes, concerted efforts in "gender training" in NGO-s served the purpose of integrating women into the process of globalization, privatization, liberalization and monetization. This was done under slogans of "empowerment", strategical vs. practical gender needs, "efficiency" (which clearly served the process SAP) and programmes for savings and credits schemes. While women have reaped some short term benefits from this approach, it has also completely obscured the process of cooptation by governments and international agencies.

Some feminists like Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies have re-introduced patriarchy as an analytical category and have connected it with the process of colonialism, neo-colonialism, ecological destruction and critique of Western capitalist science and technology which was also identified as patriarchal and colonial. However, this analysis tends to neglect the caste factor and also does not go into the class differences among women.

In the Indian situation, as the patriarchal family is the root cause of the caste system and is strongly upheld by Brahmin ideology, integration with analysis of the caste system is a must.

## 2.2. Discussion on the Origin of Caste

One major problem consists in the fact that the theories on caste are to a large extent rooted in colonial theories which in turn has drawn a lot on racial theories in 19th century Europe. There are various theories on the origin of caste like Religious origin, Aryan Invasion/Conquest, Brahmin imposition, Racial purity, Division of labour and the like. These have been brought forward in different combinations. One of the most enlightening analysis is the paper by Dr. Ambedkar of 1916 (reprinted in Vol.I) in which he refutes all the colonial theories very effectively and puts down caste to endogamy which was partly enforced and partly streamlined by imitation. While Brahmin ideological component is clearly strong in this, social agency in each generation is very important. In his later years, Dr. Ambedkar focused more on religious ideological factors and recommended inter-caste marriage as well as conversion to Buddhism.

Another important analysis is that of Morton Klass who identifies caste as marriage cycle connected with territoriality. He dismantles the colonial theories and shows how caste in the *jajmani* system served as a non-market

regulation of access to resources and exchange of services. However, he neglects some of the ideological aspects which have cemented the system and have developed aspects of purity and pollution into untouchability and he also neglects what happens to women within the caste system. Practically speaking, it is true that caste system brought forth ecologically viable forms of resource management and this is often uncritically brought up by environmentalists who speak of our traditional system of agriculture as if the social rigidity and violence and caste system did not exist. In terms of dismantling the colonial theories, the main work had already been done by Dr. Ambedkar as early as 1916. However, in his later years, Dr. Ambedkar had to shoulder so much burden of upper caste resistance to social reform that he spent lot of energies on polemics in the religious and ideological field and finally took to conversion. The analysis of Morton Klass is helpful to connect Dr. Ambedkar's approach to the ecological question. Simultaneously ideological questions must also be addressed with a view to what they mean for organizational alliances.

Some anthropologists like Louis Dumont have focused much more on the ideological aspects of caste. He has shown the relationship between status and power, separateness and interdependence, marriage and cycle and territoriality, control over land and water by dominant castes and purity and pollution. He has observed sharply how purity and pollution are related to interaction with organic life (birth, death, human excretions, agriculture, etc.).

This makes all women agents of pollution and temporary untouchables. But death dealing blood on the battle field is not polluting. Thus, *all women* and Dalit women and men have in common the pollution which comes out of involvement with the production of life. Upper caste women often do not understand such commonality, because they are coopted into the caste system.

There is therefore a commonality for women and Dalits in the struggle to safeguard the production of life and livelihood and in interaction with the resources of land and water. But it is difficult to build such unity. This commonality in the involvement in production of life must lead to strategic alliances between women's movements and Dalits movements, environmental movements who protect the land, water and biodiversity and workers in the unorganized sector, who depend in direct ways on conservation of basic resources as well as small and middle peasants.

### 3. Conclusions for the Political Agenda

The marginalisation of women, Dalit women and men, workers in the unorganized sector, *advasis*, and tribals, the destruction of nature and



disintegration of culture, - none of these can be dealt with in the form of raising separate sectoral demands. The connection with a fundamental critique of the hegemonic development concept based on unlimited growth is imperative. Each of these sections is affected by NEP, SAP, globalization, privatization, liberalization in analogous ways. What does this mean?

Privatization of industries hits women and Dalits as they had employment reservations in public sector. The conditions in the unorganized sector are deteriorating. Privatization of the commons has led to lack of access to sources of survival. The resource base itself vanishes. Opposing NEP and privatization is a major common agenda for which even organized sector independent trade unions need to give support.

As Dalits and women form a major part of the work force in the unorganized sector, the struggle for national legislation in different parts of this sector, e.g. construction labour and fisheries, is very important. Generation of employment in resource conservation would also go a long way in improving the situation, e.g.. struggle for EGS in an environmental perspective. Dalit women are triple exploited, as Dalits, as women and as workers. This awareness needs to go into the political agenda. Participation in village self-rule is only possible if intensive work goes on to dismantle oppressive caste-patriarchal social structures all the time. Programmes need to be evolved for this. Combination of programmes on land alienation and on violence can be worked out usefully. Struggle against Hindutva is imperative as this patriarchal elite ideology indirectly and directly reinforces Brahminism, controls women and Dalits, and makes a mockery of socially conscious environmentalism while hijacking all the crucial issues. Women and Dalits are the first victims in caste and religious clashes. All our environmental struggles therefore need to take care of this social component of strengthening culturally and economically the participation of Dalit women and men, women in general and also of *adivasis* and tribal men and women. Patriarchy among *adivasis* and tribals in the form of witch hunting and similar practices needs to be addressed together with self-rule and management of resources. A major question is how to build linkages between Dalit and *adivasi*/tribal struggles.

Special efforts must be made to draw in organizations representing all these sections. Ecological struggles which are also working class struggles are very important. E.g.. The struggle of the NFF against aquaculture is very significant as a struggle against NEP, not only of the fisherfolk, but as a joint struggle of coastal communities where fishing community can ally with small peasants and agricultural labour. In this coastal community resistance,

women from fishing sector and Dalit agricultural women workers play a very crucial role. It is vital to strengthen such struggles in the long term perspective of upholding *Coastal Zone Protection Notification* and *Environment Protection Act*.

The local struggles for *panchama* lands, *mahar watan* lands and the like need to be supported not only by Dalit movements but also by environmental groups. Within this, the question of women's access to land and water must be specifically raised. Side by side, other issues of land alienation, either due to development projects of the State or due to intrusions by foreign companies (*golden forest schemes, luxury agricultural goods for export*) must also be taken up under the aspect of right to life and livelihood and food security for toiling sections.

In the urban areas, major development schemes or closures in the name of ecology affect vast sections of workers in unorganized sector in Calcutta, Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. Such people are also slum dwellers, and are struggling for the right to live close to their work place. These struggles connect issues of work with issues of housing, health and sanitation as well as alternative perspectives on transport (need to encourage non-fossil fuel related transport). The coordinating bodies dealing with such struggles need to be specifically aware of the situation of women and the struggles of women's movements and of Dalit organizations.

The link between the builders, local politicians and local goondas must be exposed, as this enhances the violence against women and vulnerable urban communities. Intervention is needed also in cases where Dalits are instrumentalized to perpetrate communal violence against vulnerable sections.

Rag pickers and scavengers/sanitary workers need to be organized in all the urban centres.

Employment generation in rural areas is important to improve the lot of women and Dalits. This also needs to go together with struggles for water as a common property resource which will give all landless sections some leverage to achieve some right to land use.

As far as violence is concerned, it must be acknowledged that a very large proportion of public and gang rape is perpetrated by upper caste men on Dalit women. This requires special attention. In the same way issues of internal Dalit violence against Dalit women can also not be glossed over.



A strong commonality between women's movements and the struggle of Dalit women and men can be found in the confrontation with modern media. The media project the Western consumerist culture of the upper class/upper caste elites interlaced with the chauvinistic values of Hindutva. Thus, Dalits and women need to mobilize against cultural subversion by foreign media together with struggle against cultural homogenization by Hindutva forces. The dalitization and re-tribalization of culture has to have a definite feminist angle. It is also a fact that women and Dalits appear to gain a certain social mobility under global capitalism, especially in urban situation. Village self-rule is not necessarily an instantly attractive concept in this context. Unless social reform is very consciously worked out, it will be very hard to withstand globalisation and Hindutva.