

**Indian Feminisms Concepts and Issues**  
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**Lecture-14**  
**Concept of Endogamy**

Hello everyone, in the previous video lecture we learned about the making of the new woman. We saw how education was a prominent tool that shaped the bhadramahila in contrast with the Western memsahibs who were seen as materialist and also in contrast with the lower-class lower caste women. Formal education in fact aimed to make women into better wives and better mothers.

Women were considered to be the custodians of traditional cultural values against the rapid westernization. West had already gained supremacy in the material sphere. Now it was only the spiritual sphere where the nationalists could reclaim their past glory. It is for this reason that the dicta around sati abolition and the commencement of widow remarriage depended heavily on evidences from the Vedas and also the shastras.

Ram Mohan Roy and Vidya Sagar took pains to prove that oppressive practices on women were not there in the original Vedic culture, it was the result of the regressive misrepresentation. Such attempts were also taken to prove the British officials and missionaries wrong who used to portray India barbaric because of their treatment of women. To achieve this, we have seen how education, clothing and even cultural markers were modified to suit the purpose of making the new woman.

You can go back to the videos and take a look again if you have any questions. One important aspect that you must remember is that women did not have any choice in terms of freedom, access to the public sphere and so on. They were neatly bound within the boundaries of home, world, material, spiritual and etcetera. Now we ended the last lecture saying how this new woman or bhadramahila was specific casteist, classist construct.

The reformation impacted only one group of women in India mainly the upper- and middle-class Hindu women. The benefits often came at the cost of deprivileging lower class non-Hindu lower caste women. As Prem Chowdhry notes the widow remarriage act served to reinforce

customs such as Karewa a custom of widow remarriage that was practiced among jats and deprived widows of material rights.

In other words, the law ensured patriarchal control over the property and women's sexuality. Moreover, these laws did not have a prolonged impact. As we see in case of Roop Kanwar sati has been practiced even in the late 20th century. With respect to the widow remarriage, we saw that it homogenized women as a single category. It did not address the differences among women.

In fact, it completely removed the relative agency women used to enjoy during the earlier loss. In this lecture we will delve into the criticisms of the nationalist construction of women especially through the ideas that ran parallel to the nationalist movements and often criticized the nationalist approach to the women's question. Now in the previous lectures on movements we have briefly learned about movements other than the nationalist and the social reformist movement which focused on very different issues or even provided very different interpretations of similar matters.

In the previous lectures we learned that in detail about how the social reformist movements resolved the question on sati and its consequences. Now you need to remember that this women's question as is popularly called and known was not just taken up by the nationalists. In this context B. R. Ambedkar's conceptualization of surplus woman becomes important. Samita Sen and Nandita Dhawan point out that with regards to the nationalist social reformation although clear marks of Brahmanism and gender ideologies were visible in the way the new woman was fashioned.

Caste was never invoked within its framework. The narrative of social progress of women focused only on the upper class and upper caste women whose lives were prescribed by Brahmanical and patriarchal ideals of chastity, purity and devotion to husband. Consequently, patriarchy was interpreted as a traditional system oppressing the upper-class upper caste women.

Now Ambedkar approaches the issue of sati and widowhood through the concept of endogamy. Endogamy or the process of fixing marriages within casts justifies the exclusivity of caste groups and ascertains the logic of birth-based origin. In an extremely nuanced understanding

of the cause and effect of endogamy Ambedkar propounds the issue of parity between marriageable units within specific castes.

He notes that India in the ancient period was primarily exogamous. In a clan-based Community exogamy actually helped maintain unity among different clans through marriage. As a result, marriage within one's blood kin and within the same class was highly discouraged. Complications arise with the emergence of the caste system and its tendency to retain parity between men and women within a caste by imposing endogamy.

Ambedkar points at the connection between societal, patriarchal and also material consequences in the following manner. The group that is desirous of making itself into a caste that maintenance of equality between the sexes becomes the ultimate goal. For without it, endogamy can no longer subsist. In other words, if endogamy is to be preserved conjugal rights from within have to be provided for.

Otherwise, members of the group will be driven out of the circle to take care of themselves in any way they can. But in order that the conjugal rights we provided for from within it is absolutely necessary to maintain a numerical equality between the marriageable units of the two sexes within the group desirous of making itself into a caste. It is only through the maintenance of such an equality that the necessary endogamy of the group can be kept intact.

And a very large disparity is sure to break it. The problem of caste then ultimately resolves itself into one of repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it. Ambedkar's observation sheds light on the structural interlink between caste, gender and also class. In framing the caste system around the practice of endogamy Ambedkar highlights the importance of parity between men and women maintained through marriage within caste groups.

He knows that such parity is often difficult to achieve when faced with the death of one of the spouses. Such extraneous situation gives rise to the surplus man and surplus women. Now the term surplus literally means extra and it creates a unique problem in a caste patriarchal system by disrupting the cycles of production and reproduction. Additionally surplus men and surplus women pose a threat to the endogamous constitution of the caste system by creating the possibility of choosing a partner outside their castes.

Ambedkar points out that each caste resolves this problem by opting for child marriage in case of surplus man and by imposing stringent customs of sati or burning of widow or enforced with a hood on the surplus women. The problem of surplus men and women is resolved by specifying different rules for them. Surplus men are encouraged to opt for a second marriage after the death of their spouse because losing a man is equivalent to losing labour and depleting group numbers.

The problem then is resolved by marrying him to someone in not yet marriageable group. A moral fence scaled by institutionalizing girl child marriage. Surplus men were highly encouraged to opt for a second marriage after the death of their spouse. Being patriarchal the caste system did not allow a surplus man or a widower to be subject to the same treatment because losing a man was losing labour and as I said the loss of group numbers.

Now the problem was resolved by marrying him to someone younger. Now on the other hand the Surplus women were treated as a menace to the caste group and the society because their uncontrolled sexuality pose the possibility of marrying outside the caste and violate endogamy or marrying within the caste and thereby encroaching upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brise in the caste.

He solution to this was either to make the wives born in the husband's funeral pyre or to enforce compulsory widowhood by which the surplus women were deprived of any natural right of becoming a legitimate wife in future. Widowhood also brought with it undesirability and the erasure of allurements. The possibility of any immorality of widow was resolved visibly by dressing her in drab and colorless clothing.

By confining her completely within the house and morally by presenting widowhood as ascetic. Uma Chakravarti in her article gender, caste and labour ideological and material structure of widowhood terms this practice as sexual death of the widow. She mentions that a woman is recognized as a person when she is incorporated into her husband only then does she become a social entity and that state she is auspicious or sumangali, a saubhagyavati.

It is therefore not surprising that marriage is the only ritual prescribed for women. Female sexuality in case of surplus women was specifically threatening as it created the possibility of

bearing progeny outside the caste. Women Uma Chakravarti argues were always perceived to be caught between the conflicting sides of strisvabhava or innate lustful nature and stridharma their duties as a wife.

Now the first quality is seemingly derived from the mother; whereas the second one from the father. Now it is interesting how biological identity and desire are neatly differentiated from socially constructed image of an ideal woman. The message that it sends is that stridharma is necessarily superior to strisvabhava. In fact, child marriages became a way to channelize women's sexual energy at an early age.

After the death of the husband this energy was controlled by imposing the markers of undesirability and this was not just limited to widowhood. Uma Chakravarti writes that according to the didactic Sanskrit and Pali stories when the husband is away the chaste woman or sati is expected to forego perfumes, garlands, collyrium, the chewing of beetle and even the use of teeth cleaning stick.

According to one authority the face of the wife whose husband is away should look pale and distressed; she should not embellish her body; she should be devoted to thoughts of her husband; she should not eat a full meal and should emaciate her body. These traditional injunctions were repeated in the 18th century texts for women which lays down that the woman whose husband is away should abandon playing, adorning her body, attending gatherings and festivals, laughing and going to other people's houses and even laughing with the mouth open.

A woman's social identity and existence was dependent solely on the existence of her husband. Therefore, the moment her husband dies she also faces a social death. Here the connection between caste, gender and class also become prominent because hereditarily a father's property was handed down to the son. The birth of a son fathered by a man from another caste created the fear of the loss of property.

With reference to female sexuality Uma Chakravarti draws attention to the production and reproduction being two fundamental reasons behind excessive control over women sexuality. She argues with the collapse of clan based society and the rise of exclusive partnership over land in the post Vedic period the sexual behaviour of certain categories of women needed to be not only under male control but also closely guarded.

In the patriarchal patrilineal society, it was crucial to ascertain that the progeny belongs to the same caste and that the property is also retained within the same caste. As Chakravarti notes the practice was specifically imposed on upper caste women because control over land was exclusively maintained by Brahmins. Such stringent rules regarding marriage and female sexuality validates Ambedkar's conceptualization of endogamy as the mechanism of caste system.

Caste system therefore function through a complex interaction with gender and class. Now the crucial difference between the way Ram Mohan Roy and Ambedkar approached the issue of sati and widowhood is the former being subservient to and being the voice of Hindu Vedic and shastri traditions and the latter or Ambedkar challenging Hinduism all together by linking sati and widowhood as precisely the ways Brahminical patriarchy functions.

Ram Mohan Roy's critique of sati arises because of the wrong picture of Hindu culture it provided. His extensive citations from the lawmakers of Hindu tradition such as Manu and Yajnavalkya support his claims that Hindus are not murderers of widows. Now Ambedkar's position comes in direct contrast to that of Ram Mohan Roy. He explores the origin of these practices being rooted in casteist, sexist principles.

Instead of seeing widowhood as the contrast to sati Ambedkar viewed both these practices as mechanisms to control and eradicate surplus women. Therefore, instead of justifying either practice with the shastras he saw the problem as rooted in the shastras. It is for this reason Ambedkar aimed to altogether challenge Hinduism which condones casteism and sexism. Expectedly his views came as a blow to Hinduism and social reformation.

Ambedkar notes that instead of going to the root of the cause the nationalist reformist focus remained centered on the practice of sati and not on the cause of it. Now let us summarize today's lecture. We see that the nationalist resolution of the women's question was premised on the Brahmanical patriarchal ideals. The idea of home, world, spiritual material, private, public was an extension of the caste system.

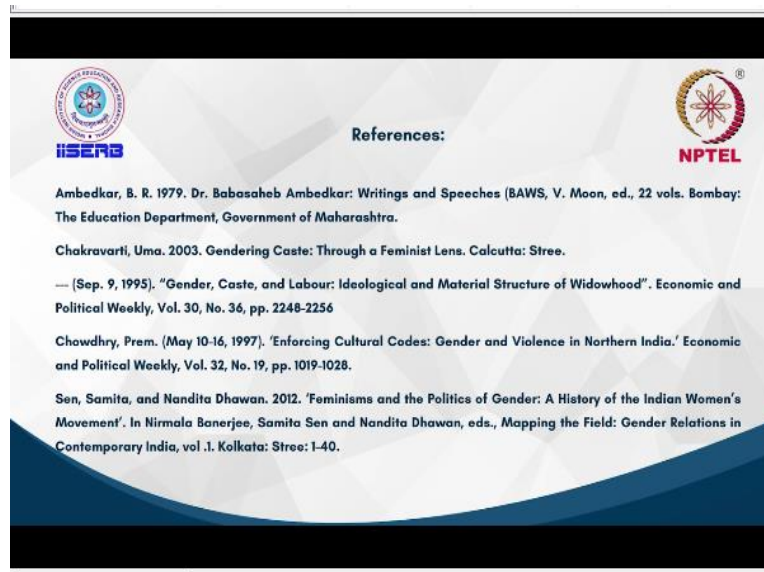
Therefore, considering the woman's question solely as a matter of gender hierarchy limits the scope of the argument. In this lecture we see that gender does not function in isolation, the

notions of sati, widowhood, marriage, endogamy etcetera prove that gender functions in conjunction with systems of caste and often class. This is where the importance of intersectionality lies.

As I have mentioned in the earlier lectures intersectionality is a method that shows how systems function in a simultaneous manner in order to create specific situations for different kinds of women. Therefore, we cannot have a homogeneous notion of women nor can we think about gender in a homogeneous manner. When we re-visit the nationalist question of women from the cast angle we see that not only women but also nationalism drew primarily on the upper caste upper class ideologies.

The 19th century woman therefore cannot be envisioned as a monolithic entity who is universally affected only by one set of issues. In the next lecture we will talk about more such alternative perspectives that when did the making of the woman and how women asserted themselves. Thank you.

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