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Impact of Discriminatory Social-systems of Labour-market Outcomes in India: Re-examining Empirical Evidence on Inequality and Exclusion

Simin Akhter Naqvi (University of Delhi, India)

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Impact of Discriminatory Social-Systems on Labour-market outcomes in India: Re-examining empirical evidence on inequality and exclusion

Simin Akhter Naqvi

[Assistant Professor,
Department of Economics,
Zakir Husain Delhi College,
University of Delhi]

siminakhter@gmail.com

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***Abstract:** In conventional economic analysis Labour-market outcomes are determined by characteristics of labour, elasticity of demand and supply, degree of organization in labour-markets, network-effects and the like. The presence and prevalence of discriminatory social-systems, however, skews market-dynamics, not just in terms of wage-gaps but equally as much, in terms of differential treatment by employers, varying service-conditions, discriminatory work-contracts and altered incentives for skill-acquisition. While Patriarchal mind-sets and chauvinistic attitudes cause exclusion of women from certain jobs, gender-biased wage-gaps and work-place discrimination; Social-endorsement of Caste-prejudices leads to a de-facto inter-job immobility for unskilled/semi-skilled lower caste workers, often forcing them to resort to parallel market-entry channels like informal sub-contracts and/or rural-to-urban migration. Overlapping 'gender' and 'caste' identities, then, imply a much greater exclusion and discrimination, the plight of Dalit-women workers in north-India, being a case in point. This paper attempts to re-examine existing data on labour-market outcomes from a 'gender-caste' perspective, seeking to establish, if discriminatory social-systems 'systematically' cause greater welfare-losses (economic-inequality and social-exclusion) among the victim-groups. While preliminary estimates indicate a strong correlation between the*

two, causation is difficult to establish on pure statistical grounds. Alternative sociological explanations and discussion on the role of state in the context follow.

Introduction: Discriminatory Social Systems, Caste and Patriarchy

The Indian Society is very deeply patriarchal. Right from the south of Vindhayas, up far north, women do not enjoy equal rights, opportunities and social status as men; across cultures, regions and religions, varying only in degree and form, not in spirit or essence. Looking at recent data for crime against women, following Manikamma Nagindrappa and Radhika M.K (2013), 'a total of 2,34,802 incidents of crime against women (both under Indian Penal Code; IPC and Special and local laws; SLL) were reported in the country during 2011 as compared to 1,99,854 during 2009 recording an increase of 4.1% during 2011. These crimes have continuously increased during 2009 - 2012 with 1,57,563 in 2009, 1,68,775 cases in 2010, 1,89,313 cases in 2011, and 1,98,856 cases in 2012. The IPC component of crimes against women has accounted for 95.6% of total crimes and the rest 4.4% were SLL crimes against women. (Crime rate 17.4) The rate of crime has increased marginally from 17.0 during the year 2011 to 17.4 during 2012. [Source, National Crime Record Bureau archives, 2012]

Looking at Crime-wise break-up; (IPC) Rape (Sec. 376 IPC) (Incidence 21,397 Rate 1.8): An increasing trend in cases of rape has been observed during 2009 - 2012. However, incidence of rape has marginally declined during 2009 as compared to 2012. These cases reported an increase of 5.4% in 2010 over 2009, an increase of 7.2% in 2011 over 2010. There were 21,413 victims of Rape out of 21,397 reported Rape cases in the country. 11.5% (2,470) of the total victims of Rape were girls under 15 years of age, while 15.6% (2,912) were teenaged girls (15-18 years). 59.8% (12,812) were women in the age-group 18-30 years. 3,124 victims (14.6%) were in the age-group of 30-50 years while 0.4% (95) was over 50 years of age. Offenders were known to the victims in as many as 20,311 (94.9%) cases. Parents / close family members were involved in 2.0% (404 out of 20,311) of these cases, neighbours were involved in 35.1% cases (7,129 out of 20,311) and relatives were involved in 7.3% (1,481 out of 20,311) cases.

Dowry Deaths (Sec. 302, 304B IPC) (Incidence 8,383 Rate 0.7): These cases have increased by 2.6% over the previous year (8,172). 26.6% of the total such cases reported in the country were reported from Uttar Pradesh (2,232) Bihar (1,295) (15.4%). The highest rate of crime (1.4) was reported from Bihar as compared to the National average of 0.7. Torture (Cruelty by Husband & Relatives) (Sec. 498-A IPC)(Incidence 89,546 Rate 7.7): 'Torture' cases in the country have increased by 10.1% over the previous year (81,344). 18.0% of these were reported from West Bengal (16,112). The highest rate of 22.8 was reported from Tripura as compared to the National rate at 7.7.

Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC) (Incidence 38,711 Rate 3.3): Incidents of Molestation in the country have decreased by 4.2% over the previous year (40,413). Madhya Pradesh has reported the highest incidence (6,307) amounting to 16.3% of total such cases. Tripura has reported the highest rate (10.8) as compared to the National average of 3.3. Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC) (Incidence 11,009 Rate 0.9): The number of such cases has decreased by 9.9% over the previous year (12,214). Andhra Pradesh has reported 32.0% of cases (3,520) followed by Uttar Pradesh 22.9% (2,524). Andhra Pradesh has reported the highest crime rate 4.2 as compared to the National average of 0.9.

Importation of Girls (Sec. 366-B IPC) (Incidence 48): A decrease of 28.3% has been observed in such cases as 48 cases were reported during the year 2009 as compared to 67 cases in the previous year (2008). Bihar (31) has reported the highest number of such cases accounting for 64.6% of total such cases at the National level. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (Incidence 845 Rate 0.1): A decline of 17.6% was noticed in cases under this Act as compared to previous year (1,025).

Dowry Prohibition Act (Incidence 5,650 Rate 0.5) the cases under this Act have increased by 1.7% as compared to the previous year (5,555). 24.1% cases were reported from Andhra Pradesh (1,362) followed by Bihar (1,252) accounting for 22.2% of total cases at the National level. The highest crime rate was reported from Orissa at 2.3 as compared to 0.5 at the National level. Crime against Women in Cities (All-India 2,33,806 Cities 23,983): 35 cities having population over 10 lakh have been identified as Mega cities as per population census 2001. A total of 23,983 cases of crimes against women were reported from these 35 cities as compared to 24,756 cases in the year 2008 reporting a decrease of 3.1%. The rate of crime in cities at 22.2 was comparatively higher as compared to the National rate of 17.4. Among 35 cities, Delhi (3,701) has accounted for 15.4% of total crimes followed by Hyderabad (1,896) (7.9%). Delhi has further accounted for 23.8% of Rape cases, 38.9% of Kidnapping & Abduction cases, 15.2% of Dowry Deaths and 14.1% of Molestation cases among 35 cities. Hyderabad has reported 11.9% of cases of Cruelty by Husband and Relatives. Lucknow has reported 14.5% of cases of Eve-teasing. All the 4 cases under Importation of Girls were reported from Kolkata city. It is worthwhile to mention that Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and Jaipur have booked more cases under Special & Local Laws among the mega cities. 17.3% (134 out of 774) of cases under Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and 83.3% (567 out of 681) of Dowry Prohibition Act cases were registered in Bengaluru city alone. Similarly, 15.9% (123 out of 774) and 14.6% (113 out of 774) cases under Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act were registered in Chennai and Mumbai respectively. All the 44 cases under Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act cases were registered in Jaipur city.

While physical violence is only one of the many instruments of 'showing women their proverbial (sic.) place' in society, Quoting Nivedita Menon in 'Seeing like a feminist' (2012), "The maintaining of this gender-unequal Social-order requires the faithful performance of prescribed rituals over and over again throughout one's lifetime. Complex networks of cultural reproduction are dedicated to this sole purpose, albeit with the ultimate goal of producing the effect of untouched naturalness!" While the conservative approach to the question of Inequality is based on the belief that 'inequalities' within human societies are

‘natural’ and ‘Inevitable’, The radical approach on the other hand, is founded in the thought that an ideal society must be ‘inequality-free’ and such a society would either emerge from the internal contradictions of hitherto ‘in-equal’ systems, or must be established through organised and sustained socio-political struggle. The Liberal approach takes a middle though digressent path, aiming to minimize inter-personal inequalities, holding, however, that the same cannot be summarily abolished. The liberal camp thus is more concerned with the twin notions of equality of Opportunity and social-mobility, and less with the ideal of complete and absolute equality. Inequality, however, is not a monolithic entity and quoting Ashwini Deshpande in ‘The Grammar of Caste’ (2011), ‘inter-group disparity in India is multifaceted; Religion, language, sub-nationality, ethnicity, caste, class, gender all add layers of complexity to the problem, making straight-forward generalizations confounding and even as one may be able to break the link between caste and occupation, the overlap of caste and class in the country is very strong’. Apropos the inter-sectionality between Gender, Religion and Caste, which all notions of ‘class trumps gender’ notwithstanding, gets reflected in an omnipresent and inter-temporally persistent interaction-effect in both material and social subordination of say Dalit women or Muslim Women as compared to their non-Dalit or non-Muslim counterparts.

So if Patriarchy is ‘A system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women’, it is not simply a crude and general domination of all women by all men, rather a well-detailed labyrinth of ‘our women’ versus ‘their women’, in a two-pronged process of both, identification of women with the value-systems and cultural-standards of the religion and caste of their birth (or as by marriage where applicable), as well as a process of systematic differentiation of women from men, where differential standards of education, employment and property-rights (read patri-lineal systems of inheritance) are used and maintained, along with a systematic exclusion of women from active politics by most mainstream political parties, differential wages and job-bias against women in labour-markets to neglecting the value of unpaid house-work and domestic-labour, along with a total control of female desire and sexuality through strictly-heterosexual universalised institutions of marriage, control of women’s dressing and physical mobility (through both the dictates of north-India’s notorious ‘Khap panchayats’, and Deoband’s anti-freedom, anti-women ‘fatwas’ as much through perpetration of crimes against ‘aberrant’ ‘loose and forward’ women and the state’s lax-punishment systems); through thorough use of myth and metaphor, in such a manner that these processes of control and domination get so deeply engrained in one’s growing-up and thought-processes, impairing the victim’s ability to perceive the injustice, thereby also assisting in perpetuation of the same!

The Caste System, similarly, is a complex matrix of social mindsets, political polarization, economic exclusion and institutional biases that seek to stratify society, based on compartmentalization of people into endogamous groups known as jatis and varnas. The subcontinent has a long history of violence against ‘Dalits’, people considered to be at the bottom of this supposed social hierarchy. As opposed to textbook definitions, casteist organization of society can also be found among the Muslims and Christians in the subcontinent. Notions of ‘quom’ and ‘biradari’ are widely prevalent, with separate places of

worship, ghettoised living spaces, endogamy and a loose political consensus and organization of people along these lines.

Looking at instances of caste-related violence, according to reports by Human Rights Watch, despite laws for affirmative action and constitutional promises of liberty, dignity and equality, Dalits and indigenous peoples (known as Scheduled Tribes or adivasis) continue to face discrimination, exclusion, and acts of violence. Beginning with the infamous Kilvenmani Massacre of Tamilnadu in post-independence India, where 42 dalit labourers were murdered by assailants sent by upper caste landlords, prominent cases that received attention from international media and human rights groups include the 1996, Bathani tola massacre in Bihar, killing 21 dalits, the Laxmanpur Bathe and Sankarbiga massacres of Muslim and Hindu 'low caste people' respectively, killing 81; the gang rape, torture and public stripping of a 55 year old dalit sikh woman in the 1999 Bant Singh case in Punjab, the 2006 Kherlangi massacre of the Bhotmanges in Maharashtra, right up to the multiple episodes of rape, murder and public hanging of Dalit women in Uttar Pradesh, this June.

Violence, again, is not an exclusive means of affecting this kind of social-inequality; only one of the many instruments of maintaining the status quo and suppressing possibilities of revolt and resistance. The more widespread means and repercussions are political and economic, as the following section would show.

Gender, Caste and Inter-Job Immobility

Given the state of gender-specific inequality and exclusion prevalent in Indian Labour markets, it is important to inquire why Economic-Growth has failed to translate into Equality and Inclusion for Women in the country. Despite the average annual rate of growth of GDP leaping from an average of around 3.2% in the pre-reform days, to as high as 8% in the 2000s, workforce participation rate for women has been found to be as low as 12% in Urban and 25% in rural areas. Further, despite the equal remuneration act (1976) in place, average daily wage for women continues to be Rs. 160 for women as opposed to Rs. 221 for men in rural areas, and Rs. 235 as compared to Rs. 262 for men in Urban areas; indicating an average female-male wage ratio of 0.78 for the country as a whole (NSSO, 68th round). Looking at Caste wage-gaps, one finds, strong evidence of wage-bias along with job exclusion and inter-job immobility.

Following Shantanu Khanna (2012) in a distributional analysis of gender wage gaps using wage data for regular wage workers from the National Sample Survey (NSS) Employment-Unemployment schedule (EUS) for the year 2009-2010. Evidence of the sticky floor phenomenon, where gender wage gaps are higher at the bottom end of the distribution, and fall to smaller levels at the top, is found for Urban Indian Labour markets in aggregate averages. Following Reilly and Dutta (1996) find that the mean wage differential between men and women was relatively stable in the 1980s and the 1990s. A study on urban labour markets conducted by Madheswaran and Khasnobis (2007) focused on decomposition of

gender wage differentials. The objective of the paper was to study wage determination for regular wage as well as casual workers, and the wage gap between males and females for both these categories of workers. It was found that “according to key indicators such as occupational distribution, earnings, nature and terms of employment and unemployment, gender gaps in earnings remain among the most persistent forms of inequality in the labour-market. Decomposing the gross wage differentials using Oaxaca, Reimer, Cotton and Neumark method, the study finds raw wage differential declining from 0.40 to 0.26 from 1983 to 1999-2000 for the regular workers. The endowment effect and treatment (discrimination) component is narrowing down for the regular workers over the period of time from 1983 to 1999-2000. The discrimination coefficient in regular labour market has been found to vary from 62.8 percent in 1983, 68.6 percent and 80.5 percent in 1999-2000. This result implies that among regular workers, the proportion of educated workers is increasing, but the nature of education differs greatly and hence their returns also vary greatly. Educated people, as captured by the NSS in broad categories can have greatly diverging wages. The divergence in the wages of regular worker with education is so great (due to the divergence in education levels). The picture is different in casual labour market. The difference in raw wage differentials is declining very steeply from 1983 (0.70) to 1993 (0.55) and it is stable in 1999-2000. Unlike in regular labour market, the endowment difference is found to be widening up in casual labour market. The extent of discrimination coefficient in the casual labour market is 74.9 percent in 1983, 73.7 percent in 1993-94 and 61.3 percent in 1999-2000. On the whole, the discrimination against female in the Indian labour market is found to be significant.”

Looking at trends in Migration, poverty and inequality-outcomes in Indian Labour markets, Amitabh Kundu and P.C. Mohanan (2010) show that “only a small part of the total women employment is in the formal labour market. Close to half of the rural women workers are helpers or unpaid workers in family run enterprises. Among urban women, this figure is close to one quarter”. Further, following Kamala Sankaran (2013) in an exposition of the state of wages and legal protection to domestic-workers, which comprise a large section of urban casual/unorganised sector labour, “The differences of wage rates between men and women and also wage rates across employments bring into focus the limitation of one of the few labour laws that applies to domestic workers; the Equal Remuneration Act (ERA), 1976. The ERA in its preamble declares that it is to provide for payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers, and to prevent discrimination against women on the ground of sex in the matter of employment”, and while Article 39 (d) of the Constitution directs the government to ensure “that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women”, the courts have conveniently, and much to the detriment of women-workers, interpreted Article 39(d) as directing “equal pay for equal work” and it “comes as no surprise then that the law is unable to adequately address the both, lower wage rates and the social-structures that cause to be found in occupations such as domestic work where women predominate” (*ibid*).

Looking at caste based wage gaps, following Aattewell and Madhesawaran (2007), “discrimination causes 15 per cent lower wages for SC/STs as compared to equally qualified others in Indian urban labour markets; SC/ST workers are discriminated against both in the

public and private sectors, but the discrimination effect is much larger in the private sector; discrimination accounts for a large part of the gross earnings difference between the two social groups in the regular salaried urban labour market, with occupational discrimination - unequal access to jobs - being considerably more important than wage discrimination - unequal pay in the same job; and the endowment difference is larger than the discrimination component.” A recent paper by C. P. Chandrashekar and Jayati Ghosh, ‘Is Social Discrimination in Indian Labour Markets Coming Down?’, reports that “Most empirical studies, including those using large-scale sample survey data as well as micro case studies, have found that social categories are strongly correlated with the incidence of poverty and that both occupation and wages differ dramatically across social categories”. In conclusion, the paper maintains that “wage differentials are very significant in rural India. Gender discrimination is clearly the strongest feature that emerges, as female wages for all categories are lower than the lowest male wages, received by SC men. With the recent increase in rates of economic activity and growth, however, there has been some narrowing in wage-differences, albeit mostly in public-works, limited to NREGA and associated projects. The biggest relative improvement has been recorded for women from SC and OBC groups. There was quite a sharp improvement for women in the ‘Other’ category in 2009-10, with a slight setback thereafter, but even so, the gap in 2011-12 (with such women’s wages at 67.1 per cent of ‘Other’ male wages) was 6.4 percentage points lower than it was in 2004-05.”

Citing the National Sample Survey, 2004; “On an average the female daily wage rate in agriculture in India is only 70% of that of male agricultural labor in India. However, there are wide differences across states ranging from 90% in the state of Gujarat to 54% in Tamil Nadu.” Quoting, (Mahajan and Ramaswamy, (2012), “On a closer inspection one can observe a systematic regional pattern-gender gap in wages in the northern states is much lower than in the southern states. At a first glance this seems to be against the well known finding that women have greater autonomy in the southern states (Dyson and Moore, 1983). Basu (1992) and Jejeebhoy (2001) also find similar patterns in woman’s status indicators in a society across India’s north and south”. Looking at the caste composition of female labour supply, one finds that “high caste women refrain from work participation because of ‘status’ considerations (Aggarwal, 1994; Beteille, 1969; Boserup, 1970; Chen, 1995)”, (Mahajan and Ramaswamy, 2012). “Using nationally representative employment data, Das (2006) shows that castes ranking higher in the traditional caste hierarchy have consistently lower participation rates for women. The ‘high’ castes also have higher wealth, income and greater levels of education. In an empirical model of household labor supply, Eswaran, Wadhwa and Ramaswami (2012) showed that ‘higher’ caste households have lower female labor supply even when there are controls for male labor supply, female and male education, family wealth, family composition, and village level fixed effects that control for local labor market conditions (male and female wages) as well as local infrastructure” (ibid).

A pilot survey of 150 construction workers in and around Delhi, carried out for the purpose of this paper and ongoing independent research, using ‘nature of task assigned’ as the control reveals significant wage-gaps between men and women, with women consistently earning only about 70% of counterpart male earnings, despite minimum wage legislations; given the

same hours of work and previous work experience. Dalit Women have been found to earn similar wages as their non-dalit counterparts in this sample, but it needs to be mentioned here that Delhi is essentially a non-representative sample of the larger Indian Labour-markets, where agricultural labour exists and operates mostly as private and informal labour in the strictly casteist and gender-unjust rural social context. Outside construction, however, as contemporary research shows, dalit women are mostly concentrated in the traditional preserves of sanitation, even scavenging in certain parts of the country, or wherever as farm labour, with consistently lower wage-rates prevailing in 'Dalit-pockets' as compared to other 'non-dalit' areas. Financial Autonomy among women, measured in terms of their freedom to take important financial decisions for themselves and the family, percentage of income retained and spent on self, and ownership of household assets, is found to be low; with most of the surveyed women contributing up to 60% of the household income, with mostly marginal or zero retention.

The findings thus, are more complicated than would seem at face value. Gender-wage gaps exist. Caste adds an additional dimension of job-exclusion and limited inter-generational job mobility. While inter-state and inter-sectoral differences in the wage-gaps exist, the twin imposters of caste and gender cut across all regional and sectoral boundaries, causing the said exploitation to vary only in degree, not in essence. Institutional provisions abound, but implementation is lax and administrative apathy rampant. The massive share of informal employment in total employment limits the scope and effectiveness of affirmative measures for caste and gender-justice.

The Base-Superstructure Debate Revisited

Any Inquiry into the material well-being of individuals is incomplete without considering the socio-economic and political circumstances of both the subject and the enquiry, in terms of both, perception and notions of well-being as understood by the subject and agent of enquiry, as well as the many ways and means through which these circumstances affect the material well-being of the subject. Oppression of a caste, community or gender by another essentially occurs through a syzygy of the multiple means and methods of social-constructs, Political structures, and Economic Institutions. Quoting LRP, (1989) in 'Women and the Capitalist family: the ties that bind', "the proletarian family is a necessity for the capitalist system and is the fundamental source of women's oppression today". The report (ibid) also cites from Engel's 'The Origin of the family, private property and the state' and says that 'Engels emphasized that the rise of industrial capitalism meant progress for women because it brought them into the social workforce, which along with the socialization of household tasks, is a precondition for liberation. Under capitalism, however, women remained oppressed because they bore the burden of family labour even when drawn into social production.' The study further Cites Marx in Capital, Volume I, Chapter 6, and says, in Marxist analysis, "Capitalism is based on the exploitation of workers through wage labour. The working-class family is the system's economic unit, an integral part of the reproduction of capitalist relations. As a necessary component of the wage form of exploitation, capitalism

imposes a sexual division of labour. Women are obliged to fulfil the wife/mother role in order to ensure the system a steady supply of labour power. There are two aspects to the reproduction of the proletariat and its labour power. In the traditional capitalist family, for the daily revival of the male labourer-his eating, sleeping, minding his health and just unwinding in order to replenish his ability to work effectively for the boss the next day-his wife cooks food, cleans house and clothing and provides nurture in less measurable ways. The second aspect, the replacement of one generation of the workforce by the next, includes the woman's biological role in giving birth and her social role in rearing children. As with any commodity, the value of labour power is based on the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the worker's maintenance and reproduction. This cost must be covered by the workers' wage. Thus the wage is not an individual payment; it also has to maintain all family members who do not work. But while the wage reflects the value of labour power, this value is not just the bare minimum needed for physical survival" It may further be noted, that in traditional Marxist analysis, the family rationale of treating women's income as supplementary and optional reduces women to only a floating 'reserve' labour supply, willing to work at lower wages, which proletarian men see themselves competing against for employment. Further, the fact that the proletarian wife, since she works at home in isolation, and not in public work-spaces, makes it further more difficult for her to participate in and associate herself with the proletarian class struggle.

Martha Gimenez, and others in their criticism of Engel's work, however, are right in saying that Engels, in drawing a broad overview of the family and the oppression of women, fails to examine how these phenomena varied among different class societies and that women's oppression is "not just a historical legacy; it is specifically moulded to serve capitalism" (Martha Gimenez, 1987). Women have undeniably been oppressed for thousands of years even before the emergence of Capitalism; and there is no logical basis to believe that there would be no exploitation or oppression of women under alternative socio-political systems.

Quoting Chandrashekar and Ghosh, (2014), "Caste and other forms of social discrimination have a long tradition in India, and they have interacted with capitalist accumulation to generate peculiar forms of labour market segmentation that are unique to Indian society". As Andre Beittle says, "A key question of concern to both Sociologists and Development Economists alike is why the emergence of an urban industrial middle class in the sub-continent failed to translate into proportional gains for the women-folk. The answer is provided by Beteille in 'The Indian Middle Class' (2001), where he says, "a new middle class began to emerge in India in the middle of the 19th century; in the womb of an ancient hierarchical society". The society within which it began to take shape was not one of classes, but of castes and communities. Even though it has grown enormously in size and importance in the last 150 years, its growth has not led to the disappearance of the multitudinous castes and communities inherited from the past." Apropos Urban India's apparently 'vibrant' and 'dynamic' labour-markets, the middle class can't stop singing hymns to! albeit with very little inter-sectional mobility, especially in the lower-middle unorganised segments.

The emergence of India's industrial middle class, thus, instead of challenging and replacing the existent patriarchal social-order, found a way to preserve the same within the house-hold,

while using to the differential advantage of the men-folk across religious communities and ethnicities, the new economic conditions that colonial and post-independence industrialization brought with it. Merely looking at the class-composition of the society or exclusive debates on the role of Patriarchy in understanding the exploitation of women are both inadequate and socially irrelevant.

“According to a recent UNO report on Deprivation, Vulnerability and Exclusion (<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/docs/2010/chapter4.pdf>) “Dalit women in India are at the bottom of India’s caste, class and gender social structure and their situation constitutes an extreme case of active exclusion. They suffer from endemic gender and caste discrimination, violence and exploitation. Pervasive violence against Dalit women in India is the core result of gender-based inequalities enforced and intensified by the caste system. Despite constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination on the basis of caste and gender as well as a series of laws aimed at protecting dalits, discrimination, exploitation and violence continue. The societal acceptance of discrimination directed against caste, class, community and family is at the root of the persistence of the problem”.

The Marx-Weber, Base-Superstructure debate thus merits revisiting in the Indian context, where the multiple identities of gender, caste and community still constitute major social forces, shaping and impacting economic outcomes in more ways than one. Following Kaveri Gill, in the 2012 UNICEF report on social exclusion in flagship welfare programmes in India, there are elaborate and deeply entrenched social mechanisms of exclusion of Dalits, Muslims, Tribals and Women in the country, and simply tackling poverty through generalised poverty-alleviation measures does not help. The causation from base to superstructure cannot be denied of course; poverty is strongly correlated with social inequality and exclusion but the causation is certainly two-way. If you are poor, it’s likely you’re Dalit or tribal or Muslim, most so, woman; but if you’re any of the above, it is certain, you’ll be at some disadvantage compared to others.

Conclusions: Role of State and Institutions

In Conclusion, the Exploitation, Oppression and exclusion of women in Indian Labour markets has clear material bases and is being persistently perpetuated by a continuous interaction of the multiple agencies of exclusionary systems based on gender, community, ethnicity and caste among others. The role of India’s colonial legacy and adoption of British patriarchal notions by the Urban Middle class in the newly-independent India is also suspect. The same needs to be acknowledged and identified in the proper light if labour-market dynamics have to be understood in the light of the day, giving due recognition to gendered asymmetries. Debasing ‘within-the-household inequality’ from its essentially ‘class-systemic’ origins will only negate a long process of understanding of how the emergence of an Industrial middle class in India led to the creation of the typical ‘proletarian-family’ and idealization of the ‘house-keeping proletarian wife’; not thwarting the existent north-Indian patriarchal order, rather, reinforcing it all the more dramatically. Gender, Religion and Caste

are thus all significant variables in the equation, only their effects are not simply interceptal, rather inter-active; something that needs to be incorporated in the mainstream discourse on understanding the structure and functioning of Indian labour-markets. Moreover, what needs to be understood is that the sugar-coated theories of ‘development is a time-taking process’ are way past their shelf-life and the state cannot continue to shrug its shoulders off the responsibility of levelling the playing-field by hiding behind this outdated armour. Dissenting voices cannot be suppressed at gun-point. The market for opinion is too large to be rigged!

The onus and responsibility of progressive social transformation rests with the state and the causation of change has to be directioned from the state to society and not vice versa. The responsibility of ensuring that the state delivers this change is ours though, that is where the civil society rightly comes in, not in replacing the state, rather in holding it accountable. It must be remembered that the Constitution, despite all its provisions for equality, liberty and justice, is not a guarantee of the same, it is only a set of promises; only a desired framework of social and political organization, not the superstructure per se. Quoting Amit Bhaduri, in ‘Development with Dignity’ (2005), “We must think of reducing all forms of inequality and poverty as an integral part of our growth agenda. Achieving high growth rates first and distributional goals later is a strategy that has miserably failed in South Asia in the last five decades”.

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