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Caste-Gender Intersections in Contemporary India

Introduction. Debating Intersectionalities: Challenges for a Methodological Framework

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Introduction. Debating Intersectionalities: Challenges for a Methodological Framework

Supurna Banerjee and Nandini Ghosh

1 On the tails of the #metoo movement,¹ a list containing names of alleged sexual offenders in institutions of higher education in India and academics of Indian origin elsewhere was compiled by law student Raya Sarkar.² The names were allegedly collected from women who had been prey to the kind of sexual harassment denounced by the movement. The circulation of the list led to a statement by thirteen frontline feminists asking for its immediate withdrawal. They expressed fear that such “manner of naming can delegitimize the long struggle against sexual harassment, and make our task as feminists more difficult” (Menon 2017, emphasis ours).³ The tone underlying the statement was criticized as dismissive and pedantic (e.g. Pal 2017), which caused much criticism and splintered the debate into two groups.



2 It would be simplistic to say that the opposition was between feminists of the upper caste or *savarna* (of “higher birth”) and Dalit-Bahujan feminists. But caste identity (assumed, claimed or assigned) played a major role in the construction and crystallization of those two groups. The voices that had called for the withdrawal of Sarkar’s list were all established feminists who, through their consistent struggles against patriarchy, had

played a significant role in shaping the mainstream women's movement and thus attributed to themselves a taken-for-granted position of power. These women, as called out by their critics, were *savarna*. In this case, however, being *savarna* was not only about birth status but also access to social and cultural capital. On the other hand Raya Sarkar's Dalit origin (and her claim that many of those who sent her the names of their harassers were also Dalit students) brought out the question of caste hierarchy within the feminist movement. This question is further complicated by the fact Sarkar is a citizen of Singapore and a law student in the USA, which gives her relative access to privilege, as she herself pointed out.⁴ It is beyond the scope of this introduction to add at length to these very important discussions but some points relevant to the current issue need to be made here. These are central to the concerns of this volume and seek to understand how power and marginalization in everyday life is structured through intersectional marginalities.

- 3 In her commentary, Shreya Iliya Anasuya (2017) points out that the multiple power imbalances within the feminist movement draw on not only one's gender but also sexual orientation, caste, class and other factors, and determine whose views are taken seriously when a feminist stance is espoused. The difference which broke out between the strands of the women's movement cannot be dismissed as simply divergent opinions. Disagreements here are a product of lived experiences, which are constructed by how one is situated within social hierarchies. The articulation of the discussion has taken place in ways that make no room for the acknowledgement of difference within the women's movement. The debates have shown how the women's movement cannot be understood by a blind faith in universal sisterhood. It is defined not just by gender but—among other things—caste affiliations as well. One's positionality within these affiliations leads to contestations regarding who gets to define feminism and whose actions are met with censorship. Srila Roy (2017) notes how Dalit Bahujan and other minority activists have framed this controversy in terms of power imbalances between *savarna* and Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi feminists, thus bringing out the invisible caste question within feminist movements and compelling the participants to engage with it.
- 4 The contours of the debate bring to our attention important questions that contextualize this issue. Who gets access to due process? Who are the gatekeepers of social movements and who do they seek to keep out? How are solidarities constructed and broken? Who bears the brunt when public shaming is legitimized? What constitutes being marginalized and what therefore constitutes privilege and power? Through these interrogations, this volume aims to address a more specific question of how caste and gender co-construct each other in crucial aspects of lived experiences such as intimate social relationships and livelihood.
- 5 Social positions are relational and it is the contradiction and collaboration between these that shape everyday social life. Locating the formation of subjectivities within the various processes of the everyday enables an examination of the multiple ways in which variations between different social categories are organized and ordered. In this issue we propose to focus on the processes through which the intersectionality of social characteristics produces specific experiences of marginalization. Purdie-Vaughn and Eibach (2008) identify this practice as proceeding along three channels of invisibility: historical invisibility through misrepresentation or de-emphasis in the mainstream historical narrative which reproduces—in this case—Brahmanical patriarchy; cultural invisibility through the failure of cultural representations to capture the distinctive

experiences of these subordinate groups by organizing themselves around the dominant prototypes which are then stereotyped into generalities; and finally political invisibility through the neglect by advocacy groups of the issues concerning these communities.

- 6 Intersectionality is not just a normative theoretical approach but an alternative approach to conducting research. Challenging universal categories, intersectionality provides a framework which allows us to unearth complex, varied and often contradictory effects which ensue “when multiple axes of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah and Phoenix 2004:76). Intersectionality, we argue, is primarily an organizing principle, a principle which asks for reflexivity in the study of social characteristics, such that one marginality is not substituted by another and lived experiences are not treated as generic and undifferentiated. The value of intersectionality does not lie only in locating hierarchies of social characteristics but also in examining ways in which they become currencies of power, a task which this issue undertakes.
- 7 In this volume, we use intersectionality as an approach to empirical research that indexes the interaction of multiple categories of difference. We have avoided the use of the term identity as an analytical category (unless specifically used in some work) due to its essentialist connotations and used alternative analytical idioms (see Brubaker and Cooper 2000). It is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide a comprehensive overview of the entire debate on intersectionality. Rather, we briefly lay out its history in India in relation to gender and caste. We then engage with some of the critiques of intersectionality which are important to enrich a discussion of intersectionality as a potential research and action framework. Then we go on to propose how intersectionality can be understood as a methodology. Finally we conclude by highlighting some of the important ideas discussed in the papers. However, before proceeding we feel it is important to lay out our own politics of location.
- 8 Being born into middle-class, educated, caste Hindu Bengali families, both of us grew up in a liberal environment with encouragement and resources available for our pursuits in life. In our upbringing, the issue of caste was only fleetingly visible, couched in problematics such as hygiene and culture. Awareness of the ubiquity of caste hierarchies came later, through gradual realization of the dominance of caste Hindus in our educational institutions and larger social circles. But our early academic pursuits still maintained a distance from engaging with questions of caste, though we were concerned with the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Supurna’s work focused on women workers in tea plantations. Nandini worked with and on women with disabilities. In the course of our individual and collective pursuits, it became evident that marginalities in India cannot be understood while bracketing out the question of caste. This meant not only adding caste as a category of analysis but also confronting our own positions and locations—as feminists and as non-Dalit women. It required us to acknowledge and reject (the process of rejection is still ongoing) the norms and rules—including the precious idea of universal sisterhood—through which we become complicit in sustaining this system of exploitation. As Rege (2006) argued, as a non-Dalit feminist, one cannot speak as or speak for Dalit women, but only make an effort to reinvent one’s self as an anti-caste feminist. It is a process which has begun but is far from completion, a process of becoming a comrade in the struggle of Dalit feminism.⁵ This volume is a step in that direction.

Intersectionality in India

- 9 The term intersectionality has only recently been imported into Indian academia but the notion of multiple identities co-constructing marginalities has been consistently discernible on the socio-economic and political canvas of India. From the early 20th century onwards, the non-Brahman movements in Tamil Nadu to the Dalit literary and autobiographical upsurges in Maharashtra in the 1960s, to the continuous episodes of honor killing and atrocities—all illustrate the various complex ways in which caste, gender, and also class intersect to shape the everyday conditions of marginalities.
- 10 Jotirao Phule, a prominent social reformer and thinker of 19th century India noted that the control over women's liberty coincided with rise of Brahmanism. He argued that the Aryan invasion and its subsequent practices brought out gender and caste discriminations in three specific ways—child-marriage, enforced widowhood and the *sati* system. While Phule spoke about dual marginalities, acknowledging the power differentials between men and women that caused the latter to be marginalized, he viewed caste and gender more as parallel categories of marginalities which shaped one's socio-economic reality. The alliance he established between the non-Brahman forces of Stri-Shudra-AtiShudra (women-lower castes-untouchables) (Deshpande 2002) was an important coalition against caste patriarchy, which perpetuates itself through control over women's choices and bodies. Equally significant was the work of Savitribai Phule, his wife, who became a symbol of anti-caste feminism. Savitribai, a radical non-conformist, was an educationist and social activist committed to the service of all oppressed groups. She spearheaded many progressive movements located at the interstices of caste and patriarchy.
- 11 E. V. Ramasamy (Periyar) was the main proponent of the Self-Respect Movement as a counter to Gandhi. It was a social and cultural movement of revolt—against caste, Brahmanism, religion and the rule of men over women (Geetha 1998). Much like Phule, he also held lower castes and women to be the most marginalized subjects of Indian history. For him their emancipation was possible only by reversing the social order on which the caste system was built. He argued that the Brahmanical order created dual (and not intersectional) marginalities for the lower castes and women. The Self-Respect movement would involve renouncing caste privileges and religious faith, thus remaking society along non-hierarchical lines (Geetha 1998:11).
- 12 There is a continuity between this trajectory and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideas. There are two aspects to Ambedkar's understanding of caste and gender identities. The first, much like Phule and Periyar, recognizes the marginal position that Dalits and women hold in a Brahmanical society. In *Who Were the Shudras* ([1946] 2013:166) he shows how excluding women and Dalits from the framework of central Hindu rituals such as Upanayana⁶ provided a legitimation for them to be prevented from owning properties as well, thereby having material consequences in their lives. Ambedkar (1916) also recognized that caste and gender identities were a not only parallel but also intersectional system as is evident in his critique against endogamy and his advocacy for inter-caste marriage. He claims the "superimposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste" (p. 10) pointing out the centrality of endogamous marriages as the means to perpetuate the sanctity of the caste system. Implicit within this is the acknowledgment of how caste norms are played out through gender norms and vice-versa.

- 13 The use of intersectionality to understand what social reality was, however, was not reflected in the mainstream women's movement in India. The women's movement displayed an unproblematic acceptance of a homogenous category of the marginalized woman, at best broken into class and rural/urban categories. While the mainstream Indian feminist community is elite in its upper-caste, middle-class and urban affiliations, it has been reflexive of these limitations to some extent such that much of their campaigns on livelihood and/or sexual violence have been for poor and rural women (John 2005). The collapsing of caste and religion into categories of economic marginalization as represented in the notion of women as "backward classes" has focused on poverty as the primary basis of marginalization. The specificities of the lived experiences shaping their marginalities, however, have been largely ignored.
- 14 Rao (2005a) critiques Indian feminism for adopting a unilinear normative gendered approach while developing strategies for intervention. The materiality of women's marginalities cannot simply be collapsed into a generic class category. This has resulted in reproduction of those margins and hierarchies within the women's movement, where the power imbalance between the castes has persisted and been rendered invisible (Rege 2003). Women whose unification is sought on the basis of systematic overlapping patriarchies are divided along caste/class lines and through their consent to patriarchies and their compensatory structures. To challenge this, feminist modes of organization and struggle should "encompass all of the social inequalities that patriarchies are related to, embedded in and structured by" (Rege 2005:95). In the last couple of decades, however, more attention has been paid to the question of caste and gender intersectionalities (e.g. Rao 2005b; Adcock 2013; Viswanath 2014). This is evident in the development of the Dalit feminist standpoint as a critique of the masculinization of the Dalit (and Dalit studies) and savarnization of the woman (and women/feminist studies). Such an intersectional standpoint acknowledges the multiplicity, heterogeneity and even contradiction present in lived experiences of an individual and group and the resultant hierarchical, multiple and changing power relations of caste, class, race and ethnicity which construct their social realities. Recent works have applied such an intersectional analysis in the context of gender and caste. For instance, in "Gender of Caste" (2016), Charu Gupta throws some light on the so far invisible colonial historiography of caste. She shows how the struggles over Dalit labor, political agency and social value in the early 20th century shaped much of the contours of Indian political life.
- 15 One of the most important interventions in the discourse in the contemporary period has taken place through Dalit literary writings. Autobiographies by Dalit women in different regions of the country e.g. Kalyani Thakur or Chandalini (Bengali), Bama (Tamil), Urmila Pawar (Marathi) among others represent the creation of a counter-public built on lived experiences located through a complex intersection of caste, class and gender. Rege (2006:4) notes how a large part of the feminist discourse of experience has autobiographies of upper-caste woman tracing out the conflicts between tradition and her desire for the modern. Dalit *testimonios* (Rege 2006) as life-narratives of struggle, oppression and humiliation disrupt the singular communitarian notion of the Dalit community.
- 16 While none of the works discussed so far uses the term intersectionality, we argue that their understanding of marginal subjectivities is intersectional. A crucial contribution to conceptualizing and problematizing the idea of intersectionality came out of the Menon-John debate (2015). The debate discusses the contours and usefulness of intersectionality

for feminism in India. While some aspects of the debate will be covered in the next section, the debate (and also its publication in *Economic and Political Weekly*, a journal with great circulation among the left intelligentsia) demonstrated that intersectionality, especially in relation to caste and gender, was being acknowledged by the mainstream feminist movement.⁷

The limits of intersectionality

- 17 Intersectionality is an important analytical tool for understanding complex social realities. But there are also limits to its use and some misuse which has to be considered. Menon (2015) provides an important critique of the usability of the intersectional framework for feminism in India. Much like Dhamoon (2011) she has argued that—from feminists of color to poststructuralists—there has been a consistent theorization of multiple and interlocking vectors of identities. Works variously identified as multiple consciousness, multi-dimensionality and inter-connectivities (e.g. Matsuda 1992; Valdes 1995; Anthias 2001) have demonstrated how the interlocking and constitutive nature of social characteristics fractures the idea of homogeneous and singular experiences. Therefore, much of what has now been brought together under the heading of intersectionality actually predates the term, raising the question of whether it is actually a buzzword.
- 18 Capitalist globalization undermines traditional forms of patriarchy, enables lower castes to abandon their traditional occupations and join new anonymous ones, leads women to new forms of employment often causing them to become primary earners, thus challenging the traditional family set-up (Menon 2015:44). These changes bring in new forms of hierarchies and marginalization through which the Brahmanical patriarchy reproduces itself, as the articles in this volume illustrate. While apparently weakening one another, dominant characteristics persist in new ways in order to re-emphasize control. Akin to Menon's fear that intersectionality fragments opposition to capitalism, Bilge (2013:407) holds that this is made possible by the depoliticization of intersectionality through commodification and colonization for neo-liberal regimes. Intersectionality as a tool for radical social justice and counter-publics faces the threat of being undermined through what Bilge (2013) calls ornamental intersectionality. A video launched by Vogue on Women's Empowerment in 2015 in India (Adajania 2015⁸) precisely brought out this superficial deployment of intersectionality whereby routine claims to emancipation and empowerment were thrown out without any attempt to interrogate the structures that sustained them. This depoliticizes intersectionality into a marketable product.
- 19 Bilge (2013:49) holds disciplinary feminism—a hegemonic intellectual position with regard to knowledge formation which rather than challenging these established parameters focuses on fitting into these—as another limit of intersectionality. The acrimony over Raya Sarkar's list referred to above, points to such occluded positions where both sides are unwilling to reflect on the possible limitations of their stance. As a result of closing off the parameters, what we have is reproduction of marginalization such as exclusion of students in non-elite, small rural institutions from the contours of this debate. Such instances illustrate a recurrence of power struggles through opportunity structures and turf wars within specific fields.

- 20 When treated as a shopping list of categories, intersectionality can result in the commodification of these analytical categories, further marginalizing specific experiences of oppression. This is one specific danger: intersectionality can be used to deflect attention away from racism (Ahmed 2012; Bilge 2013). Such modes of deflection can also be seen to avert attention from casteism. While a debate concerning the identification of the primary contradiction (the main marker of difference), is fruitless—it would solidify boundaries rather than productively open them up—Menon (2015:42) argues that what is needed is to recognize that in diverse contexts the salience of these boundaries will vary, requiring ossified categories to be tentatively destabilized by the other.
- 21 Shah and Lerche (2017) critique intersectionality from a Marxist point of view. They acknowledge that the spread of capitalism in India has not done away with “identity based relations” but rather entrenched them (Shah and Lerche 2017:1). Using the idea of conjugated exploitation (Bourgeois 1988) they prioritize the analysis of political economy under which caste, class, gender, region and religion are all linked (Shah and Lerche 2017:13–15). They argue, following from Bourgeois, that the concept of conjugated oppression can be used to show the differences within and the fracturing of the labor force resulting in different kinds of difficulties experienced by different groups at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy (Shah and Lerche 2017:26).
- 22 Shah and Lerche’s (2017) critique of intersectionality is, however, not very convincing as they hold it to treat different social markers as discrete entities. But in the previous sections we have argued that the very value of intersectionality, in fact, lies in its acknowledgment of the mutually constitutive nature of social categories and the consequent location of groups. Shah and Lerche focus on how identity-based social oppression is constitutive of one’s access to the means of production and reproduction, thus centering a political-economy analysis. Their subscription to Bourgeois’ concept of conjugated oppression makes a distinction between economic and ideological processes of domination reproducing the base-superstructure binary, hinting towards a primary contradiction argument whereby the other categories conjugate class oppression rather than being acknowledged in their own specificities. This does not allow for the recognition of the distinctiveness of how these categories specifically structure domination/marginalization, creating the danger of treating such different categories as replaceable by one another. This critique however has the merit of bringing to our attention the fact that intersectionality can retain its usefulness only by being attentive to “historical contingencies, specific contexts and the purposes of specific arguments” (Bilge 2013:420). Understanding mechanics of power, domination, exploitation and inequality through an intersectional lens is essential if we are to think of intersectional politics.

From intersectional analysis to intersectional politics

- 23 These criticisms urge us toward a more reflexive use of the term rather than its rejection. It is important to not give up on intersectionality as it has within itself the potential to address these challenges. While we echo suspicion of any universal paradigm (e.g. Bilge 2013; Menon 2015), we stress that intersectionality has the potential to address and analyze specific empirical contexts. It provides us the tool needed to accurately state the problem (John 2015). Unlike identity politics, intersectionality—by rejecting the

notion of primary contradiction—offers an outlook on sharpening the analysis and exploring the specific ways in which forms of power and dominance mutually reinforce each other. This provides possibilities of dialogue among marginal groups and an outlook on coalition as well as mutual recognition of their specific experiences of domination.

- 24 The radical deployment of intersectionality with a focus on the context will allow for the emergence of specific experiences of the marginalities of different groups. While one consequence of abandoning intersectionality is to understand marginalities as additives (once again going back to the primary contradiction argument), the other is that it homogenizes experiences of marginalization. This presents the danger of bringing about an “add marginalities and stir” approach. In her discussion of curriculum development, Rege (2006) points to this problem of treating experiences of Black/Third World/Dalit women as interchangeable. As the articles in this volume illustrate, the divergences and commonalities between these experiences provide scope for greater reflexivity and solidarity. In the present political context of India, this need for intersectional politics is especially important to prevent playing one minority against the other, as is evidenced in instances of landless Dalits being mobilized by Hindu right wing forces against the poor Muslim population (Teltumbde 2005). Homogenizing experiences of peripheries leads to obscuring the marginality of the other and produces a competition for accessing fringe-level benefits rather than systemic reforms leading to fundamental transformation. The political landscape necessitates a radical intersectional praxis which offers the potential to establish non-oppressive political coalitions between various social justice movements, which at present often seem to be competing with each other under the neoliberal regime (Bilge 2013:405). Intersectionality makes possible a political praxis of coalition-building by disorienting habits of essentialism, categorical purity and segregation in constituting movements. By providing an exposition of how marginalization is framed as a product of one’s location at specific points of intersection between identifications, intersectionality provides an outlook on the search for common interest as was evident in the Dalit-Muslim alliance against right-wing fascism in the Gujarat elections of 2017, which led to the victory of the independent candidate Jignesh Mevani.⁹ For diverse social groups, coming together on the basis of their common experiences of inequality and/or agency without losing sight of their differences, intersectionality can be a powerful tool for social change.

Methodological intersections: intersectionality as a research paradigm

- 25 The difficulty involved in conducting empirical intersectional research is compounded by the methodological challenges in exploring intersectionality. The indistinctiveness that can crop up in how intersectionality can be practiced as research paradigm has led scholars like Davis (2008) to label intersectionality as a theoretical buzzword. Researching and writing about multiple forms of differentiation without essentializing these categories or fragmenting the research subject, poses a significant methodological challenge. How does the researcher locate the relevant categories of difference in a particular context in answering a specific research question? How does one ensure that such research does not re-essentialize fixed categories of belonging, but rather looks into their interaction and thus mutual constitution (Carstensen-Egwuom [2014:265–66])? We propose lived experiences provide the possibility of exploring how intersectionality

works in practice. By mapping the fractured nature of the everyday, a lived-experience approach allows us an outlook of openness to competing interpretations through which it not only illustrates the multi-dimensionality of hegemonic facts but can, in fact, script some resistance to it.

- 26 Lived experience is the experience of being a subject (Sarukkai 2012). We argue that this subjectivity of experience cannot be separated into neat categories of gender on the one hand and caste on the other. They are rather simultaneous, linked and contextual. The four papers gathered here study lived experiences in different contexts to understand the multiple ways in which inherited social characteristics intersect with each other in complementary and/or contradictory ways. Rather than trying to locate their work in pre-determined categories, the study of lived experiences enables the authors to study social stratification in a non-hierarchical way.
- 27 The first paper by Kumar examines the restructuring of farming practices, under the new economic policy, in villages in Andhra Pradesh; this process is mediated by locally exalted ideals and practices of masculinity originating in a particular conception of caste-class norms among the Reddy castes. The contemporary reshuffling not only deepens material inequalities and ecological degradation, but also re-creates gendered identities and practices. Kunduri's paper looks at the labor markets through the lens of migrants arriving in cities in North India and their negotiation of their multiple identities of caste and gender in relation to changing spatiality. The multiple social categories which construct the migrants, not only cross-cut, define and shape each other, but often are what constitute the agency of these migrant workers in the face of shifting spatiality with its changing norms. Hebbar's paper captures the intimate aspirations, marriage strategies and negotiations of young women in an engineering college in Tamil Nadu. Relationship trajectories develop on a terrain of intersectionality between caste and gender which, while shifts in endogamy also point towards the creation of suitably acceptable subjectivities in the women's strategies to convince their families regarding their choice of mate. Rao's work explores the strategic choices of domesticity, versus the choice of livelihood opportunities, exercised by women in order to have a semblance of control over their everyday lives.
- 28 Kumar and Hebbar's papers use ethnography and Kunduri and Rao use long interviews. Both these methods permit an exploration of the lived experiences of their research participants and unearth the intersectionality of multiple social characteristics such as caste and gender as intrinsic to these. For ethnographies, the everyday life of the participants is the central site of the produced narratives, which allows for the mapping of transactions, negotiations and nuances of their lives. The fluidity made possible in ethnography is often absent in interviews as they have some form of thematic focus. Rao and Kunduri, however, do not conduct their interviews looking for relevant social categories. Rather, studying aspects of lived experience like migration (Kunduri) and conjugal loyalty (Rao), they are able to reach beyond set frameworks and rather map the emergence of intersectional categories as intrinsic to these lived experiences. The specific ways these intersectionalities play out are not consistent across the contexts both within and between papers, as is evident in the dissimilar performance of masculinity in Kumar's and Kunduri's papers, and the ways in which "choice" plays out in Rao's and Hebbar's.
- 29 While unsettling the use of categories and prioritizing the emergence of intersectionality through the fluidity of lived experiences is the methodological backbone here, it is not the intention of this issue to deny the existence of a structural system of domination.

Rather the articles illustrate the lived experiences of being dominated by, negotiating, subverting and/or being co-opted by these structures. As the articles argue, these experiences are not neatly amenable to categorization but are different, unequal and contextual. The notions of respectability mediated through a specific playing out of caste-gender-class norms are evident in both Rao and Hebbar's papers. The nature of negotiation, however, varies in the two papers, not just because of their different locations but through the mapping of the dissimilar lived experiences of the women they studied. In such cases an intersectional research method allows for non-essentialized understanding of the lines of difference it creates (Carstensen-Egwuom 2014:266). Through reading the lived experiences of the community, Kumar's ethnography illustrates how the valorization of aggression is the product of the intersection between caste, gender and class norms in his context. It makes it possible to shed light on blind spots of power. The illustration of the diverse ways in which power relations, institutional contexts and lived experiences connect is made possible by understanding lived experiences as intersectional.

- 30 One of the key objectives of this volume is to map the disruptive and the fragmented. Theoretically, considering the challenges of intersectionality would enable a grounded discussion of what the methodological possibilities of pursuing intersectionality in any meaningful way are. This is precisely what this introduction hopes to do. While we foreground the similarities between the articles below, there are significant differences between them as well. It will be interesting for the readers to see how each author has used lived experiences to map where and how discourses on power and domination/marginalization emerge, and the very intersectionality of these. We feel this approach to research enables a grounded exploration of the everyday and opens up the possibility for liberating agendas as a tool for resistance.

The organization of the issue

- 31 The four papers in this issue span India from south to north, covering both rural and urban contexts. The two broad categories in which the articles can be located are livelihood and intimate social relations though there are interconnections between these themes. Many works (e.g. Chowdhry 2009) illustrate that livelihood and control over women through marriage are very closely connected.
- 32 Class difference has often subsumed within it other identities, most importantly in the case of India the specific caste-gender (and often religious) intersections, much like race and gender intersections shape class in other contexts (see for e.g. Dill 2002; Bowleg 2008). In this scenario, one is reminded of the *bhodrolok* (gentleman) in West Bengal, ostensibly left-minded and liberal as a parallel to Periyar's colonial subject—both of whom are male, upper-caste, middle-class subjects who dominate the civic and national life of their states (Geetha 1998:9-10). The *bhodrolok* is a category that renders invisible the hegemony of the upper caste in socio-economic and cultural life.¹⁰ The critical use of the lens of livelihood is often useful to draw out caste-gender intersections in many such hidden areas, subsumed under the simplistic explanation of class difference. The first two articles by Kumar and Kunduri submit that class is not an isolated category of analysis and discernible class differences are often a product of caste and gender intersections, and that this category frequently frames the specific ways in which class relations play out.

- 33 Labor and livelihood norms produce and reproduce gendered practices and codes within which they are embedded. These practices are not uniform as they are also products of stratification structures. Therefore the strategies adopted by the people also have to take into account these intersectional social realities. Ideologies that legitimize low-caste women's practice of demeaning labor in turn produces and naturalizes their poverty and exploitation, problematizing the very framing of livelihood practices as *jobs*. Not only are questions of dignity and stigma imbued in caste ideology, as the two papers demonstrate, but the very act of gendered labor remains embedded within a particular casteist understanding of masculinity and femininity.
- 34 Understanding the labor and livelihood questions embedded in caste-gender norms problematizes particular types of feminization of labor as well as masculinities. What does caste-class mobility spell out for changing notions of masculinity? Kumar's paper shows the very action of aggression not only becomes an expression of masculinity but of a very particular type of masculinity located within cultural constructions. Kunduri's exploration of migrant workers illustrates how migration and its implications are understood differently by men and women, even though they share similar caste-class backgrounds. Both demonstrate how livelihoods are constructed within the prevailing paradigms of caste and gender not only in making certain forms of work available to certain people but also in the norms that define work practices and notions of dignity and stigma. The caste pride implicit in the notion of livelihood is a strand that runs through all four papers.
- 35 Jobs are an index not just of one's class status but also of caste pride (Hebbar). Perception of class and/or professions cannot be understood without looking at questions of caste profession. Upper-caste middle-class masculinity enables access to certain career choices which are threatened when lower castes access the same professions thus decasteizing these professions. Through access to professions hitherto closed to the lower castes, caste mobility is also the backdrop to Rao's paper, the enabling environment in which negotiations take place.
- 36 The category of status has been deconstructed in all the papers as the lens through which intersections of masculinization and casteization of livelihoods and therefore of social relationships can be understood. They have different imports in different empirical settings. While for Kumar and Kunduri status is an aspirational value for caste mobility, Rao and Hebbar demonstrate how this very aspiration for status becomes the mode for the women's negotiation within their families (i.e. caste groups). It allows women the leeway to negotiate the terms of conjugality and often the decision to work or not.
- 37 Labor and livelihood relations are entrenched within the context of intimate social relations. Gupta (2016:15) argues that intimacy is a useful lens for talking about caste, not just through categories, politics and structural and institutional inequalities, but as an idea made material through the physical body and allowing us to see the subtle manner in which the politics of caste permeate the most intimate spaces of our lives. Rao and Hebbar's papers illustrate how intimate social relationships are based on complex equations of affect and regulation. Association between caste and gender in the arena of social relationships can be understood as a means by which to regulate sexuality, configure ties of kinship and maintain the extant social hierarchies and codes. These relations of affect are not just embraced but actively negotiated both by men and women. Besides unearthing the intrinsic connection between strategies of affect and livelihood,

the papers also hint at how affect itself is mediated through caste, class and gender intersections.

- 38 Two of the papers in this issue explore how romantic love is deployed as a strategy for overcoming the social expectations coming from one's location at a particular intersection between caste, class and gender. It enables women to negotiate conjugal loyalty from their husbands, make demands that challenge the gender norms of the matrimonial home (Rao) or enables them to exercise some agency over choosing their marriage partners even if within the same kinship and caste network (Hebbar). But the authors quickly remind us that the transformative potential of affect is limited. The disciplining of intimacy within channels of endogamy and honor are evident in both the articles. Love affairs threaten the premium placed on women's chastity. Expressions of masculinity through *tiagam* or industry as in Kumar's paper and femininity through chastity or *karpu* in Hebbar's paper illustrate how the ideas of caste honor are intrinsically gendered. Rao also demonstrates that as a performance, marriage remains central in the imbrications between caste, kinship and sexuality and there are therefore limits to what the women can negotiate. The changing nature of marital negotiations, centered on reproductive bodies—while they enable some form of empowerment in terms of questions of work and the performance of domesticity—also re-inscribe new forms of patriarchal and caste control through the continued persistence of the notions of shame, honor, appropriate behavior and the like.
- 39 Caste specific patriarchies exert hegemonic control over the sexuality of women, yet the agency of women in terms of their performance and negotiation with system's casteist patriarchy is clear. The common strains and the differences between the papers show how similar phenomena captured primarily through the lens of livelihoods and intimate social relationships play out differently in different social contexts thus illustrating the contextual nature of caste-gender intersectionalities.

Moving Forward

- 40 Intersectionality as an engagement with *intersecting* social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination offers the possibility of unraveling the simultaneity of subjugations. The present political context urges the need for a move from intersectional analysis to intersectional politics—a politics of recognizing differences and creating alliances across these. It is here that we need to be very careful that the term is not just appropriated in order to fragment marginalities and set them against each other. Crenshaw (1991) has argued that political strategies which do not seek to dismantle existing hierarchies but rather superficially challenge certain subordinating practices end up marginalizing those subject to multiple marginalities. At the same it also has the effect of playing marginalities against each other by oppositionalizing class/race/caste/religion/gender discourses, something which we are presently witnessing. It can be a powerful tool for countering our failure to “see” both at the political and discursive level (John 2015:73) and for using this newfound sight productively.
- 41 Intersectionality is a theory and praxis, an analytical and political tool wielded by those facing multiple subordinations. It can be a powerful mechanism for building coalitions across these marginalities, for the purpose of confronting and combating the interlocking systems of power that shape their lives, by using theoretical and empirical knowledge production integrated with activism, advocacy and reflexive pedagogy (Dill and

Zambrana 2009). We present this volume, hoping that it will stimulate further commitment to exploring the nebulous and fragile, yet structurally secure and systemic axes of dominations/oppressions.

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NOTES

1. <https://thewire.in/191500/me-too-harvey-weinstein-sexual-harassment/>
2. This introduction emerges from the ideas we have developed over the course of several conversations with colleagues and friends. It will be difficult to name them all individually but we wish to extend our gratitude to Virginie Dutoya and Nicolas Jaoul for their insightful addition to these conversations. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions.
3. <https://kafila.online/2017/10/24/statement-by-feminists-on-facebook-campaign-to-name-and-shame/>
4. "Sarkar, formerly a student at OP Jindal Global University believes that her Singaporean nationality and American residence will shield her to an extent from potential defamation suits" (Shankar 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/karthikshankar/why-i-published-a-list-of-sexual-predators-in-academia?utm_term=.ujMGelrXG#.jsrAMNmeA). As subsequent discussions unfolded, her Dalit status also became unclear.
5. The debate as to whether non-Dalit feminists can call themselves Dalit is an important one, for in this act of solidarity there is also the possibility of appropriation, an appropriation made possible by the privilege of our position. Invoking Hall's (1992) formulation about how giving up power is a radically different experience from being silenced, we consciously refrain from calling ourselves Dalit feminists and rather consider ourselves to be anti-caste feminists.
6. A Hindu ritual of initiation restricted to males of the top three castes that marks the male child's entrance into the life of a student (*brahmacharin*) and his acceptance as a full member of his religious community. The ceremony is performed between the ages of 5 and 24, the wide variance reflecting the different educational requirements of the three upper classes. For more details see Encyclopaedia Britannica (N.d., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/upanayana>).
7. An intersectional feminist or Dalit movement also necessitates asking the question of the intersections between sexuality and the invisibility of questions of queerness within these movements. While beyond the scope of this issue, the intersections between sexuality, gender and caste need to be examined with much greater seriousness in both academic and activist circles.
8. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtPv7IEhWRA>
9. <https://newsclick.in/dalit-and-muslim-are-coming-together-gujarat>
10. For detailed discussions see Sinharoy (2012), Chatterjee (2012), Chandra and Nielsen (2012), Samaddar (2013).

ABSTRACTS

Intersectionality is primarily an organizing principle which calls for reflexivity in the study of social characteristics, such that one marginality is not substituted for another and lived experiences are not treated as generic and undifferentiated. Critiques of intersectionality have feared that intersectionality results in the fragmentation of the opposition to structural oppression. We argue for the potentialities of a reflexive use of intersectionality rather than its rejection, for this intersectionality has to be applied as a method of research. Lived experiences provide the possibility to explore how intersectionality works in practice. By mapping the fractured nature of the everyday, a lived-experience approach allows us to be open to competing interpretations, thereby not only illustrating the multi-dimensionality of what is constructed as hegemonic fact, but also can in fact script some resistance to it. Consequently, this article thus argues in addition in favor of a radical intersectional praxis as a means of building coalitions across marginalities.

INDEX

Keywords: intersectionality, caste, gender, feminism, Dalits, categories, lived experience

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