INDIAN SOCIAL DISCOURSE: RELOCATING CLASS, CASTE, GENDER AND OTHER EMERGING MARGINS

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Abstract

GOD made Man and the man made society. Though religious scriptures ideologically claim that 'all men are born equal' yet there exists a universal Darwinian power struggle for the survival of the fittest where the muscle, military and intellectual capabilities are still unanimous deciding factors. Human need, human greed, human ego are projecting their best performance in the so called modern and highly civilized era. At the grassroots level Indian sociological order is no exception where 'all men and women are born unequal is very much practised in their routine life. This paper attempts to critiquing current Indian social set up where men and women constituting the weaker segment of Indian society are marginalized to their peripheral roles and 'Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' cannot be sufficient definitions to distinguish their discriminatory existential status. Initially it is comprehended that their destiny and inferiority are designed in heaven which is beyond truth but the fact is that they are marginalised by so called crusaders (religious fanatic and powerful persons) of the society. To some extent religion draws a demarcation line but again there exist some other visible dividing lines otherwise there might not have been Dalit canon. North-Eastern part of India faces another problem which may be region specific. Language based discrimination sounds louder at intra and interstate level. All these factors are accountable for giving India an appearance of nations within a nation or countries within a country.

Key Terms: Dalit, Gender Discrimination, Class, Caste, Indian Social Discourse.

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Introduction

India as a nation of multicultural and multilingual land faces various burning issues of alarming concerns to be addressed at the fire fighting speed otherwise any time they may take a reverse digressive turn and mar the future of their own citizen. An ideal and desirable society is not the one that ensures 'the survival of the fittest' rather an ideal society is the one which ensures 'the survival of the weakest'. Even the so-called social-reformers and cultural-crusaders of the twenty first century power hungry Indian society are terribly busy in generating new caste and class everyday in the name of social protectionism and by doing so people are busy in griding their own axe by taking their own political mileage and ensuring diplomatic advantage in their own favour. Today any sort of social discourse on Indian society is incomplete if the discussion covers only the conservative traditional socio-cultural concerns and attempts only to address them. Instead the need of the hour is to initiate an open discussion by reconstructing the whole national point of view and discussing all those ailing issues that hampers the citizens and restricts the growth of the nation in one way or the other.

Indian Woman: A Saga of Gender Based Marginalization

French Novelist Marie-Henri Beyle (1783-1842) pseudonym Stendhal heralds that, 'any genius born a woman is lost to humanity'. This remark stands as towering postulate for the real picturization of Indian woman. Even at the verge of the beginning of the second decade of the twenty first century where advancements of information and communication technology, industrialization, globalization and cross-cultural communications are redefining human life and redrafting cultural ethics, Indian woman is still facing age old rotten behavioural downsizing and struggling for their identity in various fields right from the beginning of their 'struggle for existence' to the 'struggle for their identity' and finally to the 'struggle for empowerment' where her ultimate emancipation is still a distant dream. The gender-based hostility reflects inequalities between male and female and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims. While describing the phenomenon of gender inequality Professor Amartya Sen fervently remarks:

"The afflicted world in which we live is characterised by deeply unequal sharing of the burden of adversities between women and men. Gender inequality exists in most part of the world, from Japan to Morocco, from Uzbekistan to the United States of America. However,

inequality between women and men can take very many different forms. Indeed, gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems." [1]

Amartya Sen further moves upto the extent of identifying gender inequality existing in human society. His observations and analytical approach regarding gender descrimination exhibts in his essay Seven Types of Gender Inequality wherein he classifies them as:

a) Mortality Inequality   b) Natality Inequality

c) Basic Facility Inequality   d) Special Opportunity Inequality

e) Professional Inequality   f) Ownership Inequality

e) Household Inequality

Apart from above mentioned seven types of gender inequality woman are marzinalised in the name of work devision which leads to unequal Job opportunity, and economic disparity. It makes her very existence peripheral by following the envolvement in unethical practices like sex-determination test resulting into abortion of female fetus, sexual abuse of children, rape, family clashes, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking of women and girls and other harmful customary practices which may leave deep emotional scars posing damage and threat to the health of women and girls, including their reproductive and sexual health, and in some instances, resulting in death. Woman has always been projected as a secondary and inferior human being since the very beginning of the scriptural conceptualization of her mythological existence.

It has been widely discussed that sex is natural phenomenon while gender is societal and man ordained patriarchal construct. Some of the critics also superimpose the view that a woman in her own body who is still struggling and striving not only for her empowerment but also for relocating her very gross existence in Indian society. Woman subjugation and gender inequality is now becoming an acknowledged phenomenon and so this is not only imperative but also a burning theme throughout the world to be contemplated. It stands like black cobra that is ready to engulf the whole society by piercing his fangs. It includes sexual abuse of children, rape, family clashes, sexual assault, trafficking of women and girls and other harmful customary practices which may affect the health of women and girls in respect of their reproductivity, and in some instances, resulting into death. According to Shashi Deshpande, there is a sharp division between women's world and men's world: "Even today, you'll notice, to insult a man, you say, 'go wear bangles.' Bangles mean identification totally, and absolutely, with a woman [2]."

The problem of gender discriminations stand in various forms like physical, mental, socio-political, cultural, financial and sexual abuses which a woman experiences at various stages of her life consequently she is debarred of her rights and in some critical situations she is not even given the right to be born. It would also be appropriate here to relate this incident to the observations of a well known publisher, historian, feminist thinker, the director, Zubaan Books, an imprints of Kali for women, the first feminist publication in India Ms. Urvashi Butalia who wrote in one of her feminist articles From Emancipation to Consumerism:

"The moment the doctor says, it is a girl, a struggle begins. For survival, for equal opportunities, and for letting the social needs cut her to size. In a male sociological order where she is meant to play a peripheral role she is trying to change the matrix. Hundred years back the largest revolution for women's liberation began which took the road to woman's emancipation... There is no other country in the world where female foetuses are killed in the womb in such large numbers as in India (Butalia, Urvasi, The Tribune). [3] Thus, Indian woman is forced to face violence even before she is born and it continues till her death where she is subjugated to unexpected and unimagined types and forms of violence. Any sort of social discourse which covers gender inequality in India will be incomplete if it does not ponders upon the merciless destiny to which dalit women are thrown to. Sometimes they are prescribed a lower position in Indian social design than that of their own male counter parts. Since they occupy the lowest place in the traditional sociocultural hierarchy they are exposed to numerous sorts of physical and mental abuses with no right of their own to raise voices. Their voice is to be crushed by everyone including their own family members and consequently they are forced to bear the social stigma of being the meanest creature of Indian human society throughout their lives.

Marginalization as Outcome of Caste System

Undoubtedly traditional Indian society is a society based on a very complex foundation of graded inequality. The Indian traditional system adheres to the diktats of 'VARNASHRAM SOCIAL SYSTEM'. This system assigns supreme place to Brahmin, then the second highest place in the social hierarchy is enjoyed by Kshatriya, third place is granted to Vaishya and lastly the fourth place is ordained to Shudras. Shudras, occupying the lowest order in the sociological hierarchy were positioned at the lowest societal paddle and prone to the exploitation by each of the superior castes. Not only these four segments rather they have one more Varna beyond the

periphery of these four castes and they were popularly known as Varna-Vahya. According to Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambekar, the deplomatic motive which worked in the mind of Manu behind writing Manu Smriti was to ordain a very complex and unchallengeable social design for the ordinary uneducated Hindu. Ambedkar further critiques Manu saying that "He (Manu) knows only two things. One thing he knows that there are three barriers in the matter of social intercourse which he must observe. They are (1) Prohibition against interdining, (2) Prohibition against inter-marriage, while in untouchables there is third barrier added and, (3) Prohibition against physically touching certain class of people. The first two barriers make up the caste. The third forms untouchables. The caste Hindu does not bother about the number of barriers. [4]

As the result of the observations of the above said practices Indian society kept on segregating into many more smaller possible segments which was further to be compartmentalize in many other infinitesimal group of tribal or remote communities. Thus the Indian society was further brocken into numerous socio-culture group raising their own issues, likings and disliking. Sloganizing and fighting for their own concerns which must be addressed immediately. These new emerging shudras and varna-vahyas constituted a new class of society which was further to be known as one of the most marginalised community as "the Dalit communities". The origin of the words, Dalit, Shudras, and Ati- Shudras is in the Purusukta of Rig Veda wherein the cast system has been explained. From the hymn described in Rig Veda explicitly delineates the fountain of social order. In X, 90, 11-12, known as the Purush Shukta, it is stated,

"Brahnoasaya Mukhs Masit. Bahu rajanayah Kruta Uru Todasay Yadvaishya Padabhayam Sudraajyat" ("11. When they divided up the Man into how many parts did they divide him? What did his mouth become? What his arms? What are his legs called? What his feet? 12. His mouth becamem the Brahmin; his arms became the warrior-prince [Kshatriya], his legs the common man who plies his trade [Vaishya]. The lowly serf was born from his feet [Shudra].)" [5] This must be noticed here that the Indian society which was having varna-Ashrms as its most ideal foundation that keep claiming that varnas were not the birth-based divisions rather they are the work-based divisions for that the most popularly quoted line comes from Bhagvat Geeta where Shree Krishna as the supreme voice proclaims that:

| Chatur-varnyam | Mayashrishtyam | Gun-karma-vibhagasah. |

Tasya   kartaram   api   mam   viddhy   akartaram   avyayam.

(Srimad   Bhagavatam: 7/11/35)

"[According to the three modes of material nature and the work ascribed to them, the four divisions of human society were created by Me. And, although I am the creator of this system, you should know that I am yet the non-doer, being unchangeable.]" [6]But as time passes the VARNASHARMA phenomena took a rigid shape the social system which was designed on the basis of liberal work division took the shape of a stagnant caste system where the uniqueness and cardinal characteristic of Hindu Caste System changed its very foundational conceptualization and this shift places it on the basis of birth and not on the ability of the people. Due to the hardships of this system Dalit and Shudras-ati-Shudras are called the most inferior one and Brahmins are the most superior one in the chain. In order to grid their own axe Brahmins labelled the caste system as "God made" and thus they declined the theory of man made castism. Anon Manu a staunch supporter of castism produced a code in his Manu Smriti and now this has extolled the mind of masses all over the world and become a part and parcel of man's life lines. At this stage people of high cast are no-way ready to eliminate or separate themselves from this system because if they do so it will get them down to the ground reality of the people on this planate consequently both the feminists and the dalits are unconvinced to look at Sri Rama as their own ideal who otherwise regarded as the 'Maryadapurusottma' in any of the Hindu mythological texts. Professor S. R. Jalote rightly observes this mythological phenomenon with respect to Dalit Theatre saying that:

Dalit playright discards myths accepted by Hindu religion. He cannot accept Rama, who deserted Sita and killed Shambuk, as his ideal. He despises the treatment meted out to Eklavya and the insults heaped on Karna. [7]

This divide generates a sort of faithless attitude towards past and adds to the environment of disbelief in which Dalits are convinced to look at the so called highly respected traditional values of Sanatan Hindu philosophy as it threw them away to the margins in their own religion and that in their very own land.

Language based Marginalisation

India is a nation of cultural and linguistic diversity but this reflects an idealised utopian concept of Indian society. Quite contrary to it the emerging realities are projecting that India is going through a process of sociological fission and fusion that is dividing Indian society in multi-parts based on caste, class, culture and language. The way there are emerging demands of constituting new states, or getting freedom from the federal republican set up of this nation are surfacing on Indian sociological horizon indicates projection of horrible symptoms for the future of harmonized Indian national identity. After having constituted so many caste, religion, culture and language based states it will be tough for India to sustain as the sovereign republic because of flooding regionalised and narrowed interests. It will also limit and restrict the image of India as a united nation rather it will reduce its image as nations within a nation struggling for their own benefits. Though on the broader canvas of idealism there has been tall claims often made by scholars and philanthropist that India is a nation embracing multi-lingual, multi-cultural diversity yet the nation has witnessed crimes against humans beings which was inflicted on the innocent people in the name of region and language based identity and discriminations. Recent violence in Maharastra in the name of Marathi Manus and Hindi speaking Bhaiya ji is burning example of it. Such shallow things are by-products of the ideologies that give weightage to regionalism instead of giving the same to the nationalism. On the other hand there has been state sponsored militancy in the name of national unity. Irom Chanu Sharmila from Manipur, who very recently has entered in eleventh year of her 'anshan' (observing fast till death), left with skinny Skelton and only thirty five kgs of gross body weight, is a living victim of such insensitivity shown on the government's part. Both the extremes are to be avoided. Such cases are definitely matters of great concern and ultimate sufferers remain none other than innocent common individuals who are minorities exposed to unethical inhuman violence and marginalised in the names of all other so called major concerns.

New Emerging Margins and Their Classifications

The closing years Twentieth century was projecting the different picture of society where the Indian society seemed to be divided in to two major segments of 'haves' and haven'ts'. Brahmins were divided into two categories namely rich Brahmin and poor Brahmin, same was the fate of Kshtriya and Vaishya. Surprisingly some dalits also obtained upliftment in their life due to protective government policies and extended law of reservations in various walks of

human life and so unexceptionally they were also able to made their appearance in the elite class social structure consequently a few of them also emerged out dynamically to the status of rich Shudras and poor Shudras. So there was an obviously visible dichotomy of Indian society namely powerful and powerless. In Marxist terminology they may be termed as 'Bourgeoisie' and 'Proletariat'. But this division was not sufficient to cover up the Indian social context as very soon the society started showing different subdivisions and each caste was getting subdivided further social subdivisions i.e.:

a) Lower Class   b) Lower-Middle Class

c) Middle-Class   d) Higher Middle Class

e) Upper Class

Early dawn of twenty first century adds considerably to the gap of all these and the gulf between Upper Class and Lower Class was widened and Indian society is almost torn apart between them so far as economic disparity, socio-cultural representations, distributions of resources and educational opportunities are concerned. Privatization of higher education keeps the lower classes far away from the reach of quality technical and professional educations. This added to the misery of common man.

Social Digital Divide: New Emerging Margins of Literacy, Cyber Literacy and Beyond

Indian civilization mostly has been an agrarian civilization where major segment of population has to survive on farming but due to advent of technology and its large scale intrusion in human life Indian society is facing a massive social transition. Any upcoming new technology gets introduced firstly in high-tech metropolitan cities whereas rural India remains deprived of it. In some of the cases it takes decades for a technology to reach in the remote villages that is still age old deprived 'Bharat' surviving on epical and mythological past traditions much behind 'India' that remains in cities. Those illiterate and semi literate masses are still struggling to meet their basic needs and their sufferings are beyond the periphery of latest technological sphere. They are trying to locate their existence and empowerment in getting literacy and in some cases they are unable to command it.

Towards the later half of twenty first century illiterate people won't be those who cannot read and write rather the illiterate people will be those who cannot have a comfortable access to complicated high-tech electronic and digital devices consequently the literacy will be

synonymous to cyber literacy and the future Indian society will be divided into three major sociological segments namely:

A) High-tech Citizens

B) Low-tech Citizens and lastly but the most deprived ones,

C) No-tech Citizens

Though the term digital divide oftenly refers to the gap between physical and digital world and vise-a-versa but the social 'digital divide' here used to indicate the consistently widening gap among the people who are having 'No-technical literacy', people who are having 'Low-technical literacy' and people who are having 'High-technical literacy'. This rushed to technical knowledge will again put the High-tech people in holding the central command of future Indian society and throw the Non-technical persons to the peripheral margins. They will have to face harder destiny, tougher competition and in some of the cases will be left to the highly pathetic and wretched lives.

Conclusion

Vedic India was divided in four Varnas and in middle India Varn-Vahyas and Ati-Shudras were additional segments which gave birth to the problematic plethora of highly despicable and rigid untouchability and caste system generating many sub-castes and orthodoxical marriage system which further resulted into Sati-pratha, Dowry system and the most of the most heinous crimes i.e. murdering and slaying innocents and powerless girls and boys belonging to very own Indian soil in the name of honour and popularising it as 'Honour Killings' by their own paterfamilias. This shows the dark face of Indian society projecting that how in the name of addressing multiple concerns powerful persons keep exploiting the weaker social segments may it be gender based discrimination resulting in exploitations of the weakest Dalit-women; rape, murder, acid-throwing, killing of female foetuses, bride-burning or physical and mental abuse of any other woman; observing untouchability and inflicting violence on Shudratishudras; widening gulf of lower and upper classes; clashes and unleashing violence in the name of class, caste, religion and language; or finally forthcoming social digital divide between citizens of non technical abilities and high-technical abilities, collectively all such narrowed conflicts of interests are blackening the face of Indian society and throwing the nation towards a bleaker destiny. The barbarian concept of lynching is not yet alien and extinct to the so called civilized Indian society.

Lastly these alarming situations need to be tackled and intervened urgently on war footings otherwise it wont take long years when India will be converted to an uncivilized barbarian nation fragmented into many states surfacing 'a group of states fighting consistently and rigorously for their own trivial and narrow interests' whereas the long cherished identity of India as a 'sovereign republic' will only turn out to be 'imaginary, hypothetical and utopia'.

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