

EVASION OF SELF-SUBJECTIVATION IN BIOPOLITICS' INSTITUTIONALIZED IDEOLOGICAL MECHANISMS AS REPRESENTED IN SUBALTERN LITERATURE

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Exploring the interrelationships between caste, class, and patriarchy is necessary in order to delineate the subaltern female bodily experience and understand how biopolitics as an institutionalized ideology operates on the subject's individual bodies. This connection constructs the discursive possibility to discuss the institutionalization of the caste system and its permeative operation on the bodies of subaltern women, its regulation and discipline in optimizing its capabilities and productivity. The social mechanism of endogamy is the mechanism employed by the system to enable the delimitation, restriction and violation of female subaltern bodies. This paper attempts to deconstruct the operation of biopolitics using feminist, racial, and anatomic-political approaches in the poetical production of female Subaltern writers. The exploration of poetry as the site of resistance to institutionalized discrimination in the form of body politics, particularly Foucauldian anatomic-politics is explored in this paper.

Keywords: Biopolitics, Indian subaltern literature, anatomopolitics, ideological operation, female subaltern poetry, feminist body politics.

This paper attempts to delineate the permeation of disciplinary and biopolitics power in understanding the Subaltern female bodily experience; the inextricable tie between caste, class and patriarchy necessitates the exploration of their interrelation. Theorizing Ambedkar, Sharmila Rege concludes, “caste determines the division of labour, sexual division of labour, and division of sexual labour” (Rege 39-48). This correlation enables the discussion of the institutionalized operation and disciplinary mechanisms of the caste system on Subaltern women’s bodies along with patriarchal politics, which excludes them from the equation of power relations by restricting their sexuality and access to society’s productive force (Ghosh 2). The centralization of the body as the spatiality for contestation is because “bodies are sites in which social constructions of differences are mapped onto human beings. Subjecting the body to systemic regimes – such as government regulation – is a method of ensuring that bodies will behave in socially and politically accepted manners” (Brown and Gershan). However, Subaltern women have been institutionally (government) recognised as a subaltern section of the population and decent-based discrimination against them has been constitutionally abolished, but the systemic oppression against the community in private, political and social spheres is insidiously prevalent in the Indian society.

In the contemporary Indian socio-political environment, these discriminatory structures are not withheld and sanctioned by governmental establishments but enabled by social (class, caste), religious and political institutions. Through the political ideology of Hindu nationalism, the political parties in India engage in the ideological propagation of physical violence against Subaltern women. In the religiously influenced ideological discourse, “the body is placed in hierarchized (false) dichotomies” (Brown and Gershan) of pure and polluted bodies as the *manusmriti* uses this doctrine to classify the population into four *varnas*. This hierarchical divide situates Subaltern women outside the four *varnas*,

assigning them a sub-human status along with animals, constructing a conception of biological normativity and situating Subaltern women outside it,

All women in the world are second class citizens. For Subaltern women, the problem is grave. Their identity gives them a different set of problems. They experience a total lack of social status; they are not even considered dignified human beings... Dalit women have to put up with triple oppression, based on class, caste and gender.

(Limbale 226)

The caste system employs certain ideological apparatuses to enable the control and violation of female Subaltern bodies. One such social mechanism is endogamy, “the patriarchal practice of marrying within one’s caste, has long been a functional component in maintaining the purity and hierarchical exclusiveness of the caste system. Endogamy controls the reproductive power of women through strict rules and regulations regarding marriage and sexual behaviour. As the sexuality of women is the access point for any intervention in destabilising the caste system, these norms continue to play a significant role in Indian society” (Venkatnarayanan). In the discussion on the functioning of disciplinary power, “normalization consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result, and the operation of disciplinary normalization consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can conform to this norm, and the abnormal that which is incapable of conforming to the norm” (Foucault 58). The assignation of subaltern female identity as a productive subject outside of the system of economic production is anatomically normalized in the subject through ideological self-optimization. Hence, the Hindu religious traditions normalize endogamy through the scriptures by constructing an ideal model of society where the bodies of individuals from different castes are regulated by social intermingling. This normalizing power ensures the operation of sovereign power by inflicting corporeal punishment on those who attempt to

exceed the norm/law. Ambedkar identified endogamy as a peculiar characteristic of caste which hierarchically separates the population, with strict punishment for any intermixing. Widowhood and sati were the mechanisms to address the problem of surplus women, while *sanyas* (asceticism) and child marriage were prescribed to handle the problem of surplus men. However, since asceticism could potentially reduce the strength of the productive force, child marriage was encouraged. Such strict rules were seen as necessary to protect the purity of the caste system for them to enjoy the associated religious, political and economic rights (Venkatnarayanan), constructing female subjectivity in regulating their bodies for productivity and efficiency.

In addition to these mechanisms, *pratiloma* (hypogamy), or the practice of a woman from an upper caste marrying a man from a lower caste, was strictly opposed as it disturbed patriliney, which is the foundation of patriarchal domination. Even in contemporary times, cases of honour killing, largely in *pratiloma* marriages are existent within conservative societies. Moreover, other discriminatory patriarchal notions such as virginity and virilocality (the practice of a married woman staying in her husband's home) were imposed to control the sexuality of women and protect the caste system through endogamy. Such institutionalised norms not only control women's sexuality but also degrade her position within the family by denying her all opportunities for self-development. Further, these norms were extended at the societal level to render women inferior to men (Venkatnarayanan).

In the application of bodily politics to the poetical production of female Subaltern writers, feministic, racial and anatomo-political approaches to bodily politics are undertaken to comprehend biopower's allowance for personal autonomy as a form of resistance. The surge of women's writings from the Subaltern community thematically discusses the bodily oppression and subjection of the women. Contemporary Dalit literature is "chiefly an effort towards

conscious construction of a casteless society based on modern liberal values. It exhibits and expresses dissent over the oppressive social structure, advocating the emancipation of Dalits and the subalterns” (Sivakami 47). The poems selected for study are from the initial stages of Dalit literature, primarily resistant literature that explores patriarchal atrocities and discrimination. In Dalit studies, scholars have predominantly focused on women’s marginalization, oppression and exploitation under patriarchy (Keshavamurthy; Pan). This paper attempts to further explore the biopolitical operation in the surveillance, disciplining and optimization of female subaltern bodies.

Sugirtharani, a female Subaltern poet in her politically concerned poetical production, explores discrimination and the female body. She explicates that “caste identity and the female body are closely intertwined; Subaltern women’s bodies are especially subjected to routine violence”. She gives an instance to her statement by stating that if a dispute arises between upper-caste men, they dissolve the fight among themselves. But if it is up against a Subaltern family, female bodies are dragged into the violence (Karthikeyan). Regarding the operation of the anatomo-politics, in the mechanisms used, the sexuality of Subaltern women are exempted from strict codes like Sati, enforced widowed, the notion of chastity and pativrata as her movement was required for labour works (Kaur). This enables the application of feminist body politics of second-wave feminism in challenging the patriarchal objectification of the female body and violence against women through discourse. Sukirtharani’s poem “My Body” is a reclamation of her bodily autonomy through the metaphorical comparison of her body parts with natural landscapes, she transgresses the bodily dichotomy of a pure and polluted body. Her poem serves as a reassertion of her body as a creation of nature as opposed to normative attribution of ethical, moral and social characteristics to Subaltern women based on their body types and sexual anatomy.

Through a mountain where small shrubs abound flows a river.

Along its banks, branches of trees

running with sap lean over

and touch the water's surface.

The fruit, tasting richly of ginger,

break open their fine skins

and put for their seeds

The day's heat dissolves into the night's coolness.

In the end, Nature becomes my body, lying still." (Sugirtharani)

Additionally, the female poets discuss the labouring body of Subaltern women, of how their labour in the fields and domestic labour are unaccounted for by patriarchal economic and social structures. Jupaka reflects on the physical impact of imposed and designated labour on the bodies of the Subaltern women. Since lower castes are not allowed to possess land or property of their own, they are disciplined and regulated to perform cheap labour for individuals of the upper castes. For a Subaltern woman, labour is central to her existence but is devalued by the caste system (Kaur). Feminist body politics discusses the commodification of Subaltern women's bodies by the economy based on the caste system is explored in the poem, "Avva: A Slab at the Doorway":

Avva

She is a slave unrecognized

I had no memories of clinging to the waist of my avva

I never heard lullabies or tales while being fed baby-food

with her soot-formed, hardened hands. (Jupaka Subhadra)

Body politics promotes the construction of counter-narratives by breaking the silence about rape, sexual abuse and violence against (Subaltern) women as it is interpreted as hegemonic masculinity, extreme examples of socially sanctioned male power (Jewkes et al.). In the context of Subaltern women, the violation of their bodies is not only related to gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination based on caste and religion. The anatomo-politics “shapes people’s subjectivity, their sense of self... and the mechanisms provide discourse on how individuals learn to conform to the social and political order” (Foucault 140). The internalization of the disciplinary power is evident through Aruna’s usage of the phrase “she was told”, referring to the political, social and religious indoctrination and the internalization of the self by Subaltern women in the poem, *A Subaltern Woman in the Land of Goddesses*. It further enumerates the assumption about Subaltern women’s bodies as seats of excessive sexuality, which sanctions its sexual violation, both by men of the upper caste and of their caste. Hence, the ideological control of the Brahminical patriarchy operates at both levels. Feminist body politics is concerned with the over-sexualisation and the objectification of Subaltern women’s bodies. They are viewed as easily accessible objects for the sexual satisfaction of upper caste men and the normalization of this behaviour among Subaltern women for management and control of their bodies.

She was told

Not to wear a blouse

To allow every male

Watch her as a device.

To bend her back, not walk straight...

She was told

To take the insults, jeers, beatings and assaults.

For being born a woman, in a cursed clan.

She was told

To take the daily thousand cuts

Of sexist remarks, acts and assaults

Of her man and master...

Her eyes two dry hollows bear silent witness

To hundreds of deaths of her mothers, daughters, sisters

Their dreams, respect and their bodies. (Aruna Gogulamanda)

The poet also mentions the violence against the bodies of Subaltern women resulting in their deaths and the systemic nature of the occurrence. Thus, this paper is an exploration of the simultaneous operation of caste, patriarchy and class, ideological operation and the mechanisms of these institutions of the bodies of Subaltern women. Body politics is inclusive of resistance towards institutionalized discrimination through body politics in poetical expression, especially in the anatomo-politics of Subaltern women's poetry.

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