

Means and Measures of Modern Subaltern Feminism

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ABSTRACT

For the past decade, subalterns all around the globe have been speaking out, in different forms, with different voices, shouting, and whispering, giving expression to a historically significant rebellion. Subaltern feminists across the continent are taking to the streets and public spaces to make their voices heard after feeling silenced for so long in the private, invisible spaces they have traditionally occupied. This unadulterated encounter has not only altered subalterns' day-to-day lives, but also their values and ideas about social and personal relations, thereby highlighting subalterns' antecedent resistance. The main objective of this paper is to understand how subaltern feminist indentured women's cries, degradation and dehumanization, and the politics of change and control that impacted their social organization. Within the theoretical framework of subaltern studies, this paper analyzes and discusses secondary data gleaned from print and digital sources such as books, newspapers, and websites. The author takes a discursive approach, allowing readers to delve into Indian and Afro-American subaltern studies while also gaining access to multiple major perspectives on subaltern feminism. The paper tracks the resistance against oppression voiced by marginalized women in South America and India.

Keywords- Subaltern, Bama, African-American, Dalit, Feminism, Oppression.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women are the backbone of any society, but centuries of discrimination and oppression have kept them from reaching their full potential. As a result of patriarchal dominance, women around the world have experienced the politics of oppression and repression firsthand, making them no different from colonized subjects. Women are deemed "subalterns" on the basis of this inherent inferiority.

In the present day, feminists work to end the subjugation of women. For a considerable portion of human history, many societies have unfairly prevented women from attaining full equality. The concerns that agitate women from various cultures vary. The Dalit

woman in India and the Black woman in the United States, both of whom are oppressed on three fronts (caste/race/class), are two of the loudest voices calling for liberation. It is crucial to identify the unique challenges faced by these triple-subjugated women if we are to make progress toward empowering them. (Rose) Writings by Bama, a Dalit woman, and Alice Walker, an African-American woman, show how different material circumstances can shape women's perspectives on the nature of political struggle. Each feminist theoretical tradition has its own take on what it means to be free. Womanist ideology promotes women's individual flourishing but acknowledges the myriad of social and institutional influences on that process, including families, communities, political institutions, and the like.

On the other hand, the history of colonialism on the national front and the history of male hegemony in the family are both emphasized by Dalit feminism.

Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s looked for fresh perspectives on this issue, with many theorists concluding that women faced oppression from both overt and covert social forces. Some of these women found encouragement in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, whose books *The Second Sex* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, respectively, analyzed the oppression of women. Women all over the world began to recognize and categorize the various feminist narratives they encountered. Feminist ideology gained tremendous density and gravitas as word of it spread.

II. AFRICAN-AMERICAN SUBALTERN WOMEN

Slavery is the starting point for any analysis of African-American women, as it was in this historical moment that their very existence in the United States was conceived and defined. Slave culture viewed black women primarily as reproducers, objects of white men's gratification, and laborers. Their status was that of possession. In both their enslavement and post-enslavement lives, sexual exploitation played a significant role.

As a result of being expected to conform to social norms, black African-American women faced discrimination when trying to take part in community decision-making. Additionally, black women were viewed very differently than white women, and many conventional ideas about gender roles did not apply to them. One of the first and most influential public figures to discuss the challenges faced by black women in a racist and sexist society was Sojourner Truth. She discussed her experiences as a black woman living in bondage. The widespread sexual violence and harassment faced by black women during slavery was one of the most horrifying aspects of their experience. Numerous forms of sexual violence against black women exist. The term "The Fancy Trade" was coined to describe the business of buying and selling women of mixed racial backgrounds for sexual purposes. When black women and girls talk about being abused, traumatized, or assaulted, they are often rejected, criticized, and ignored. More than any other demographic, people with these backgrounds have their lives analyzed, dissected, and questioned.

For as long as statistics have been kept, black women have had the highest rate of workforce participation of any racial or ethnic group. The dehumanizing legacy of slavery, the expanding labor market of the 20th century, and the current work culture all have their origins in the racial and gender biases that have persisted in the United States since its founding. Because of their lower social standing, black women

have traditionally done more unpaid work outside the home than their white counterparts, who were traditionally expected to uphold a more traditional, maternalistic, and domesticized feminine ideal.

Even though black women participated in the labor force beginning in the 19th century and continuing well into the 20th, they were frequently relegated to the lowest-paying jobs. Legal barriers kept women of all races and ethnicities out of high-paying jobs that were set aside for men. Despite the widespread rejection of these antiquated ideas over time, black women continue to deal with the lingering effects of this historical narrative's devaluation of their status as women and as workers. Therefore, increased labor force participation among black women has not always resulted in increased earnings, and the rise in the economic recession has led to the deterioration of their living conditions. Black women are therefore subjugated on multiple levels.

III. SUBALTERN DALIT WOMEN

Women from the Dalit community, who make up about 16% of India's female population, experience the "triple burden" of sexism, caste discrimination, and economic hardship. In his book *Caste Matters*, Dr. Suraj Yengde states that "the Dalit female belongs to the most oppressed group in the world." (Biswas) "She is a victim of the cultures, structures, and institutions of oppression, both externally and internally. This manifests in perpetual violence against Dalit women." (Biswas)

Dalits, and especially Dalit women, live in a world where constitutional rights and caste-based violence are at odds with one another. There have been many Dalit women in India who have never received social justice, including Bhanwari Devi, Surekha Bhotmange, Priyanka Bhotmange, Manisha Valmiki, and countless others. The Brahminic character of India's judicial system is reflected in the statue of Manu installed in Rajasthan's High Court. This Brahminical way of thinking persists, especially among India's upper classes. As a result, caste ideology and power have appropriated educational and legal institutions, limiting access to social justice for the most marginalized members of the Dalit women's community.

Dalit women in large parts of rural India have historically and consistently experienced sexual violence. For the most part, those in the upper and middle classes in these areas continue to control the land, resources, and political power. However, violence against Dalit women continued unabated even after a law was passed in 1989 to protect the community from atrocities. They are still subject to harassment, abuse, molestation, rape, and murder, all of which go unpunished.

Bama, a Dalit woman writer, accurately depicts the lynchings, whippings, and canings endured by Dalit women in her fiction. She describes how women are

treated harshly by male family members such as fathers, husbands, and brothers, and how the women respond with violence. Bama, a radical feminist, delves into the mental anguish that leads women to believe they are possessed by ghosts or spirits.

Five hundred Dalit women from four Indian states were surveyed about the types of violence they had experienced in 2006. Of those women, 54% reported being physically assaulted, 46% reported experiencing sexual harassment, 43% reported experiencing domestic violence, 23% reported being raped, and 62% reported being verbally abused.

The murders of a Dalit mother, her daughter, age 17, and her two sons by men of a higher caste in 2006, following a lengthy dispute over land, marked a watershed moment in the history of violence against Dalit women in India. In a small village called Khairlanji in the Indian state of Maharashtra, two women went to the police to file a complaint about a land dispute with the village's upper castes. "This gruesome incident stirred the conscience of Dalits and highlighted their social suffering and discrimination," says historian Uma Chakravarti. (Biswas)

The violence against the Dalits is increasing in frequency and severity, in part because more Dalit women are speaking out. The so-called socially superior people have been shaken by the growing assertiveness and retaliation of the Dalits. According to reports, the victim's family feuded with an upper-caste family for two decades before the tragedy occurred in the Hathras case.

As a result of nationwide social shifts, more and more Dalit girls are enrolling in school, and more and more Dalit women and feminist groups are speaking out. Dr. Yengde claims that, "like never before," a strong leadership of Dalit women is voicing their concerns and organizing the fight.

There has been a recent uptick in the violence directed at the Dalit women who have retaliated. "Earlier the violence was invisible and unreported," says Manjula Pradeep, a leading Dalit rights activist. "Now we have visibility. Now we are stronger and more assertive. Much of the violence now is to remind us of our boundaries." (Biswas) Subaltern women were 'doubly effaced,' or prevented from speaking up and taking an active role in resistance. Most mainstream analysis discounts the prospects of subaltern women joining the resistance because of the complexity of their colonized identities. To argue along these lines is to imply a critical space in which engagement with problematics necessarily excludes subaltern women from the emerging resistance discourse. Furthermore, such an outlook betrays an insular view of humanity and an intention to maintain subordination.

According to feminists, countries like India, which still practice blatant gender discrimination, are behind the times because of their treatment of women. It makes it more difficult for women to take part in the

political, economic, and social life of their communities. Therefore, many developing countries, such as India and the United States, continue to engage in gender discrimination and inequality in many spheres, including but not limited to: education, health care, employment, social values, compensation, customs, and the norm of sexual harassment. Even in the modern era, discrimination can take many forms, such as the misconception held by some educated individuals that women's only purpose in life is to serve their husbands, children, and other family members by cooking, cleaning, and caring for the home. Women are discriminated against for exercising their right to vote in local elections because they are expected to uphold social norms.

Women of the Dalit and African-American communities who had been indentured often restructured their families, rethought their social, moral, and religious values, and were more determined than ever to ensure that their children received an education so that they would not be exploited as they had been. After indenture, mainly through the efforts of their communities and meet their grit and determination, women were able to recover and develop their families and society. Women were able to draw strength from their struggles and become more driven to achieve their goals so that they could provide a better future for their children and families. Dalit women and women of African descent in the United States have broken barriers and achieved success in many fields despite the persistence of sexism and misogyny. Their forefathers' and foremothers' hardships were not in vain.

IV. CONCLUSION

Essentially, it may be deduced that feminist voices across the globe have started to gain currency in the current milieu. The concerns that are voiced are now paid attention to, and it is made sure that the attention given to such voices is sincere and deep. It is a positive sign for our movement toward a progressive society. It sustains our hope for a largely optimistic aspiration for social equity. Many developments in this direction have made it clear that humanity may see a day when women may be accounted for their tremendous contribution to society and may be allowed to have equal rights and privileges.

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