

Block

2

GENDER AND OTHER STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

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UNIT 1 CLASS AND GENDER

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 2 we will read about structural inequalities like caste, class, race and ethnicity and how these structures are affected by gender. You will read in the first unit, how class as a category of division in our society has further detrimental effects when seen from a gendered lens. Besides feminist debates on class, we will also look at how women are treated as a reserve army of labour and what is the feminist perspective on domestic labour. It is important to locate these ideas within a historical context. Therefore, you will read about the historical context of gender and class with respect to the industrialized world of Europe and how it influences Indian society.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the relationship between Feminism and Marxism;
- Describe the theoretical formulations on class and gender;
- Analyze the role of gender and class in Industrial Europe; and
- Examine the role of gender and class in Indian context.

1.3 BACKGROUND

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, three major struggles against inequality dominated relations within and between societies- (a) on the question of economic inequalities within societies, a question that gained increasing importance with the development of industrial capitalism and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor; (b) on the question of imagined differences between peoples based on the colour of their skin or their location within unequal terms of global trade, leading, for instance, to colonization of major parts of Asia, Africa and Australia by a few countries of the industrialized west as well as an immense global mobilization of labour; and (c) on the question of the discrimination against and denial of opportunities to women in relation to men, a problem common to almost countries but taking very different forms in different historical and cultural settings.

A major concern of social theory in these two long centuries has been to understand the relationship between these three different relationships of inequality, to analyse their intersections, to explore possible commonalities and dissonances and to seek ways of linking the struggles against them. In these endeavours, there have not always been agreements. While most social theories see links between these three forms of domination, they disagree not only about the nature of these linkages but also regarding their relative explanatory force and the path towards their resolution.

From the late nineteenth century, there have been many debates about how class differences complicate women's demand for equality. At that time, the women's movement was focused on the realization of rights like those of education, employment, property and the vote, which were seen as primarily the concern of middle class women even though the demands were made on behalf of all women. Women who were active in the leftist movements of the time, now called Marxist Feminists, regarded the concerns of working-class women- better wages and working conditions- to be more urgent and to be striven for within the framework of socialist struggles. An equal society, it was believed, would also mean the end of discrimination against women. Women leaders at the forefront of the struggle for the vote, often labeled Liberal Feminists, were not willing to defer their immediate concerns to the long-term goals of socialism.

The debate, between 'sex' and 'class' became more intense in the second phase of the women's movement, which began in the 1960s. By this time, socialist revolutions in many countries (beginning with Russia) had taken place and the prediction that women would in such conditions achieve equality with men was proved wrong. Moreover, a strand of Radical Feminists were arguing that patriarchy pre-dated class and was more fundamental in

understanding social inequality. There were long arguments about the relative analytical primacy of 'sex' and 'class'. In this context, one strand of feminist thinkers sought to reconceptualise the relationship between women and class. Their distinctive contribution was the **Dual Systems Theory**, which sought to deploy sex and class in inter-relationship without granting primacy to either.

The classification of these different varieties of feminist thought has not been without controversy. At one time, the earlier generation of feminists, who worked within socialist movements, was termed **Socialist Feminists** while the thinkers who sought to reconcile sex and class analysis in the 1960s and 70s were called **Marxist Feminists**. In recent years, the terms have been used in the reverse since the earlier feminists, it is argued, were more committed to a specific Marxist line of analysis giving primacy to class, while the later feminists took a broader view of socialist theory. Some commentators prefer the term Socialist Feminism for the entire body of feminist thought developed in relationship to class analysis. This terminological debate can sometimes cause undue confusion; for the purpose of this unit, the last position is adopted, i.e., the term Socialist Feminism is used for all these strands of analysis, the conceptual basis of some of which is discussed in brief below. Now that we have a better understanding of the background against which struggles in opposition to inequality were taking shape, let us begin by looking at some early debates linking feminism with Marxism.

1.4 FEMINISM AND MARXISM: EARLY DEBATES

The idea of women's inequality came to public attention in 1792, with the publication of **Mary Wollstonecraft's** *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She argued in favour of equality between women and men on the basis of a common rational capacity. Her feminist vision came together with the thinking of a number of utopian socialists, whose vision of an egalitarian society included sexual equality in the family and in society at large. These thinkers were seeking to understand and overturn the divisions between rich and poor that had arisen in consequence of the industrialisation in many of the countries of Western Europe. **Karl Marx** and **Friedrich Engels** sought, for the first time, to place the question of social inequality within a broader theoretical framework of history and social change and thereby to provide a basis for realization of an equal society. Termed **Scientific Socialism** (or **Communism**), this theory provided a vantage for questioning and challenging all forms of social hierarchies. It is thus that Marx's idea (or Marxism) has had a deep influence on Feminism, even though the relationship between the two has been contentious.

It should be noted that though the term 'class' has been deployed in many different ways, it is Karl Marx's notion of class and class struggle framed within his theory of Scientific Socialism, which has been the most influential. What was Marx's distinctive contribution? He adopted an approach called '**historical materialism**' to show that successive modes of production (such as slavery, feudalism or capitalism) are each constituted by a distinctive relationship (class) between the direct producers and the owners of the means of productions (who appropriate the major share of the production), in each case leading to a distinctive form of social conflict (class struggle) and thus to social change (to another mode of production).

Box No.1.1

Oppression and exploitation are common to all class societies, but the form this takes depends on the mode in which the owners of the means of production appropriate the surplus of the labour of the direct producers- and these arrangements also inform the corresponding specific forms of the state. The appropriators are thus the oppressors- the ruling class, and the direct producers are the oppressed (or exploited) - the ruled.

As a further step, Marx argues that while social organizations and cultural expressions may exhibit infinite variations depending on their specific historical context, they are linked to a specific mode of production. In his analysis, therefore, the economic basis has an explanatory primacy- and class struggle is the engine of social change. This is why Marx was criticized for economic determinism and why Marxists sought to explain women's inequality in terms of and through class differentiation.

The one mode of production that Marx himself analyzed in great detail was capitalism. He understood it as a unique historical form aimed at the maximisation of profit in a competitive market system, based on wage labour. The owners of capital, capitalists, strive towards higher productivity of labour; in capitalism, labour is not only legally free but also '**proletarianised**', i.e., free of any means of production. Unable to produce their own subsistence, labourers are forced to work for capitalists, who pay them enough to live on and appropriate what is left- the surplus. The surplus is transformed into profit for capitalists and this drives the system. Given the centrality of wage labour in this analysis, it is on the relations of labour and capital that Marx focused. His collaborator, **Friedrich Engels**, however, wrote an enormously influential tract called ***The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*** (1884), using historical materialism to understand the development of family and the nature of women's labour. Though the book was published after Marx's death, it is supposed to be based on notes that Engels and Marx made on the research of anthropologist

Lewis Henry Morgan, who had published *Ancient Society* in 1877. It is thus considered a pivotal text in Marxist theory.

In *The Origin*, Engels historicises the family, tracing its origin to the rise of class society. In his view, like the state, the family emerged to serve the interest of a small ruling class seeking to maintain control over their property. In pre-class societies, women and men enjoyed unrestricted sexual freedom, a system he called 'hetaerism'. In such a society there was no means of determining fatherhood. Consequently, he argues, descent could only be traced by the female line in compliance with maternal law, and this was universally practiced by all the nations of antiquity. In such a society, women as mothers received a high tribute of respect and deference, amounting to a women's rule (**gynaicocracy**). Moreover, in these pre-class hunter-gatherer societies, women were usually in charge of the gathering and growing of crops. The work performed by women was central to the group's survival, and therefore valued highly. With the accumulation of surplus came the rise in private property; and men came to control the sphere of production. The monogamous family became the means by which property could be passed down from generation to generation. Marriage was little more than a property relationship. As the demand for surplus increased, so did the demand for labor. Women were now required to produce more children to perform more labor. Marriage was a means of ensuring paternity as well as tying women to the household. The division of labor between men and women did not change, but production was moved out of the household. Household management lost its public character and became private service. The wife became, in Engels' words, 'the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production' (Engels, 1884).

Given that the exclusion from social production and the control over her reproduction was the basis of women's oppression within the monogamous family, a crucial element in Engels' argument is that capitalism, through the processes of proletarianisation, draws women back into the mainstream of productive activity as wage labour. This is a positive development, since it takes them out of the isolation of the household, and forms the basis for a more egalitarian family, where men and women both participate in wage-earning. This also provides the basis for the argument that socialism would be liberating for women already established as workers. On both these counts, Engels has been proved wrong. Nowhere have working-class families been noticeably egalitarian. And, socialism, when it came, did not lead either to the abolition of the monogamous family or to the emancipation of women. Engels, feminists have argued, underestimated the powerful role of ideology underpinning women's inequality. His predictions, moreover, have been the basis of a strand of socialist feminism, which considers class struggle to be more important than a feminist movement. Most feminists are suspicious of such a strategy. However, his insights inspired an early

generation of socialist feminists. Perhaps the most important leaders of early socialism were Alexandra Kollontai (Russia), Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg (Germany). In the next section, let's look at some later developments in socialist feminism.

1.5 FEMINISM AND MARXISM: SOME LATER THEORETICAL FORMULATIONS

In the 1960s, radical feminists concluded that Marxism had failed as a theory of history and a theory of oppression because it did not account for the origins, structure and dynamic of male domination and it did not recognize women's oppression as fundamental. They rejected Marxism as a basis for understanding women's oppression and socialism as a viable vehicle for social change. In response, some socialist feminists, who acknowledged this critique of Marxism as valid but nevertheless wished to retain its insights in the struggle against capitalism, sought to address feminist concerns with Marxist theoretical tools.

Feminist theorists, who have worked within the Marxist theoretical framework, have drawn heavily on the Engelsian paradigm, to focus particularly on questions of women's work. Several insights have emerged from this rich body of research- (a) women work as unpaid housewives and mothers thereby subsidising the capitalist system indirectly; (b) since women provide many services at relatively low cost for their male partners, male workers are willing to accept lower wages for their own work; and (c) women are more likely than men to be employed in low paid jobs within the capitalist system and men are more likely than women to own private property within the capitalist system. Two of the very influential theses developed in this context are discussed below:

- women as reserve army of labour
- the domestic labour debate.

1.5.1 Women as Reserve Army of Labour

This thesis is associated with the writings of **Veronica Beechey**, though many others have also contributed to this debate. According to Marx, capitalist economies fluctuate causing increased demands for labour during economic booms and reduced demands for labour during economic slumps. Capitalists seek flexibility to vary employment levels in accordance with these economic fluctuations. At any particular time, the existence of a reserve army of labour increases competition for jobs and helps to depress average wage levels. According to Veronica Beechey (1977) women are the more significant part of the reserve army of labour and this helps to explain the disadvantaged employment situation of some women.

The theory assumes that it is easier to dismiss women or ask them to work part-time during a recession and then to re-employ them during a boom because they are prepared to return to their traditional housewife-mother role; they can still rely on the husband's wage as the main source of income for the family because in any case men are better paid; women's part-time jobs are less likely to be covered fully by redundancy legislation.

This theory has been challenged on empirical and theoretical grounds. Recent research has shown that fluctuations in women's employment have not always followed the logic of economic cycles. In fact, moving the spotlight to countries other than advanced capitalisms of the west reveals very different relations between men and women to the labour market. Even more importantly, it has not proved possible to establish whether women's labour functions causally as a reserve army of labour or whether such a theory explains women's inequality in the labour force.

1.5.2 The Domestic Labour Debate

This debate began with **Margaret Benston's** classic article 'The Political Economy of Women's Liberation' (1969) in which she used a Marxist analytical framework to understand household labour. It was an attempt to derive an explanation of the oppression of women from the labour theory of value, linking housework to the accumulation of capital. Women's unpaid labor in the home is seen as functional for the accumulation process. Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James (1972) argued that the housewife produces labour power- people who can sell their labour to employers (hence, reproduction). This makes the family a 'social factory', creating (through procreation) and maintaining (through domestic work) labour power that is vital to capitalism. According to Costa and James 'women are the slaves of the wage slaves'. Wally Secombe argued that domestic labour is an example of what Marx called unproductive labour- that is; domestic labour produces labour power, and hence indirectly produces surplus value for capitalists who hire that labour power (1974). In addition, he comments that since women are physically isolated at home and exploited indirectly they have less power to change society than men.

This has been an enormously influential debate, raising a number of related theoretical questions and campaign issues such as the meaning of family wage, the valuation of work and payment for housework. Further empirical explorations have shown the complex inter-relationships between productive work and household work in different historical contexts, since even capitalism does not always effect a clear separation of the two. Indeed, this debate has led to serious rethinking of the definition of work itself, productively stretching classical Marxist concepts.

1.6 THE 'DUAL SYSTEMS' APPROACH

In the mid-1970s, a group of Socialist Feminists sought to synthesise Marxist and radical feminist theory into a viable theory of social reality and, especially, women's oppression. Their efforts led to what became known as the **Dual Systems Theory**. This followed from recognition of the significance of reproduction in understanding not only capitalism but any mode of production. Further, this called for a theoretical reformulation of Marxism itself. According to the dual systems theory, women's oppression arises from two distinct and relatively autonomous systems- patriarchy (system of male dominance), which produces specific gender oppression of women, and the system of mode of production, which produces class oppression and determines the appropriation of the surplus value of women's work. Patriarchy in relation with the specific mode of production- say, capitalism- produces the concrete phenomenon of women's oppression in society. Indeed, a notion of "**Capitalist Patriarchy**" has been central to the dual systems approach.

The "dual systems" approach emphasised the relationship of men and women to central aspects of production and reproduction. **Linda Phelps's** "Patriarchy and Capitalism" was one of the earliest statements of this approach, arguing that patriarchy operates as a system parallel to capitalism. The two are distinct systems of oppression and their histories and principles of authority are different. In her view, the two reinforce each other, but are also at times in contradiction with one another (Phelps, 1975). **Zillah Eisenstein**, one of the major exponents of this theory, lays more emphasis on how the two systems support one another (Eisenstein, 1979). The "dual systems" approach has probably been most cogently elaborated in the work of **Heidi Hartman**, who has shown that in modern societies, capitalists have not always been able to bend patriarchy to their own interests (Hartman, 1981).

The most significant achievement of the dual systems theory was to direct attention to phenomena beyond the production process that were nevertheless central to understanding contemporary society. The theory yielded, as a result, some very rich historical and sociological research. It has been criticised, however, on multiple counts. First, it grafts a theory of gender relations on to existing Marxist theory, without sufficiently examining or reformulating its assumptions. Second, the theory allows only the play of two categories- class and gender. How can it accommodate other relations of hierarchy, such as race? Just as patriarchy and capitalism has been accorded autonomy to prevent one from being reduced to the other- categories like race, caste, heterosexism demand equivalent explanatory force. A solution along the same lines- a multiplication of systems of oppression- would not be analytically productive. The primary

question- how different forms of oppressions are related- remains unanswered in such a framework. In the section which follows, we will take a more in-depth look at the interplay between gender and class.

Check Your Progress:

- 1) *What is capitalist patriarchy? In what ways do capitalism and patriarchy work together to oppress women?*
- 2) *What is the 'Dual Systems' theory? Do you think this theory is capable of explaining women's subordination? Try to use examples from your experience/surroundings to explain this in your own words.*

1.7 THE DISCURSIVE SHIFT—GENDER AND CLASS

Up to the early 1980s, feminists used the term 'woman' or, if they needed a category, 'sex' to talk about difference. The problem was, however, that this made it difficult to distinguish between biological differences, usually also called sex, and what feminists called the social construction of sexual difference. The point had by then been made quite emphatically, starting with **Simone de Beauvoir's** insightful statement that one is not born a woman but *becomes* one (Beauvoir, 1949). To overcome the naturalizing consequences of terminology such as 'woman' or 'sex', a need was felt for a term that would in itself signal social construction, i.e., a discursive category. The term 'gender' once introduced became popular very quickly and had long term consequences for feminist intellectual projects. In unit 2 of Block 1, you have already been introduced to some of the distinctions between 'sex' and 'gender'. Before moving ahead, you may find it useful to review to what you have already learnt in the earlier unit.

One major advantage of the term 'gender' was that it did not denote embodied subjects- and thus, did not have the same implications in case of plural and additive categories and, moreover, it laid to rest some of the debates over the primacy of one category over another. With the gradual acceptance of the insights of post-structuralism, similar shifts were taking place in the understanding of 'class'- from E.P. Thompson's seminal intervention in the 1960s advocating the understanding of class as 'experience' (Thompson, 1963), to Gareth Stedman Jones's attempt to trace the development of a 'language of class' (Jones, 1983) to Patrick Joyce's exploration of class as a discursive category (Joyce, 1995), theories of the origin of class and class consciousness were considerably altered. In the

1990s, the emphasis was on class as identity. It was now possible to explore the ways in which relationships of oppression- race, class and gender, for instance, -were constituted in reference to each other in different historical contexts.

It is difficult to over emphasise the impact of **post-structuralism** and **post-modernism** in the current academic environment. The reformulation of 'class' notwithstanding Marxists methods and insights that informed class analysis have receded into the background. In this context, the gender versus class debate, a hugely productive intellectual project in its time, seems to have been laid to rest. In the 1990s, however, a group of Socialist Feminists tried to give post-modernist theory some grounding in social realities. Said in the inverse, this means that they have attempted to bring the tools and methods of discourse analysis within the ambit of socialist feminism. The term often used for such theorization is **Materialist Feminism**, though it is difficult to pin the term down with any great precision. The term was first used in the mid-1970s by **Christine Delphy**, drawing on socialist and Marxist feminism (Delphy, 1979); *The Grand Domestic Revolution* by **Dolores Hayden**, which described Material feminism as reconceptualizing the relationship between the private household space and public space by presenting collective solutions to housework, cooking, and other traditional female domestic jobs, was a forerunner too (Hayden, 1982). At present, the most closely associated with the terms are **Rosemary Hennessay** and **Chrys Ingraham**, who are editors of *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives*. They describe material feminism as the conjuncture of several discourses such as historical materialism, Marxist and radical feminism, as well as postmodern and psychoanalytic theories (Hennessay & Ingraham, 1997).

Still more broadly defined by some, materialist feminism is premised on material conditions, on the social construction of gender, and on an understanding of gender hierarchy as relational and multiple and not in itself simply exhaustive. Thus, the aim is not just a formulation of an arena of female difference or differences but also a conceptualization of multiple axes of difference, moving beyond the additive logic of female differences to a grounded understanding of gender in relation to other categories. Such an understanding includes the possibility that in given instances, gender is not the only foundational category.

This said, let us begin to look at some specific contexts within which the categories of gender and class get defined in the historical terms.

1.8 A HISTORICAL NOTE: GENDER AND CLASS IN INDUSTRIALISING EUROPE

Much of the debates about gender and class have been elaborated in the context of the transformative impact of industrial capitalism in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The industrial revolution is considered a major watershed in the organization of work because of the introduction of the factory system, which effected a separation between the home and the workplace. In pre-capitalist societies, the household was the locus of production, reproduction and consumption, of work and leisure; productive labour was organized through the family with its attendant gender and generational hierarchies. The factory system involved two significant changes- the removal of productive work from the ambit of the home and new forms of hierarchisation (skill and supervision, for instance) of labour, which drew on gender and generation, but were not premised on familial relationships. These changes were coded in a discursive formation, known as the separation of spheres, which involved a series of overlapping binaries- home and work, family and state, private and public, reproduction and production and women and men. Gender was thus fundamentally implicated in the social imaginary of post-industrial societies.

In concrete terms, there were several social consequences for women. The industrial revolution gave rise to a capitalist class, better known as the middle class. Among the middle classes, men were engaged in entrepreneurial, managing and professional work, while the women were relegated to the reproductive domain of the home. In the nineteenth century, there emerged a powerful ideology of femininity based on this perception of the 'unproductive' housewife, which carried two distinct but inter-related images: (a) the woman as the 'angel in the house' was pure, asexual, submissive yet morally superior and responsible for upholding and preserving familial, social and spiritual values; and (b) the 'leisured lady' spent a life of idleness and frivolity confined to the domestic sphere, devoted to 'leisure' purchased through employment of domestic servants or at best accessing 'unproductive' public activity like social work.

At the lower end of the social scale, industrialization meant the participation of large numbers of women and children in factories and workshops. Even though, there was a substantial participation of married women in such work, the abiding stereotype is that of the 'factory girl', the young unmarried woman, who worked in factories for a few years enabling her to collect some resources towards marriage and her own household. Poor women's participation in wage work evoked two diametrically opposite responses in society. On the one hand, there were the pessimists who felt that factory work eliminated the possibility of a flexible adjustment between productive

and reproductive work; consequently, wage-work by married women jeopardized housework and childcare. In case of young unmarried women, wage-work disrupted patterns of domestic training and undermined patriarchal authority. The visibility of women's work and the outcry against the exploitative nature of the work and the social harm resulting from it, led to a series of enquiries, such as in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most western European countries enacted legislation to protect women workers and to regulate their work in factories in the interests of family and child care. On the other hand, however, there were those who were optimistic of women's participation in factory production, predicting on the lines of Friedrich Engels, that wage-work, in giving women a new sense of economic independence, would allow them to bargain for more rights within family and society.

Recent research on industrialization in Europe raises doubts about many of these abiding stereotypes. One central question asked by feminist scholars is whether the separation of the private and public, home and workplace has been emphasized too much. In fact, industrial capitalism in Europe is not co-terminus with the factory system- apart from the overwhelming presence of small workshops, there was a continuing practice of home-working among women, for whom their home was their workplace. The majority of women workers were in the sweated trades, where they earned significantly lower wages. Factory women were a small minority of early industrial populations. The gender segregation in the labour market sharpened the already existing division of labour between men and women; and skill became designated as a masculine domain, women being defined as unskilled or semi-skilled. It may be argued, therefore, that for women, the great continuity across the industrialization divide was domestic work. All women, whether they were employed or not, remained responsible for domestic work, many women continued to combine productive and domestic work within the home and, most importantly, the greatest increases in women's employment was in paid domestic work. The female domestic servant was the most striking feature of early industrial societies- the 'maid' toiling 'below stairs' in affluent middle class homes or in the aristocracy's town and country houses or general servants in households of tradesmen, shopkeepers and artisans, or in the new suburbs, constituted the largest single group of women workers. As such, domestic labour, paid or unpaid, also provides the most potent theoretical challenge to established understandings of industrial capitalism.

In some of the literature of industrialization, the separation between private and public has been taken too literally. The physical separation of the home and the workplace did not result in de-linking the two- the importance of family in determining labour use and arrangements remained; the industrial

economy can not be understood without reference to changing constitution of family, relations of power and authority within the family and their influence on processes and structures of production outside the home. Moreover, the division between the worlds of men and women was not a single process or a settled arrangement. The nature of such division varied across social groups and changed over time. In nineteenth-century England, for instance, the separation of spheres became a major plank of class identity- middle class women could afford not to work outside the home, while working class women were forced to. Over time, however, the values of feminine domesticity spread across much of the working class in Western Europe. As skilled men organized themselves in trade unions, they sought to expel from the workforce women and children, who exerted a downward pressure on wages. The notion of a 'family wage', which found increasing favour among trade unions and even the state, upheld the ideology of a single male breadwinner with a family of unproductive wife and children. The result was the domestication of working class women. On the one hand, women in socialist movements sought improvements in their wages and working conditions; on the other, socialist movements upheld working class struggles for family wage, which resulted in women's exclusion from factory work. None of these, therefore, were uni-directional changes.

At the time when working class women were being domesticated, middle class women, exhausted from unalloyed leisure, began to access the new opportunities presented by an industrializing society. They began to access education and employment; and, learning from their experience in charity and social work, organized themselves to demand a variety of rights such as that of public activity, dress reform, public association, property, divorce, representation, culminating in the demand for the vote. This last led to the suffragette movement, led by the middle classes but with differing degrees of support from socialist and working-class women. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the First World War cost European countries dearly in the life of men; while the men fought and died, women were called upon to provide labour for agricultural and factory production. When the war ended and the men returned from the front, women were asked to return to their homes to their housewifery and mothering. Many women did indeed do so, but their experience of work and self-sufficiency had unalterably changed the fabric of social life. Not only did they earn the right to vote in many western countries at the close of the war, their presence in the public domain increased considerably. New winds of change came again with the Second World War; this time too women were called upon to aid the war effort, not only as hands on the land and in the factories, but at the war front as well, as drivers, nurses and administrators. In the aftermath of the war, in the following two decades, women became active participants in the radical politics of Europe, which heralded the emergence of **New Feminism** in the 1960s. This was a period of expanding women's employment.

After the war, governments began to play a more active role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of the citizens. The welfare state in its current form came into being in many advanced industrialised countries of the west. At the same time, labour movements grew in strength and were able to negotiate better working conditions and more security of employment. Individual manufacturers found, increasingly, large factories and a huge workforce restricted their ability to adjust to the vagaries of fluctuating international markets. In the 1970s, thus, manufacturers began to relocate the more labour-intensive part of their production to countries where labour was cheaper and more docile. Thus manufacturing began to cross national boundaries and production in the assembly lines gave way to assembling parts made in distant global locations. This **New International Division of Labour** led to what is now called a ‘feminization’ of manufacturing workforce on a global scale. In the 1970s, some of the south-east Asian countries emerged as the workshops of the world and the workers in these new manufacturing centres were predominantly women. In the next section, we will learn more about what this implied in the context of India.

1.9 THE INDIAN CASE

The idea of industrialization as a blueprint for economic development remained dominant up to the 1960s. In the next few decades, however, the understanding of development and the role industrialisation may (or may not) play in it was revised considerably. First, it came to be acknowledged that the nature of industrialization in the western countries was premised largely on their ability to command resources in the colonies; second, the de-colonisation of regions of Asia and Africa had major implications for the future economic development of erstwhile Imperial countries of western Europe; third, the newly independent countries were faced with the problems of development from a severely disadvantaged position because they had been plundered in different ways by the imperial powers but they had no similar external resource to smoothen their path; and fourth, economically backward countries faced the additional difficulty of a late start because they now had to compete with advanced industrialized and developed economies. In 1947, on achieving Independence, India too was confronted with these myriad questions of development. Three decades later, in the mid-1970s, with the publication of *Towards Equality* (1975), it became clear that these were not gender-neutral issues- these seemingly general problems had quite different and distinct implications for women and men.

In India, industrial capitalism had been introduced under the aegis of the colonial state in the late nineteenth century. There were factories- starting with mass products such as jute and cotton, but after the First World War

expanding to infrastructure goods such as iron and steel, chemicals and engineering as well. There were mines- coal and irons were the most important, but the range included precious metals (gold and silver), copper, bauxite and many others. There were also large-scale plantations, tea in Assam and north Bengal and coffee in southern India. Moreover, burgeoning urban centres attracted labour for a range of industries and services- construction, docks, transportation, petty trading, personal services and others. While these workers remained a small enclave within an overwhelmingly rural population, agriculture was being commercialized through international trade in primary products. Markets were being integrated as a result of political and administrative unification as well as through improved communications such as the expanding railways network. Thus, while peasant agriculture continued to be predominant, there was a steep increase of wage labour in agriculture. These new labouring arrangements were grafted on to existing relations of family, caste and community and showed strongly marked gender and generational patterns. In the urban and industrial sector, women and children were marginal to begin with and their numbers dwindled over time. By the 1930s, these industries began to be regulated by the state and their labour organized in trade unions; in the next twenty years, they came to be marked out as a small but core 'formal' sector, of which women had a negligible share. In the plantations, women had a nearly equitable share of employment, even though they were paid poorly for back-breaking work. In the countryside, in contrast, women's (and children's) unpaid labour was engaged more intensely than earlier, since on this depended the survival of small peasants squeezed by the pressures of rent and revenue. On the whole, in this period, the paid component of women's labour decreased, while its unpaid component increased.

The exclusion of women from the formal sector did not mean the domestication of women except for a small group of wives and daughters of formal sector workers, unionized labourers earning family wages. Most other poor women had to work harder than ever- either as unpaid household workers or in the informal sector where their labour was subject to intense exploitation for poor returns. In the 1990s, when the Indian state embarked on a course of liberalization, the small and exclusive character of formal sector labour became a political flashpoint. India, many feared, would experience the same feminization of labour evident in some of the south-east Asian countries- women would undercut the benefits achieved by organized male labour over a century of struggle. Thirty years after the onset of liberalization, it is now clear that the gender pattern of the Indian workforce remains intact. The formal workforce is a little less than ten percent of the country's total; and, women have considerably less of that share. Women continue to flock in the informal sector.

In South Asia, where seclusion and segregation of the sexes- encoded in the *purdah* system- was an organizing social principle, class and caste played major roles in determining what work women could do. Usually, the avoidance of visible and manual work by women was a mark of elite status, while the public appearance of women (especially for work) underlined low caste and social status. Meanwhile, in the nineteenth century, a new colonial service and professional middle class emerged in the urban centres of the country. Their women began to access education and, very soon, began to aspire to similar service and professional employment as their men. Beginning as a small trend, this was expanded after Independence. Ever since the liberalization of the 1990s, new and better job opportunities have emerged for educated middle class women. The expansion in educated women's employment has become one of the more striking social developments in the last twenty years. Thus, similar processes have had opposite effect for middle class and poor women- the former have by and large gained in terms of expanded education and employment opportunities, while the latter have been pushed into more intensive labour for lower returns. Exploring such intersecting and divergent patterns of gender and class provides new insights into the story of modern India's development.

1.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to understand the relationship between gender and class based on theoretical insights gained from Marxism and Feminism. Initially, it was believed that women's emancipation would follow from the end of capitalist exploitation and the transition to socialism. From the 1960s, we have had a much more nuanced understanding of this relationship, and theorists have explored how the dynamics of patriarchy work within capitalism and socialism. In recent years, feminists have tried to move away from a gender and class binary to try to accommodate multiple axes of oppression, such as caste and race.

We have also seen how industrial revolution changed the nature of women's work and altered the balance between their productive and reproductive work to give rise to new categories of women workers. The creation of a category of middle class women resulted in their making new demands for social and political rights, giving rise to incipient feminist movements across many societies.

The impact of capitalist industrialization was somewhat different in the colonial context. In India, for instance, industrialization directly affected only a small proportion of women, though capitalist developments affected the lives and work of much wider segment of the female population. Over a long historical period, class differences among women have sharpened, providing the background for current processes of globalization.

1.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you agree with the view that women's participation in wage labour gives them greater autonomy? Discuss with the help of suitable examples.
- 2) How did industrialization create the separation between the private and the public? How did this affect women's work in early industrializing societies? Explain in your own words.
- 3) How did the advent of capitalism change the nature of women's work in India?

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UNIT 2 CASTE AND GENDER

Samita Sen

Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Locating Gender vis-à-vis Caste
- 2.4 Definitions of Caste in India
- 2.5 Caste and the Control of Women
- 2.6 Brahmanical Patriarchy and the Concept of Multiple Patriarchies
- 2.7 Caste and Patriarchy—A Historical Note
- 2.8 Caste, Gender and Colonialism
- 2.9 Dalit Patriarchy and Dalit Feminism
- 2.10 Caste, Politics and Women in Independent India: The Reservation Debate
- 2.11 Honour Killings: Caste, Gender and Love
- 2.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.13 Unit End Questions
- 2.14 Glossary
- 2.15 References
- 2.16 Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Having looked at the relationships between gender and class, let us now turn to the gender implications on caste. Caste has been an important factor in forming hierarchy in Indian society. Women get located at the lowest rung under each caste making it pertinent to examine their situation in casteist Indian society. This unit deals with definitions of caste, what role it plays in controlling women, caste in relation to patriarchy and various other aspects related to caste and gender. Towards the end of this unit you will read about caste, gender and colonization, caste and politics in independent India and how caste is associated with marriage and honour killings. The discussion presented here will help you to see how gender and caste are inextricably linked in India.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Define the concept of caste;
- Explain the relationship between caste and patriarchy;
- Analyze the role of caste and gender in the colonial period;
- Explain the features of dalit patriarchy and dalit feminism;
- Explain the resistance of caste-based political parties to the Bill for women's reservation; and
- Link the recent incidents of 'honour killings' to caste and the marriage system.

2.3 LOCATING GENDER VIS-À-VIS CASTE

The category 'class', though historically grounded, makes a universalistic claim to explain inequalities in all societies. In the Indian case, however, caste is an equally powerful determinant of social hierarchy, and though there are major overlaps between class and caste- the high and the low in both systems of grading tend to converge most of the time- this is not invariable, and the two are quite distinct categories founded in very different historical systems. We have already seen that gender relations are central to class structures. This is equally, if not more forcefully, true of caste. Indeed, one may argue, that gender is one of the primary axes on which caste stratification rests; structurally, caste presumes differential modes of control of access to women; and in modern India, hierarchies of caste are often articulated through gender. Thus we begin by addressing some of the ways in which caste and gender are linked. After describing in brief some of the major debates surrounding the definition and origin of caste. Then we will analyse some of the structural links between caste and gender. Next we will discuss the ways in which caste and gender are in interplay in controversies over questions of marriage and political representation, before moving to notions of patriarchy, colonization and their impacts on the caste system in India.

2.4 DEFINITIONS OF CASTE IN INDIA

There is no consensus on the origins and definition of the caste system in India. In simple terms, it refers to the stratified and hierarchical socio-economic organization that has evolved from India's ancient civilization, having its own unique ideology of social order, moral and ritual codes. There are thousands of castes (and/or subcastes) hierarchically ranked: all

are named, endogamous (in-marrying) groups, membership being restricted to descent by birth. Each caste is part of a locally based system of interdependence with other groups, involving occupational specialization, and is linked in complex ways to networks that stretch across regions and throughout the country. Notably, though the term is associated with Hinduism and considered to have a religious sanction in ancient Hindu scriptures, as a social system it exists among other religious groups too. Muslims sometimes expressly deny that they have castes, since Islam prescribes equality among co-religionists, but there are castes or caste-like groups among Muslims in many parts of India. Such a social hierarchy is also found among Indian Christians, differences in caste often being acknowledged and maintained.

‘Caste’, however, is not an Indian word. The word caste derives from the Portuguese *casta*, meaning breed, race, or kind. This has led many scholars to argue that the caste system is not unique to India; rather, the Indian caste system is a specific variant of systems of social ranking based on classification of peoples. Moreover, there are arguments about the equivalence of the term. There are two concepts most commonly used to describe caste- *varna* and *jati*. There are many other words in popular use in different parts of the country, such as *jat*, *biradri* and *samaj*. All of these terms refer to ranked groups of various kinds. It is the *varna-jati* dyad, however, that has more general application.

The terms *varna* and *jati* have been variously defined and distinguished. The most common understanding of *varna* is as colour and is supposed to denote the four great divisions in society outlined in ancient Hindu texts- *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* in this order of status. Later, a fifth group comprising the so-called ‘untouchables’, regarded as outside the pale of caste society, was included. This ordering is variously explained as economic, based on occupational specialization or ritual, and founded in norms of purity and pollution. *Jati*, literally a descent group, is characterized by endogamy, also denoting an occupational group. The *jati* groups are regionally variegated, often having their own specific practices of food, dress and rituals. The *jatis* are also hierarchically ordered, positioned within local power structures bearing relationship to both ritual status and control (or the lack of it) of productive resources. While the *varna* system provides a powerful ideological framework, the reality of caste experience in contemporary India is structured by *jati* affiliation. The *jatis* may be castes intermediate to the five-fold *varna* order or subcastes within it. The ordering between the upper and lower *jatis* is on graded scale in which three broad divisions may be discerned- the upper castes comprise the castes and subcastes generally claiming identification with the three upper *varnas*; the middle castes, comprising primarily the various subcastes associated with the fourth *varna*, the *sudras*, with peasant, artisan or service occupational histories (some of these are now designated as ‘other backward castes’ or

OBCs with low social status but not regarded as polluting); and the low castes at the bottom of the social scale, whose touch is often regarded as polluting and who correspond with the fifth *varna*. Such overlaps between *jati* and *varna* though useful for classification are neither quite neat nor invariable. There are enormous regional variations in the placements of *jatis* in the system of social hierarchy.

Box No.2.1: Caste and Power

Much of the classical literature on caste emphasizes the purity-pollution aspect, which is the ideological framework for the hierarchical ordering. Since this ideology was constructed within brahmanical texts, the mouthpiece of the upper castes, it obscures the relationship of power at the core of the system.

One relatively well-known example of such scholarship is Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966). In such an approach, caste is rendered:

- relatively neutral, or
- as one more form of social inequality as is common in all societies, or
- as a system of interdependence and mutual reciprocal relationships, or
- as one expressive simply of difference

None of these are true; the hierarchies of caste represent a concomitance of inequalities- in ritual status, in law, in control over productive resources (including labour) and in access to knowledge. The privileges are concentrated at the top and the disabilities at the bottom, producing a form of institutionalized inequality, which goes far beyond mere purity-pollution. An individual's location within the caste system determines not only material conditions of everyday living but also the experience of power. The emphasis on the experiential dimension of caste is associated with the work of scholars like Joan Mencher (1974), Gerald Barreman (1971) and others. Today we understand caste primarily as a pernicious form of inequality, which is not only the basis of the continued power of the elite in India but also contributes towards the high levels of sanctioned violence in our social fabric.

2.5 CASTE AND THE CONTROL OF WOMEN

Caste is defined as an endogamous group- this clearly means that marriage is central to the composition of caste. It has been pointed out that a caste derives its identity in its difference from another. Thereby lies the importance of each caste maintaining its distinctiveness and reiterating its separateness- all of which have to be generationally transmitted for a closed descent group to emerge, persist and expand.

Reproduction is thus central to caste- i.e., unlike class, caste is premised on relations of reproduction as well as production. Significantly, for our purpose, caste inequality is premised on a convergence of relations of production and reproduction.

The social organization through which caste is reproduced is endogamy- a total prohibition on marrying outside one's own caste group. In earlier times, when new communities were included within the system to enable expansion of the labour force, endogamy ensured that these communities preserved their distinct identity within the *jati* system. While endogamy regulates marriage for men as well as women, the prohibition applies more to upper caste women than any other group. Thus, we have another dimension- a gender dimension- to caste inequality, one based on female sexuality.

Box No.2.3: Endogamy

The practice of caste endogamy ritualized female sexuality in a hierarchical ordering in consonance with caste.

A number of commentators have noted the overwhelming importance of marriage in Indian society- and this is clearly to do with drawing and maintaining the boundaries that define caste. What in fact is marriage? If we are to see it in terms of individuals, we might invoke Engels' definition discussed in the previous unit- that marriage is a means for a man to ensure his monopoly in sexual access to a woman. However, in the context of group endogamy, marriage also signals collective behaviour. It has, in such situations, been defined as an exchange of women between kin or clan or tribal groups. It indicates a gender inequality in kin (or clan or tribal) relationships whereby male kin have non-reciprocal rights over their female kin. The most iniquitous aspect of this is that- by reason of the rights male kin have over their female kin- women do not have full rights in themselves, these rights are restricted by the power over them that is enjoyed by the men kinsfolk.

In her book *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens*, Uma Chakravarti (2003) gives us a clear explanation of the way marriage and caste are linked. Marriage, she writes, is the ritualized form of exchange of women. It is determined by exogamy (*prohibiting* marriage within a specified group) and endogamy (*enjoining* marriage within a specified group). These two principles determine the group within which marriages may or may not take place (called the marriage circle), which signals territoriality and kinship. The prohibition (which draws on incest taboos) applies to the circle considered too closely related for marriage. Those within the bounded group sufficiently

distantly related to be eligible for marriage but sufficiently connected to be able to maintain their distinctive identity are enjoined to intermarry. All societies have some rules of exogamy, but endogamy is less common, its purpose being to preserve the separation and boundedness of a group through generational reproduction, which becomes necessary in cases of social stratification based on birth. In such cases, the dominating metaphor is purity of descent/lineage. Such a marriage system is calculated to maintain social and economic privileges within a group; ideologically, it is a means of preserving the qualitative attributes of a *jati* and establishing its difference from other *jatis*. The Indian marriage system is linked to birth and descent- specifically, it serves the purpose of perpetuating the purity of male lineage, which is the core of the family and the unit of the social group, the caste or the sub caste. Thus, marriage is central to the principles of hierarchy that organize the caste society in India. Given the centrality of marriage to structures of power, and its highly structured and complex organisation, it is considered to be vital to the social strategies of families, clans and castes- it is thus a collective decision subject to the authority of male elders. Hence we have the dominance of the arranged marriage system.

So far we have looked at marriage within a caste based patriarchal system. In the next section you will learn more about Brahmanical patriarchy and multiple patriarchies.

Check Your Progress:

- 1) *Explain the notion of 'caste' in your own words.*
- 2) *Show how caste has been a mechanism to control the autonomy of women.*

2.6 BRAHMANICAL PATRIARCHY AND THE CONCEPT OF MULTIPLE PATRIARCHIES

The link between gender and caste has been conceptualized in recent feminist scholarship as **Brahmanical Patriarchy**. The literal meaning of patriarchy is 'the rule of the father'. It is often used to denote the concentration of power in the hands of elder men, who exercise control over the person of women and younger men. It is also sometimes defined more widely in terms of the power that all men wield over all women. This latter definition has been challenged on the grounds that class, caste and race structure fields of power in such a way that all men do not and can not have power over all women. However, it is possible to discern how

idioms of patriarchal power are institutionalized within even the modern state, with far-reaching consequences. A definition of patriarchy as a universal system of male control is no longer acceptable to feminists; rather, the emphasis is on the ways in which male domination works across time, space and cultures and along interstices of other forms of inequality. The imperative thus is to contextualize and *historicise* patriarchy. For instance, some of the specificities of capitalist patriarchy have been discussed in the previous unit.

Box No. 2.4: Brahmanical Patriarchy

The idea of brahmanical patriarchy is posited not as one more variant of male domination but a structure unique to Hinduism and the caste system. It refers to the system of patriarchy prescribed in brahmanical texts, which were meant to be enforced by the coercive power of the king or on his behalf.

This set of norms has shaped the ideology of the upper castes and continues to influence upper caste women through the highly valorized notions of chaste wives and sacrificial mothers. The rules of feminine behaviour are applied both by manufacturing consent and coercive means. The emphasis is on the sexual purity of women, which is ritualized through restrictive controls over women's behaviour and mobility. It also grants men absolute control over women's persons. These rules governing women's behaviour figure centrally in maintaining boundaries between castes; indeed, the caste system is itself structured through these patriarchal codes. The most stringent control is prescribed in the case of upper caste women, since on their sexual purity rests the hierarchical order of closed endogamous circles, which is the caste system (Chakravarti, 2003). Thus, brahmanical patriarchy links caste hierarchy and gender inequality in ways which remain dominant to this day, often even ethnicised and generalized as 'Indian'. Notably, middle and low castes often emulate these codes and regulations when seeking upward mobility, a process named **Sanskritisation** by the noted sociologist, **M. N. Srinivas** (Srinivas, 1956).

The fundamental principle of Hindu social organization was a closed structure to preserve land, women and ritual quality within it (Yalman, 1962). The ideological framework to ensure the sexual purity of upper caste women was provided by *stridharma* or *pativrata*dharma. There were at least three striking features of this ideal femininity. First, these codes were constructed to harness the consent of women in the process of their subordination. The biological aspects of womanhood were emphasized to allow their representation as wild and untamed nature, the corollary being an untrammelled sexuality. These aspects of a woman could only be controlled by chaste and sacrificial wifehood, the sublimation of the self in an ideal conjugality.

Thus, the individual woman could aspire to an epitome of virtue and righteousness, worthy not only of celebration but even worship. First, feminine virtue- women's only claim to a social being- was premised upon a self-willed subordination that amounted to a surrender of the self. Second, the system did not depend only on consent but on institutionalised control within marriage, which involved denial of economic and political resources. The key to women's subordination was dependence- real, achieved through the denial of property, opportunities for labour or mobility; as well as ideological, as demonstrated by Manu's famous dictum that a woman's dependence was transferred from father to husband to son. Third, when consent failed, coercion was sanctioned at every level. If kinsmen failed to discipline errant wives and daughters, caste-men were enjoined to use social sanctions against offending women. The authority of male kin (especially father and husband) extended to extreme forms of physical chastisement. In the last instance, the state (or the king) punished women, who transgressed social codes, especially those of marital chastity and upper caste endogamy (Chakravarti, 2003).

The very fact that the most stringent controls are prescribed for upper caste women indicates its opposite- that, for lower caste women, rules are less strict or more lax. The rules prescribed for ideal feminine behaviour are not uniform across castes- the greater control over women is considered to be the privilege of upper caste men; the reason being that men of lower castes have to be prevented institutionally from having access to upper caste women. The opposite is not true- lower caste men do not have the same degree of control over their women, thereby signaling their powerlessness, but also enabling upper caste men to have access to lower caste women. Inverting the logic, one may say, that for upper caste men to have sexual access to lower caste women, the rules of sexual purity have to be looser in their case. This differential aspect of brahmanical patriarchy has given rise to some major debates. How do we interpret the relatively low emphasis on sexual purity in case of lower caste women? Does this mean greater freedom for them? Or, are they doubly oppressed because upper caste men too have access to their sexuality? Finally, is the imposition of sexual purity the only way to establish domination over women- do lower caste men exercise power over their women by means other than through restrictive control over their sexuality? A great deal of empirical research is required to answer these questions with some degree of certainty. **Kumkum Sangari** has suggested that we think these complexities through with a notion of 'multiple patriarchies' (Sangari, 1995). The upper and lower castes are ranked in brahmanical patriarchy whereby the differential emphasis on women's sexual purity serves as a function of caste domination and hierarchy, not only structurally to uphold the system itself, but also to facilitate the processes of surplus extraction by upper castes from lower castes. In this latter sense, the control by low caste men over lower caste women is

linked to appropriation of labour- not only the surplus of labouring women but also through the processes that create more labourers (viz., marriage and procreation).

To throw further light on the above discussion, it would help to locate the relationship between caste and patriarchy in a historical context. Let us turn to this in the next section.

2.7 CASTE AND PATRIARCHY—A HISTORICAL NOTE

To trace the historical evolution of patriarchal structures in India, we would have to visit the earliest records of the civilization. Recent historical research, especially by **Gerda Lerner**, suggests that even in the archaic state there were some form of control over women and their sexuality. Though the evidence from Harappa culture is meager, there are indications that there were some social controls over women in that period. However, a much clearer picture emerges when we come to the Vedic period, since there is supporting textual evidence. **Kumkum Roy** has demonstrated how class and gender stratification developed as an interlinked process- control over production and reproduction was established by the ruling men in a parallel structure that became the core of the caste system (Roy, 2002). From the sixth century BCE and during the Mauryas, there was considerable social flux resulting from changes in agrarian relations, craft production, urbanization and new kinds of state formation. From Buddhist and Jain texts, it becomes clear that the caste order had not yet acquired fixity and the claim of the Brahmans to an inherently superior status was being contested at many levels. For our purpose, it is notable that there was no correspondent challenge to the idea of endogamous *jatis*. However, it is only when the endogamous *jati* became locked in with occupational specialization and birth-based hierarchy that the full-blown caste system emerged. The ideological basis of the brahmanical order was laid in the *Manusmriti* (about the second century CE), which affirmed the divine sanction of *varna* divisions, endorsed the privileges of the upper castes, upheld the brahmana claim to monopoly of the *Vedas* (increasingly being established as the fountainhead of divine prescription), elaborated the marriage system and prescribed the codes of ideal femininity or *stridharma* (Chakravarti, 2003).

The lineament of the caste system as we know it is believed to have emerged during the Gupta period, about fourth century BCE. In this period, the settlers of the Gangetic Valley, the cradle of the caste system, began to spread into new regions, bringing into the fold of their social organization other discrete clans and communities. The caste system provided the principle of hierarchy through which such colonization was effected. By the fifth

century, untouchability was incorporated in the expanding caste system. The tribal people were drawn into these processes, allowing not only occupational specialization but a means of preserving their cultural specificities. The caste system that came to define social relations in India- a hierarchical structure linking property, labour and occupation, closed through endogamous marriage and unequal gender relations- was in place already in early India.

There were critiques of the system and the most celebrated of these is the *Bhakti* Movement, dispersed in four major regions of the country. The common and most striking feature of the movement was its advocacy of personalized and unmediated access to the divine. This was a blow aimed at the priestly classes, who had monopolized spiritual power. It also became a vehicle for women to participate in public debate and devotion. It allowed some women to even reject (or renounce) the household in denial of *stridharma*, even though in the case of Mirabai, for instance, the idiom of devotion that powered her rebellion was modeled on heterosexual love and union. The different strands of *bhakti* offered very different critique of caste and gender and had very limited impact on the hierarchical social relations within which its proponents operated. Many of the sects/groups founded in the name of *bhakti* became absorbed as endogamous groups within caste society; there was no sustained transformative effort. While *bhakti* remains a significant critical tradition, its importance lies in the opportunity it gave the underprivileged (including women) to express their aspirations in a limited ideological and spiritual context. Despite the significance of the critique of caste in some strands of the movement, there was no major disruption of the caste system in the early or medieval periods, unlike the modern period to which we will now learn.

2.8 CASTE, GENDER AND COLONIALISM

The modern transformative moment in the history of caste is often believed to have been wrought by British colonialism. This is part of a larger historiographical trope, which perceives colonialism to be the key 'rupture' in the otherwise internally-driven history of India. In the case of caste, such a view has several implications. First, many argue that the use of colonial and modern-historical categories/sensibilities have led to a profound misunderstanding of caste. After all, caste itself is not an Indian word; and, the very use of the word distorts the pre-colonial *varna-jati* system. Second, there is a school of thought, which believes that there were alleviating features in caste society, mitigating its seemingly oppressive character. The argument that the rigidification of caste by colonial authorities rendered it more pernicious serves at times as its justification. Since there has been very little research on the operations of caste in the pre-colonial or colonial

societies, these contentions await proof. Uma Chakravarti, however, in a pioneering essay on the workings of the Peshwai in Maharashtra, shows how a pre-colonial state actually upheld and enforced brahmanical patriarchy, thereby challenging the romantic view of the caste system prior to colonialism (Chakravarti 1996 & 2003).

Though it is doubtful whether colonialism fundamentally transformed the caste system, it did have a major impact. Let us briefly summarise the chief elements of this impact:

The British were a new secular power, not implicated in the hierarchy of local caste orders. This was an opportunity for castes who wished to renegotiate their power and status- and many caste-groups seized it.

Three routes were taken:

- i) The recording and classification of population undertaken in the mammoth enterprise of the decennial census offered one route.
- ii) Sanskritisation (described above) was the second route.
- iii) The law and the judiciary offered a third route to determine 'custom' with implications for ritual status.

The British, who at first took the position that they would not intervene in intra-caste or even inter-caste relationships, soon found it impossible to maintain such a position. Since they now stood in the position of the king, they had to mediate in and pronounce on caste-based disputes. Apart from collective mobility of particular caste groups, colonialism also offered individuals alternative means of aspiring to elite status, which were not quite so closely corralled in birth and caste. Thus, individuals too sought to negotiate with their kin and caste; conversion, education, urbanization, professionalisation and government employment opened up possibilities of reworking caste practice or to exit caste altogether.

The most significant critique of the caste system came from the oppressed low castes. Beginning with Jyotiba Phule of Maharashtra, leaders like B. R. Ambedkar and E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (known as Periyar) spoke against the injustices and inequalities of the system. At a later stage, Mohandas Gandhi took up the issue of untouchability, attempting to reverse the association with ritual pollution by renaming such caste groups as *harijan*. Not only were his interventions heavily circumscribed by the imperatives of Congress nationalist politics, but his refusal to countenance a separate political settlement for the low castes in the 1930s and his brokerage of the Poona Pact (1932) was perceived as a major betrayal of the cause.

Strategies of individual upward mobility- such as education and white collar employment- were important to the champions of low caste movements, since it challenged the command of their labour by the upper castes, and

offered a way out of the ritual pollution associated with their occupational specialization. However, such strategies were not enough. The caste movements that became the strongest in western and southern India challenged the organizing principle of caste through a sharp and radical critique of class and gender. They sought to dismantle the productive-reproductive axis of this social hierarchy.

The 'women's question' had become an emotive one by the end of the nineteenth century. The social reform movement focused on legislation to improve women's position within marriage, prohibiting *sati* and enabling widow remarriage. These reforms were undertaken by the East India Company's government but in response to advocacy from educated men from the ranks of the new urban elite. Historians have shown that the debates around these reforms- which were bitterly contested by segments of traditional and new elite- extrapolated upper caste customs and practices as Hindu. Given that the British were engaged in constructing religion-based 'personal laws' to govern family affairs including marriage, the 'new patriarchy' (as the change in gender relations has been termed) was much more homogenizing, i.e., less flexible and tolerant of the 'multiple patriarchies' of castes and regions (discussed above). By the end of the nineteenth century, the reformist zeal of the elite was dampened and, inspired by a new cultural nationalism, elite men rejected British intervention in the 'private' realm of the family. Thus, in 1891, when the British wished to raise the age of consent in marriage, they were vociferously opposed and the proposed law had to be diluted (Sarkar, 2001). Since marriage was so crucial to the caste system, the marriage reforms were closely interlinked with debates about caste. The connection became evident in 1872, when the British enacted a civil law enabling marriages, which breached customary injunctions of endogamy and exogamy. Though this piece of legislation had no immediate impact on Indian society, it introduced the idea of 'love marriages' that were modern and in breach of the traditional 'arranged marriage' system (Mody, 2002).

The other major plank of the reform debate was women's education. Many of the initiatives taken for women's education, again bitterly contested, were on behalf of upper caste women of the new elite. Many of these women went on to access employment and public activity (including politics at a later stage). Significantly, however, low caste women too were able to avail educational opportunities, albeit in small numbers. **Phule** made an important contribution in this regard, so did various Christian missionaries. These women, empowered by literacy, were able to critically engage in the debates about caste and gender relations current at that time. Perhaps the most radical moves came from **Periyar's Self-Respect Movement**, which combined the efforts to imbue a sense of dignity among men and women of low and backward castes with a sustained critique of Brahmanism. Periyar

understood the critical role of the marriage system in upholding caste hierarchy. He, therefore, advocated marriage reforms, which went far beyond the imagination of the nineteenth century reformers. He was a strong advocate of inter-caste and 'love marriages'. He also attempted a reform of the marriage ritual itself, which was based primarily on brahmanical scriptures.

The mobilization of lower castes did not, however, have any major impact in social or political terms in the colonial period. **Ambedkar** was able to make two significant interventions in the Indian Constitution of which he was the architect: He ensured the legal abolition of untouchability (thereby leading to the provision for 'scheduled castes') and positive discrimination measures for those who laboured under the disabilities imposed by caste hierarchy. These provisions along with the momentum of caste movements were to have more dramatic consequences in the period after Independence. In the sections which follow, you will read about some recent developments in terms of caste structures and movements.

Check Your Progress:

In your own words, summarize the chief impact of British colonization on the caste system.

2.9 DALIT PATRIARCHY AND DALIT FEMINISM

The notion of multiple patriarchies implies the existence of different kinds of patriarchies in different caste groups. In recent years, there has been some discussion around the particular situation of women among the low castes. At present, there is a general consensus to adopt the name 'dalit' to replace pejorative terms such as 'untouchables' or 'low castes'. Dalit means oppressed peoples and captures best the dynamic of struggles against inequality. Dalit activists from time to time express the view that among these groups there is greater equality between men and women. Since concerns of property and lineage are restricted to the upper castes/classes, the control over women and the ideology of sexual purity is of greater significance among them. Moreover, upper caste/class women derive their status and privileges through their men and are, therefore, more amenable to conformity. Among the dalits, men and women are equally integrated into labour processes, their relationships are determined by their labouring roles. They share the exploitation of those who profit by their labour (Ilaiah, 1996). Feminists have pointed out that this is not the entire picture. Even within labouring Dalit households, women experience subordination

and deprivation- in sharing the fruits of their labour or the burden of domestic labour. Moreover, processes of upward mobility have meant the downward percolation of ideologies of upper caste ideals of femininity in such a way that the differences between upper caste and dalit women's roles and responsibilities are getting blurred.

The *dalit* women thus see their battle to be on many fronts at the intersection of caste, class and gender. In the 1990s, they came together in the *Dalit* Women's Federation, a national-level organisation, which sought to highlight the specific predicaments of *dalit* women. This has led to a movement of *dalit* feminists. *Dalit* feminists question Indian feminism's claim to speak for all women, but also that of Dalit men to speak on behalf of Dalit women. Many Dalit women such as **Bama**, for instance, have asserted the right to speak of the specificities of their experiences of hurt and humiliation, and have thus subverted centuries of historical neglect. Dalit feminist articulates theirs as a triple oppression by double patriarchies- patriarchies of their own caste and an overlapping patriarchy of the upper caste- combined also with poverty. The issue of dalit feminism has been treated in greater detail in Course MWG - 001. For the present purpose it is important to note how dalit feminist accounts have highlighted the aggressive exploitation of Dalit women in terms of wage labour, domestic labour and violence, priests in the Church, upper caste landlords and their own ignorance (Rao, 2003).

2.10 CASTE, POLITICS AND WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT INDIA: THE RESERVATION DEBATE

In 1990, there were violent nation-wide protests by upper castes against the report of the **Mandal Commission**, which had recommended an increase in reservations in educational institutions and employment for scheduled and other backward classes. The democratic and secular pretensions of educated upper castes were tested and found wanting; deeply-held prejudices came to the fore when a perceived threat to their entrenched dominance in Indian society was posed. Indian politics was polarized over caste as never before. In response to the frenzy of upper caste resentment, there was deepening frustration over systematic deprivation of backward castes and the violence and atrocities perpetrated on the *dalits* in the countryside. In the last few decades, we have seen caste-based political parties making a rapid headway, changing the equations of electoral politics.

Such political polarization and the '**politics of difference**' has been a hurdle in the way of reservation of seats for women in parliament and state assemblies contemplated first in 1996. The proposal followed the successful implementation of women's reservation in local self-government. In 1994, the then Congress government built upon an initiative of the Janata Party

in Karnataka to undertake constitutional amendments 73 and 74 to reserve for women one-third seats in the *panchayati* and municipal governments. Within the women's quota, there were special quotas for SC/ST women (thus addressing *dalit* and *adivasi* women as a sub-category). The measure was adopted with surprising ease, there being no major disagreement among the political parties. It is to be remembered, however, that the initiative for this measure came from the government rather than from the women's movement. Within a few years, the different state governments followed through with fresh elections and a much strengthened *panchayati raj*, implementing the reservations for women. The success of this measure has been much debated in political and feminist circles. When the government proposed to reserve one-third seats for women in the Lok Sabha and in the state assemblies, however, a storm of controversy broke. The arguments against the Bill were many- those dedicated to the merit principle asked why women should need reservation if they were equal; others argued that unless women worked their way up the system, we would get a '*biwi-beti*' brigade as proxy for male politicians.

2.11 HONOUR KILLINGS: CASTE, GENDER AND LOVE

Processes of urbanization and marketisation have had some impact on daily practices of caste. Long-entrenched upper-caste practices vis a vis lower castes of avoiding touch and refusing to share food and water, for instance, have been attenuated somewhat. But the marriage system, so critical to the existence of caste hierarchy, has shown enormous resistance to change. In recent years, there have been a spate of lynchings and murders of young men and women by families and caste groups for breach of marriage rules of caste endogamy or *gotra* exogamy.

The killing of young couples, especially the woman, for breach of established marriage norms is often ironically dubbed "**Honour Killings**". The large number of such cases in some of the states of northern India in recent years, especially Delhi, Haryana, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have raised a series of debates and discussions in scholarly as well as media circles. Are the incidents on the rise or are they being reported more? Do we need new and tougher laws? The standard definition of "honour killing" is murder of women by family members, generally male, who are compelled to remove any threat to their family's honour. The ideology of honour (or *izzat*) is a gendered notion that resonates with caste inequality and hierarchy. Both men and women embody honour- but in different ways. The woman is the repository of honour and men are responsible for ensuring that women do not, deliberately or even inadvertently, pose any threat to honour. The woman's honour is equated with the family's, caste's and community's honour. Any action by a woman that violates traditional norms governing

their behaviour can be interpreted as a breach of honour, invoking extreme sanctions, including death. Needless to say, most of the encoded norms relate to sexuality- honour is located in the woman's body. The more common offences are: refusing an arranged marriage, eloping with a man of choice (the more heinous if the man belongs to the same *gotra* or to a different caste), adultery, being the victim of a sexual assault, or asking for a divorce. In India's caste society, the most powerful idiom of power is the control of women's sexuality. Not only are women familial property- their productive and reproductive capacities belonging to the family- they are the vehicles through which descent groups are constituted. Those committed to upholding existing systems of social hierarchy invest hugely in women's sexual purity, since they thereby protect and maintain the boundedness and distinctiveness of their group identity. Thus 'honour'- pertaining to descent groups such as family, clan or caste; thus too the need to kill women who defy their male kin or caste-men by stepping across the boundaries drawn for them, or defy male command over their persons. It needs perhaps to be reiterated here that the ideology sanctioning male kinfolk's rights over their female kin has a clear and obvious corollary- that such rights override the rights of women over their own persons. The tail of 'custom' or 'tradition' wags the dog of controlling women.

The gendered notion of **honour** draws on a widely endorsed interpretation of the procreation process. The male and female roles in procreation are metaphorically described as seed and earth. The men provide the semen, the seed, the creative core, while women are perceived as passive recipients. The semen, the life essence, the blood, is received from the father- thereby justifying patriliney. The woman, the earth, is the vessel and as such its purity must be maintained in order to ensure the purity of the bloodline. This seed and earth metaphor goes back to ancient literary texts and is a part of customary law and popular consciousness. It provides the foundation for the notion of women as vehicles of honour and men as guardians of women.

Prem Chowdhry (2007) has shown that the idea of women as the repository of honour leads on the one hand to their exaltation and, on the other, to coercive control over the everyday activity. Thus, family honour impels men to both protection and violence in relation to women. By extension, the perpetration of violence on women kinsfolk is associated with masculinity, justifying male violence within the family as natural and commonplace. However, even domestic violence is not entirely private in societies where family honour is structured into the ranking of social hierarchies such as caste. There is rather a link between the familial logic of honour and the expectations from the wider community. Chowdhry argues that a family cannot, even if it so wishes, allow transgressions to go unpunished. Social pressures from the kin group, the caste group or the village community may force the family to act or allow the wider group to act on its behalf.

Traditionally, **honour killings** have been rationalized and justified- even glorified as an act of high moral courage. The difficulty for the state in dealing with perpetrators of such crimes is that the community does not perceive it as a crime but as a legitimate and even desirable application of appropriate sanctions against socially condemned behaviour. In the recent spate of honour killings, this has come to the fore. Even as some activists are demanding tougher laws against such murders, sections of the elite, the administration and the political classes, who subscribe to this ideology, seek to justify individual and familial autonomy in punishing (even with death) recalcitrant young couples. Even as education, urbanization and migration are opening new opportunities, there is a deepening and widening of sanctions against transgression of collective norms of sexual and marital behaviour.

Moreover, the perpetrators are not always the family's male elders, though they often inspire and support, but young men. Many sociologists have argued that in Haryana, where such incidents are most common, the steep decline in the proportion of women in the population explains the aggression of young men unable to find brides within sanctioned marriage circles. Thus, we have a pernicious and vicious cycle- the marriage system devalues women and leads to the dowry system; the fear of dowry feeds the deep prejudice against the female child and leads to a drastic decline in the female sex ratio in the population; and, as a result, there is another and equally violent backlash, primarily against women. Such an equation between gender and caste encapsulated in the marriage system has been one of the most enduring features of Indian society- and it continues to structure entrenched inequalities and sustain the iniquities of coercive power.

2.12 LET US SUM UP

The hierarchical caste system is a specificity of Indian society, which continues to structure and influence social and political organization in the country. The system was consolidated in the fourth and fifth centuries, though there have been many changes and challenges to the system since then. The caste system underwent radical restructuring during the colonial period, when imperatives of social mobility gave rise to a number of lower caste movements, which interrogated its fundamental hierarchical assumptions. As an axis of inequality, however, caste remains a significant reality in India.

The caste system is premised on principles of endogamy and exogamy, which structures the marriage system and rests principally on the differential control of women. At its core is a system of Brahmanical Patriarchy, which enables upper caste men to deploy the productive and reproductive labour of women and lower castes. The crucial role of the marriage system in

sustaining caste hierarchy has been evident in the last few decades in the spate of 'honour killings' in northern and western India.

From within the interstices of the multiple forms of patriarchal authority, there have been, in recent years, the emergence of dalit feminism, which challenges upper caste domination as well as the patriarchal control sought to be imposed upon them by dalit men.

The intersecting relationships of caste, community, class and gender have given rise to major controversies in recent years- of which, the one over the reservation of seats for women in parliament and assemblies has received great public attention. The OBCs and Muslims have argued that women's reservations are a means of renewing elite domination in politics by accepting a homogenous meaning of the category.

As you progress further with your reading in this course, and in other courses of this programme, you will find other examples of the inter-linkages between caste and gender, and may find it helpful to build connections between these and what you have read here.

2.13 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Would you argue that the marriage system is central to the sustenance of a caste-based society in India? How would you explain the recent spate of 'honour killings' in India?
- 2) Discuss the specificities of dalit feminism. In what ways does the dalit movement draw upon the colonial legacy?
- 3) Why do you think there is opposition to the Bill for the reservations of seats for women in parliament and state assemblies?

2.14 GLOSSARY

Adivasi	: Lit. original inhabitant; name now used for 'tribes' or 'scheduled tribes'; self-renaming by movements of the people
Bhakti	: Lit. devotion; a movement against caste system and priestly mediation, celebrating personal god
Biradri	: Patriarchal clan, kin or caste group
Brahmana	: Highest in the varna order
Dalit	: lit. oppressed; renaming of lower Castes/untouchables through their own movements

Gotra	: Exogamous group, explained as descendants from an original ancestor
Harijan	: Name given by Mahatma Gandhi to lower castes/unotouchables
Jat	: Caste
Jati	: Group, nation, caste
Kshatriya	: Second in the varna order
Panchayat	: Lit. council of five elder males; extended to local self-government
Panchayati Raj	: The name given to the new regime of decentralization, which seeks to empower the grassroots by devolution of more power to local self-government institutions
Pativratadharma	: Lit. ideology of devotion to husband; women's duty
Peshwai	: Ministry in the Maratha empire; later, Maratha imperium ruled by peshwas
Samaj	: Lit. society, also kin or caste group
Sati	: Chaste and devoted wife; also the practice of immolating the widow on the funeral pyre of the husband
Stridharma	: Ideology of femininity; women's duty
Sudra	: Fourth (sometimes bottom) in the varna order
Vaisya	: Third in the varna order
Varna	: Colour, social division

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UNIT 3 RACE AND ETHNICITY

Samita Sen

Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 Locating Gender in Context of Race/Ethnicity
- 3.4 A Brief History of Racism
- 3.5 Black Feminism: The US Context
- 3.6 Women, Colonialism and Nationalism – Contexts for Third World Feminism
- 3.7 Gender and Ethnicity: *Adivasi* Women in India
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Unit End Questions
- 3.10 Glossary
- 3.11 References
- 3.12 Suggested Readings

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two units we read about the impact of class and caste on gender. In this unit we shall dwell upon another important social system that greatly affect gender and that is race or ethnicity of an individual. In MWG001, you have already read about issues related to Black women and Dalit women (Block 2, Unit 3). You may also find it useful to refer to the unit on Postcolonial feminism (Block 5, Unit 3) of the same course.

In this unit we will look more closely into the concept of racism, its historical background both in the west and in context of India. The unit will also highlight the movement of Black Feminism in the US . Further, you will learn about issues relating to women and colonization from the third world feminist perspective, and specially focus on issues relating to tribal women in India.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Define the concept of racism;
- Explain the features of Black feminism;
- Analyze the nature of feminism in third world countries; and
- Examine the role played by gender and ethnicity in the Indian context.

3.3 LOCATING GENDER IN CONTEXT OF RACE/ETHNICITY

The most enduring and powerful logic of patriarchy is based on the invocation of 'natural' or biological differences between the sexes. Until recently, such differences were considered innate and immutable, social inequalities following as an inevitable consequence of an unalterable natural order. In this sense, the category 'race' is similar to sexual difference, since it is also grounded in biology, in the visible differences of physical appearances, most commonly associated with colour. Racial difference is also presumed to be determined by birth, ordained and fixed by nature and hierarchical. Some races are considered inherently superior- physically and, therefore, intellectually and culturally. The superior races assert their right (or obligation) to dominate others. Ideas of racial superiority have been deployed in different historical contexts, most powerfully by Europeans to elevate 'whiteness' as an instrument of colonization from the fifteenth century onwards. In the nineteenth century, with the anti-slavery movements in Europe and the United States gaining momentum, the dominant race theories came under concerted attack. In the United States, the chief ideological challenge came from within- through the civil rights movements. In many of the settler colonies, confrontations between colonists and indigenous peoples became cast in racial terms. In many other parts of the world, anti-colonial nationalist discourses were in uneasy tension with the imperial discourses of race. From the beginning, questions of gender were inextricably entangled with race. Gender and racial classifications have been so inter-developed that when gender constructions are resisted, they necessarily disturb/ challenge constructions of race. Thus, feminism is always in conversation with the politics of race.

In the Indian context, there has been some debate on the relationship between race and caste. At the United Nations conference on racism at Durban in 2001, there was an attempt to renew the argument that the Indian caste system was a form of racism. There are two reasons for such an equation. First, the basis of caste is considered to be *varna*, which literally means colour and is supposed to be grounded in the primary distinction between fair (invading) Aryans and dark (indigenous) Dravidians. Many scholars believe that these theories were floated during the colonial period by British Indologists to bolster their own assertion of racial superiority. A section of the Indian elite appropriated the Aryan myth to claim proximity to the white colonizers, labeling the darker people of the southern provinces of India as Dravidians. None of this has been historically proven, however, and the theory of the racial origin of caste is pegged on highly disputable readings of Vedic texts. "Fair", some say, could mean "light" as in learned; and "*varna*", some say, could mean "order" rather than colour. The second reason for equating caste with race is the existence of similarities between

racial segregation/apartheid (in United States and in parts of Africa) and untouchability in caste Hindu society. While there are, undoubtedly, similarities in the experiences of the oppressed in both systems, there is a crucial analytical difference between caste and race. Race stratification is arranged along a continuum of colour- with the whites and the blacks occupying two ends of the spectrum. The colours in between are positioned along a scale- and, this is the result of inter-racial unions often called miscegenation (the mixing of genes). The caste system by contrast is premised on closed and bounded endogamous groups, with the children of intermarriage being pushed either lower in the hierarchy or outside the system altogether. Moreover, the position of the outcaste or the untouchable as polluting is distinctive to the caste system; the blacks are despised but rather than their touch being avoided, black people have been used, in many different contexts, as personal servants by white elites. As you have read in the previous unit, an understanding of the caste system along a single grid of purity/pollution is misleading. The castes are discrete and cannot be ordered in a single hierarchy. The category race is considered to have greater affinity with ethnicity than with caste and, therefore, a discussion of some of the issues of gender among indigenous peoples (or *adivasis* in the Indian context) is included in this unit.

3.4 A BRIEF HISTORY OF RACISM

Racism is the belief in the superiority of a particular race over others following from an understanding that members of each racial group possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race. If, based on such beliefs, certain racial groups are denied rights, or receive benefits, racism is said to be 'institutional' or 'structural' or 'systemic'. Such racial discrimination is often upheld by governments, corporations, religions, or educational institutions or employers. The term 'state racism' applies when governments underwrite racial discrimination by law.

Box No. 3.1

The idea of race is grounded in the taxonomy of human population groups based on physical characteristics, which are hierarchically ordered.

However, the line between physical and social/cultural being always blurred, ethnic or cultural groupings often coincide or overlap with typically racial classifications. As a result, racial and ethnic discrimination is difficult to distinguish and the United Nations conventions reflect the fluidity between these two. An extended definition of race thus includes physical attributes like colour, but also nationality (including citizenship) or ethnicity or culture.

It has been argued that the term 'race' was previously used loosely to denote groups of people and that, in such a sense, racial antagonism goes back to the beginning of history. In antiquity and in medieval times, distinguishing physical attributes of groups of people became associated with conquerors and subject populations, especially in conjunction with the expansion of slavery. Such examples range from the ancient Greeks, the Indo-Aryans to Arab forays into Africa. The origin of the ideology of white supremacy is traced to the *Reconquista* in the fifteenth century, when the Catholic Spaniards fought a fierce and violent battle to recover the Iberian Peninsula from six centuries of Arab occupation. To assert purity of birth (not contaminated by the dark-skinned Moor), they formulated the doctrine of the 'cleanliness of blood', which became the basis of the Western concept of aristocratic 'blue blood', a euphemism for white purity (Lacey, 1983). The doctrine of purity of blood was carried by Spanish and Portuguese colonizers to the Americas, leading to the racial separation of the various peoples. An intricate list of nomenclature for race was evolved and became the primary determinant of social status (Galeano, 1971). Spanish colonial policy is often contrasted to northern Anglo-American policy, constituting two fundamentally different approaches towards the race question- the former imposed racial hierarchies that were gradational and fluid, encouraging widespread miscegenation both with Indian and African populations; the latter established a strong taboo against racial mixing, especially among whites and blacks.

Box No 3.2

The overlap between 'race' and 'folk' was a key element in nineteenth-century ethnic nationalisms- e.g., Italian, German, Slavic, Turkish and Arabic.

The long and varied history of race antagonisms notwithstanding, the contemporary notion of racism is considered to be a *modern* phenomenon. According to Michel Foucault, the first formulation of racism emerged in the Early Modern period as the "discourse of race struggle", a historical and political discourse which Foucault opposed to the philosophical and juridical discourse of sovereignty. He traces the first appearance of racism as a social discourse to the Glorious Revolution (1688) in Great Britain. In this discourse, 'race' was a historical rather than a biological notion- used by the bourgeoisie, the people and the aristocracy in their struggle against the monarchy. From such a notion of 'people' emerged the 'nation' and was enormously influential in France during the Revolution and after (Foucault, 1976-77).

A combination of Social Darwinism and eugenics was the cornerstone of race.

In the nineteenth century, however, race discourse moved along another path to ‘scientific racism’, ending up as the state racism of Nazi Germany, to leave a powerful but negative historical legacy. The term ‘scientific racism’, also called academic racism, is given to the modern biological definition of race developed in the nineteenth century, which used science to justify and support racist ideology. Various disciplines emerged to legitimate race- physical anthropology, anthropometry, craniometry, phrenology, physiognomy and others have now been discredited as sciences. These explorations were combined at that time with new theories of social progress to argue the superiority of white European civilization. The idea of competition and the ‘survival of the fittest’, the latter coined by Herbert Spencer (1864), became the basis of a body of theorization named **Social Darwinism**. By the end of the nineteenth century, scientific racism was bolstered by **eugenics discourses** of “degeneration of the race” and “blood heredity”. The first theory of eugenics was developed in 1869 by **Francis Galton** (1822-1911), who undertook a statistical study of human differences on the basis of inherited characteristics, such as intelligence (Galton, 1869). The linking of heredity to behaviour became academic commonplace by early twentieth century.

The mid-1920s marked the high point of racism’s scientific respectability. Gender became implicated with this dominant discourse of race in two particular ways. First, eugenics focused on reproduction and, by extension, on women’s bodies. Ideologies of racial purity advocated stringent control over women’s sexuality to ensure desirable reproduction. An extreme form of such eugenics-driven social policy was evident in Nazi Germany, but policies of coercive birth control practices, such as forced sterilization of coloured and black women, was not uncommon in the United States. **Margaret Sanger**, a feminist celebrated for pioneering legal abortion and women’s reproductive freedom, was associated with eugenics-inspired arguments about reproductive selection and control. Indeed, and this is our second and significant point, in the United States in particular, the central tenet of feminism- women’s economic, political, sexual and reproductive autonomy- was defined and justified through eugenic and imperialist discourses. The figuring of the woman- white or black- as central to the progress of the nation was argued through eugenics or the ‘regeneration of the race’, which provided the ground for legitimating female bodily sovereignty (Athey, 2000).

By the early 1930s, scientific pronouncements on race came under attack within the academy from the fields of anthropology, psychology and genetics.

Only after the Second World War, however, in revulsion against the eugenics-driven holocaust in Nazi Germany, was there a systematic debunking of biological race theories.

Box No. 3.4

The UNESCO statement, The Race Question (1950), signed by Ashley Montagu, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gunnar Myrdal, Julian Huxley among others, was the first concerted international effort to challenge racist theories.

3.5 BLACK FEMINISM: THE U S CONTEXT

The race question in the Americas was complicated by its brutal plantation slavery system. By the eighteenth century, slaves became synonymous with blacks and some estimated 12 million Africans had been shipped to the Americas as slaves. From the early nineteenth century, anti-slavery campaigns began to gain ground. In the USA, middle class white women became active participants in this movement, called the abolitionist movement. The early women leaders, inspired by the cause of social justice, learned from Anti-Slavery Societies how to organize, publicize and articulate a political protest. The men at the helm of the movement, however, resented women playing active roles. There was a great deal of public anger too against women seeking to upset the race/gender social order. In 1838, the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women was held at the Pennsylvania Hall, where some 3,000 white and black women attended. A mob gathered, the women were stoned and insulted, and the hall was burned down. The attempt to silence women at Anti-Slavery Conventions in the United States and England led directly to **Elizabeth Cady Stanton's** and **Lucretia Mott's** decision to hold the first **Woman's Rights Convention** at **Seneca Falls, N.Y.** in June 1848. One of the articles of belief proclaimed at this and subsequent conventions was that women were in some sense slaves too. The link between abolitionism and women's rights were not provided by white women alone. Some remarkable black women also took the lead. In 1831, **Maria Stewart** began to write essays and make speeches against slavery, promoting educational and economic self-sufficiency for blacks. After Stewart, **Frances Ellen Watkins Harper**, **Sojourner Truth**, and **Harriet Tubman** became some of the leading figures of the US women's movement.

Women's rights activists had believed that the abolition of slavery would mean votes for blacks and for women. However, after the civil war ended, many national leaders continued to argue against giving women the vote. The suffragists regarded this as a betrayal, and they reacted with bitter disappointment. The different priorities concerning votes for women and votes for Black men led to a split within the movement. This rift and the

rhetoric employed by suffragists at this time dented the solidarity between black and white women too. Many leading suffragettes promoted women's vote as a means of preserving white domination. Black women, however, remained actively engaged on all three fronts- in the women's, civil rights and socialist movements. Much before the celebrated National Association of Coloured People was established, in 1896, the **National Association of Colored Women (NACW)** came into being in Washington, D.C., by the merger of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, the Women's Era Club of Boston, and the National League of Colored Women of Washington, DC, and some smaller organizations that had arisen from the African-American women's club movement. The founders of the NACW included Harriet Tubman, Margaret Murray Washington, Frances E.W. Harper and Ida Bell Wells-Barnett. Its two leading members were Josephine Ruffin and Mary Church Terrell. In the next ten years, the NACW became involved in campaigns in favor of women's suffrage and against lynching and Jim Crow laws, which enforced segregation of blacks and whites in public spaces. The twin myths of the 'black rapist' and the 'promiscuity of black women' constituted a strong gender plank in anti-racist struggles. Black feminists also led efforts to improve education, and care for both children and the elderly. By 1918, when the United States entered the First World War, membership in the NACW had grown to an extraordinary 300,000 nationwide.

After the war, women achieved the vote. In the meantime, the rift between the white and the black women leaders had grown wider. **Angela Davies**, perhaps the best known Black feminist wrote that Black women were not allowed to vote in most of the southern states: "In the ranks of the movement which had so fervently fought for the enfranchisement of women, there was hardly a cry of protest to be heard" (Davies, 1981, p.148). In the 1950s, the civil rights movement entered a new and radical phase under the leadership of Martin Luther King. The spark was provided by a woman civil rights leader, however. On 1 December 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, **Rosa Parks**, age 42, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger. Her action was not the first of its kind, but it led to the first organised movement against segregation- the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which in turn led to a concerted attempt to dismantle segregation. As the civil rights movement gained momentum, the new women's movement too made great strides in the 1960s.

It was at the cusp of the civil rights and new women's movements that **Black Feminism** sought to define itself anew. Black women encountered discrimination in both movements- on grounds of race in the Women's Movement and on the grounds of gender in the Black Liberation Movement. Moreover, "black" was equated with black men and "woman" was equated with white women. *Black women were being invisibilised*. The aim of Black Feminism was to juxtapose race and gender and to develop a theory which

could adequately address the ways in which race, gender, and class were interconnected in their lives. The founding moment was the formation of the **National Black Feminist Organization** in New York in 1973.

Even though women played prominent roles in many of the anti-race campaigns of the time, there was no space in these for a gender perspective. This was true of the many strands that constituted the **Black Liberation Movement (BLM)**- Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism, the Black Panthers, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and others. The rhetoric of BLM was highly gendered- freedom was equated with manhood and the freedom of blacks with the redemption of black masculinity. Moreover, the control of women and their sexuality remained an important agenda for male black leaders. Bell Hooks pointed out that the black men tended to overemphasize white male sexual exploitation of black women as a way of expressing their disapproval of inter-racial relationships (Hooks, 1992). Further, women's demand for equality was not accommodated within the BLM, which sought to highlight the need for solidarity among black men and women, but on the basis of 'natural' difference and 'complementary' roles. The problem was not with policy-makers and misogynist writers alone, Black women also faced the force of patriarchal structures within family, community and political organizations. As in many other radical movements of the time, women were expected to make the tea and feed the men, especially those engaged in the serious business of politics.

Black Women who participated in the feminist movement during the 1960s were equally dissatisfied. They found themselves excluded from decision-making and public-speaking while their experiences were theorized under the general umbrella of a universal patriarchy. The differences in race and class that structured diverse experiences of black and white women were largely ignored. The greatest difficulty lay in identifying and naming the racism that was constitutive of a women's movement dominated by the white middle class elite. Black women perceived the women's movement to be complicit with racism and directed by the narrow interests of white women.

As you may have noted from the above, it was, thus, within an uneasy tension between gender and race that the Black Feminist Movement was born. In the early 1970s, there were few black women willing to identify themselves as feminists. BLM argued that black women were already as liberated as was desirable; many black women agreed. The only oppression before black women was racism and the battle against it would be weakened if men and women did not make common cause or the women turned against their own men. The larger, the more important and urgent struggle against racism could not be compromised. Such propaganda fed long-held misconceptions about black women, including the belief that their extraordinary strength in the face of tremendous oppression denoted

liberation. Much of their celebrated “freedom”- working outside the home, supporting the family economically as well as emotionally, and heading the household- was thrust upon them.

The two best-known early formulations of the Black Feminist Movement came from **Alice Walker** and the **Combahee River Collective Statement**. Alice Walker coined the term “**Womanism**” to emphasise self-determination, appreciation for all aspects of womanhood, and the links between women and other movements (Walker, [1974] 1983). The Combahee River Collective Statement (1986) highlighted the intersectionalities of black women’s struggles- against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression. They perceived Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat manifold and simultaneous oppressions.

Box No. 3.5

Following on these general lines, Black feminist writings focused on developing theory, which addressed the simultaneity of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class discrimination.

In the early years, black feminists campaigned on issues of reproductive rights, equal access to abortion, health care, childcare, violence against women, rape, battering, sexual harassment, lesbian and gay rights, police brutality, trade unions, anti-imperialist struggles, anti-racism, nuclear disarmament, and environment protection. Several organizations and meetings highlighted these agenda during the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as the Black Women Organized for Action in San Francisco (1973), the establishment of Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press (1981) and the Black Women’s Self-Help Collective in Washington, DC (1981). The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) and Black Women Organized for Action (BWAO) included black women from varied backgrounds- well-educated, middle-class women worked together with poorly-educated women on welfare to address issues that pertained to all of them.

Black feminism has succeeded in putting the issue of race and ethnicity on the agenda of Feminist theory, which now includes an analysis of race, class, sexuality, as well as gender. In the rhetoric of the current black liberation movements, however, there is relatively much less sensitivity to gender issues, posing a serious challenge for black feminist activists. In recent years, as the theoretical focus has shifted away from categories anchored in biology such as ‘woman’, the black feminists have been faced with new questions of identity and politics. The materialist position that being Black and/or female generates certain experiences, which automatically determine variants of a Black and/or feminist consciousness, can no longer be sustained. It follows that Black feminism cannot be considered the exclusive province of African-American women, regardless of their

experiences and approach. However, the pendulum cannot swing to the other extreme: Black feminism cannot be conceived in a void, without reference to the specificity of the Black women's social location. In response, **Patricia Hill Collins** speaks of the 'outsider within', (Collins, 1991) and a dialectical relationship between the black woman's standpoint (derived from every-day experience of gender/race discrimination) and black feminist thought (the specialized knowledge of experts, who are part of the group and express its standpoint).

So far we have looked at the relationship between race and gender through the example of Black feminism. In the next section, let us turn to an equally important issue close to home- third world feminism in the context of colonialism and nationalism. You have been introduced to post colonial feminism in Course I. It may help you to read the discussion presented here in conjunction with that unit in order to obtain a more comprehensive grasp of the subject.

Check Your Progress:

- 1) *What do you understand by 'racism'? Write a note of about 300 words to explain it.*
- 2) *Write, in your own words, a short note tracing the history of Black Feminism in US.*

3.6 WOMEN, COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM— CONTEXTS FOR THIRD WORLD FEMINISM

The most influential thinker to link race and colonialism was **Franz Fanon**. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) he analyzed the impact of colonialism on its black victims. The book had a major influence on civil rights, anti-colonial, and black consciousness movements around the world. Fanon's last work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), was called by its publisher 'the handbook for the black revolution'. It was based on Fanon's experiences in Algeria during the war of independence. Using a Marxist framework, Fanon explored class conflict and questions of cultural hegemony in the creation and maintenance of a new country's national consciousness. *The Wretched of the Earth* became one of the central documents of the black liberation movement. Fanon's writings influenced many other anti-colonial writers.

In India, the interconnection of race and gender in the colonial discourse came to the forefront in the context of the 'women's question'.

Questions of gender became central to explorations of race and colonialism, however, only after **Edward Said's** enormously influential *Orientalism* (1979). In the last three decades, scholars have explored the ways in which European colonialism in Asia and Africa was premised upon inequalities of race and gender. These two categories, anchored in biological difference, provided the 'naturalizing' ideology to justify the conquest and rule of subject populations in far-flung areas of the globe at a time when Europeans were engaged in struggles over democracy in their own countries. The '**feminization of the orient**'- so vividly portrayed by Said- went hand in hand with a characterization of the western ruling race as masculine. As such the colonizers were able to assert their 'natural' authority to rule and protect weaker sections of the colonized society: as men reign over women by natural law. The notion that the non-white were 'unfit to rule' themselves matched the civilizing mission that was the 'white man's burden', to produce powerful legitimating ideologies of colonial rule.

In 1817, James Mill wrote in the *History of India* that the condition of women in a society was an index of its place in the hierarchy of civilizations. India scored poorly in such a test, given the spectacular 'barbarity' of practices of *sati*, *purdah*, infanticide, child marriage and so on. At that time, a section of India's elite men, exposed through the English language to the liberal and enlightenment philosophies of the west, became open not only to self-criticism but also to improve the situation of women in Indian society. This led to the celebrated social reform movement, begun with **Raja Ram Mohun Roy's** successful campaign to legally abolish *sati* (1829), moving to the legalization of widow remarriage spearheaded by **Iswarchandra Bandopadhyay (Vidyasagar)** (1856) and finally to the abortive attempt to raise the age of consent in marriage (1891). It has been argued that social reform was also a nascent attempt at resisting and challenging the political and cultural disability imposed by the colonial civilizing mission. This initial response, however, gave way to a more aggressive assertion of superiority by the colonized, a project variously named as 'extremism', 'militant nationalism' or, most appropriately in recent years, as 'cultural nationalism' (Sarkar, 2001).

Three elements in 'cultural nationalism' require emphasis here:

- First, there was an attempt to rewrite the history of India to prove that in ancient (Hindu) India, women had high social status. Maitreyee, Lilavati and Gargi became household names as examples of educated women in a remote golden past. It was argued that Muslims, coming from outside India, caused the degradation of women by introducing *purdah* and excluding women from public life.
- Second, politically disenfranchised elite men sought an area of sovereignty and found it in the domestic domain. They sought the control of social institutions like family, caste and religion, a claim that the British were willing to accede in part.

In an influential essay, **Partha Chatterjee** has argued that Indian men invested this 'new patriarchy' with the 'spiritual' essence of Indianness, thereby constructing the home (and women in it) as the site of resistance to colonialism (Chatterjee, 1989). The home thus was the cradle of the nation in more ways than one. As a result of such a discursive reformulation, from the late nineteenth century onwards, nationalists resisted any attempt by the British to intervene in gender relations in Indian society, unless it accorded with their view of an ancient, timeless and unchanging tradition. Women were thus caught between competing masculinities- if they sought to improve their condition, they became complicit with a colonial power that was seeking to emasculate Indian men; as nationalists, they were expected to submit willingly to the tyrannical dictates of Indian patriarchy.

- The third aspect of cultural nationalism that has been the subject of much debate in Indian historiography is its contribution to the rise and growth of communalism. It has been argued that by valorizing ancient (Hindu) India and by designating the Muslims as foreign and as the cause of India's fall from a pinnacle of civilisational height, 'nationalism' was itself imbued with a Hindu culture, alienating Muslims. The use of the image of the Mother Goddess to iconise the nation as Mother India- the songs, festivals, and inspirational literature that elaborated nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were suffused with Hindu imagery. Some scholars have argued that the manipulation of Hindu religious idiom did not amount to a 'communal' intent in nationalist rhetoric, since the aim was to mobilize popular religious sentiment against colonial rule rather than against an oppositional religious community. However, the focus on home/women in early nationalism had the long-term effect of rendering the condition of women hostage to communal competition and conflict. Women as the primary bearers of Hindu and, later, Islamic identities, found it more difficult to escape the patriarchal prescriptions of their respective communities (Sarkar & Butalia, 1995).

Despite these dilemmas, middle class Indian women made great strides in education, employment and political participation in this period and achieved a significant voice- including franchise and constitutional equality- in independent India.

The Indian case is illustrative of constructions of gender within nationalisms across a wide spectrum of the colonized world. The postulation of an 'authentic' national essence was in many cases scripted on familial relations to justify the nation as 'natural', just like the biological family. This resulted in naturalising the social hierarchy that subordinated women and children. Indeed, women have been the battleground between colonialists, who see them as an index of backwardness, and nationalists, who construct them as the embodiment of an 'authentic' national identity.

Moreover, women's bodies have often acquired symbolic significance as the nation and set its boundary; thus, women have to be protected against attack from outside and this means maintaining a vigilant control over them. When women took part in nationalist struggles, as they did in India, they were required to 'return to the home' when the fire was put out (or the enemy defeated). Also, as in the Indian case, while women gained significant concessions in return for their contribution to the national cause, they were often left with a sense of betrayal. Post-colonial states, dominated by male elites, have poor records of implementing laws and policies to promote gender equality (Herr, 2003).

In recent years, **post-colonial theory** has engaged with the double dilemma of nationalist feminists. They are, on the one hand, confronting the racist/ imperialist bias in western feminism; on the other hand, the dominant nationalist ideology marks feminism itself as 'western' and illegitimate. This has led some feminists to articulate a specific position within feminism to address questions of colonialism and nationalism. Termed variously used as **Post-colonial Feminism** or **Third World Feminism**, this body of theory seeks to explore the unique experiences of women in the post-colonial countries of the so-called Third World. There is a great deal of debate over the definition of 'Third World' itself, and **Kumkum Sangari** famously argues that the term does not only designate specific geographical areas, but also imaginary spaces. The key significance of the term, she wrote, lay in its ability to unite vast and vastly differentiated areas of the world into a single definition of 'underdevelopment' (Sangari, 1999). Third World Feminism is most closely associated with the writings of **Chandra Mohanty**, who coined the term to challenge the preoccupations of dominant Western feminism with issues internal to their own countries. She argues that terms such as 'women of colour' or 'third world women' have been appropriated by western feminists and produced as monolithic categories. This, in her

view, results in a discursive colonization through the production of ‘third world difference’. The use of the categories of ‘third world woman’ and ‘third world difference’ in western feminism often ties into larger, latent cultural and economic colonialism, given the hegemony of the West in the production and dissemination of humanities and scientific discourses. Mohanty wishes to use Third World Feminism to signal a viable oppositional alliance in a common context of struggle rather than for color or racial identifications. In this sense, the term adds a new dimension to feminist thinking. Earlier attempts at internationalisation of feminism were on the basis of linking nationally located struggles; Third World feminism seeks to place the imbalance of global politics at the heart of feminist debates- thereby, linking in new ways issues of race, class and gender (Mohanty, 1991). Moreover, given the vast scope of such a feminist imagination, Third World feminism is crucially engaged with questions of difference. Trinh T. Minh-ha, for instance, argues that ‘difference’ in this context is not ‘division’ but an enriching and productive play of intersecting discourses (Trinh, 1987). Third World feminism is thus in conversation with Black Feminism and Womanism (discussed in the earlier section), African feminism, “motherism”, “negofeminism”, chicana feminism and “femalism”.

Let us now turn from the issue of race to a related distinguishable, as well as strongly challenged concept, that of tribe, especially in the context of *Adivaasi* women in India.

3.7 GENDER AND ETHNICITY: *ADIVASI* WOMEN IN INDIA

As we mentioned earlier that a mythic construction of the Aryan race has played a significant role in the way the origin and development of Indian social hierarchy is explained. As we noted that such explanations lack historical validity in our current state of knowledge. In this, nevertheless dominant, trope of social categorization, the British inserted the term ‘tribe’. Early European ethnographers and anthropologists used this term synonymously with ‘aborigines’, denoting three chief characteristics- animism as the chief religion, contrasted primarily with Hinduism and Islam; ‘primitive’ or backward in terms of social, economic and political organization, which resonated with the racial connotation of aboriginals; and ‘autochthonous’ by which they meant isolated from the neighbouring civilizations, locked into simple economies of hills and forests. A dual and oppositional characterization of tribal people became staple in colonial literature- a tension between the ‘noble savage’ image and that of the primitive backward. In recent years, the use of the term ‘tribe’ has been strongly challenged- for its evolutionist bias and its historical inaccuracy, given long traditions of settled agriculture and migration among so-called tribal peoples.

The Indian constitution retained the term tribe to give rise to the category of 'scheduled tribes', who are entitled to special privileges, such as retaining their customary law and reservations in education, employment and political institutions. The alternative term, *adivasi* (meaning literally original inhabitants or indigenous peoples), has emerged from within peoples' movements. Even though some scholars argue that the term *adivasi* suffers from similar occlusions as the term 'tribe', it has gained wide currency now and has the legitimacy of self-description associated with various movements.

The status of women among the *adivasis* has been controversial and remains so even today. There has been, on the one hand, an emphasis on the egalitarian character of *adivasi* communities in which women have high rates of economic and political participation and high status; on the other hand, there are accounts of denial of property rights, exclusion from decision-making, high incidence of witch-killings and generally unequal gender relations in many *adivasi* communities. There has been enough research, though a great deal more needs to be done, to show that all these are correct- the problem lies in the inference drawn from such disparate data. First, the enormous diversity of the population, ranging from the forest peoples such as Dangs and Bhils of western India to the tribal-majority areas of the north-east cannot be homogenized in any one trope of gender.

Among some of the groups in the north-east, matrilineal practices constitute far more positive regimes of gender than among some of the central Indian groups, who place a taboo on women touching the plough. In some communities women enjoy considerable sexual and economic freedom, playing visible roles in production and marketing; in others, they play secondary roles. Second, Virginia Xaxa points out, the issue of women's property rights must be explored in the context of customary laws prevalent in the communities. Given that among many *adivasi* groups, land is held by the community or the lineage rather than by individuals, the question of women's separate rights cannot be posed. In fact, some of the objections raised to women marrying out of the community are based on the disruption caused by the entry of outsiders in existing property arrangements. However, men kinsfolk are also able to use their power within the community to deprive women of their customary rights to maintenance. The identification of widows enjoying life-interests in their husband's land as witches clearly displays the vested interests of the male agnates of the deceased husband. Though, of course, as noted by Virginia Xaxa witch-killing cannot be reduced to property relations alone (Xaxa, 2007).

The question of women's status within *adivasi* communities is often linked to civilisational transformations, a premise drawn once again on a primary assumption of initial backwardness. Two primary strands of change have been highlighted in existing literature:

- **Sanskritisation** or the absorption into caste Hindu society, the transition from tribe to caste.
- **Christianisation**, a process that began with missionary activities in the colonial period.

Both these processes are associated with restrictions being placed on the freedoms previously enjoyed by women. In the former case, women were drawn into mainstream notions of respectability/status involving their withdrawal from work, restrictions on divorce and remarriage and the transition from bride price to dowry. The latter is associated with new freedoms such as access to education, right to worship, participation in social organizations around the church and even entry into the clergy among some denominations; but Christian morals and values have also meant gender segregation and restrictions on divorce. Thus, there is no one answer to the question whether women gain or lose by such transition.

The *adivasis* have been involved in migrations from earliest historical memory, but in the colonial period, there was a huge increase in the scale. They were drawn into labour regimes in mines and plantations under highly exploitative conditions- in many of these cases, the need for cheap and docile female labour for production as well as reproduction drove employers to concentrate on recruitment among *adivasis*. The resettlement of motley groups of *adivasis* from eastern and central India in the tea plantations of Assam and north Bengal have left a troubled legacy, of gathering significance now that the tea industry is facing a global crisis.

The People of India project (1985) by the Anthropological Survey of India has identified 461 *adivasi* communities of which 174 have been identified as sub-groups. According to the Census (2001) the *adivasi* population is 84 million, which constitutes about 8.4 per cent of the country's total population. The sex ratio is somewhat more even at 106.4 (male to female at birth) than the national average at 116.4. State policies after Independence have also had skewed gender impact. The provisions for reservations in education and employment have benefited the men more than women- female literacy rates in 1991, for instance, stood at 18.2 per cent as against 29.6 for men. In terms of health, women suffer more from chronic malnutrition than men. In employment too, men have far outstripped women, despite the long tradition of female workforce participation in many of these communities.

In the heartland of *adivasi* settlements in central India, a battle wages today over natural resources. On the one hand, there are the rich mineral deposits which mining interests are keen to exploit; on the other, there is the *adivasi* resistance to displacement and the destruction of their way of life. In one estimate, about 67 million *adivasis* have been affected by displacement- termed recently as genocide. The crucial natural resources

such as land, forests and water are being depleted and *adivasi* communities' access is being restricted.

These changes have immense impact on the women, who have to adjust to the changing nature of work and livelihood. In the current political conjuncture it may be useful to remember the atrocities to which *adivasi* women have been subjected as a matter of routine. The scale and frequency of physical and sexual assault is mind-numbing and is perpetrated by agents of the state such as forest officials and other law enforcing authorities as well as by estate managers, private security guards and local traders and moneylenders. The extreme vulnerability of *adivasi* women has contributed to their increasingly active participation in armed resistance movements such as the Maoist-led ones.

The *adivasi* women, at the intersection of community and gender, face, in common with the Black and Nationalist feminists, a double dilemma. On the one hand, as individuals and citizens, they are entitled to basic human rights as well as other rights such as those of property, freedom in marriage choice and others. On the other hand, however, the Indian constitution also guarantees the *adivasi* groups collective rights as minorities or as an oppressed and vulnerable community. The difficulty arises when the latter becomes an impediment to the former.

Box No 3.8

Thus, the provision for customary law may be at odds with women's property rights. There are no clear or universal solutions to the oppositional demands of the politics of race/ethnicity and the politics of gender, but rather the need for a politics that can accommodate both. Thus, the search today is for a feminist praxis that does not pose these in oppositional terms as much as within a complex matrix of multiple axes of inequalities.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

As you have seen from the above discussion, the question of race has posed a potent challenge to feminist politics since the nineteenth century. In the United States, the abolition of the brutal plantation slavery system left the legacy of a large black population and their continued struggle for justice, equality and civil rights. At the interstices of a largely white feminist movement and a highly masculinised black liberation movement, the black woman was invisibilised. In response, the black feminist movement delineated a rich and complex theory regarding the intersections of race, class and gender, exploring the multiple disadvantages in the position of the black woman.

We have also noted that the race question also emerged as a critical one in the context of colonialism. The ideology of the civilizing mission or the 'white man's burden' configured the politics of race and gender in many colonized societies and became the framework within which nationalism was articulated. In many anti-colonial nationalist thinking, 'women' became the bearers of tradition and national identity and in that capacity subjected to additional patriarchal control within their own societies. In the post-colonial context, some of these issues have been recast to challenge the dominance of 'white' feminism in the West, emphasizing the imbalance in the global economy and politics to position women of the third world within new parameters of social, economic and cultural 'difference'. This body of feminist thinking is referred to as post-colonial or Third World feminism.

The category 'race' is often used in an expansive sense to include 'ethnicity'. Taking this broader view, this unit has also included a section of the situation of adivasi women in India, exploring their complex position within their own communities as well as the larger developmental agenda of the state. This section has shown the various ways in which adivasi women are subjected to atrocities within and from outside their communities. The double dilemma of these women, caught between the patriarchal forces within their own community and the wider assault on the community from the state and the market is yet another reflection of the double axis of oppression faced by the various segments of women discussed in this unit, in each case variously and historically shaped by experiences of racial inequality.

3.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What is 'Scientific Racism'? In what ways does it intersect with gender ideologies?
- 2) How did Black Feminism emerge in the United States? How have black women articulated their special relationship to feminism?
- 3) In what ways did ideas of race and gender shape imperial ideologies? With special reference to the Indian case, discuss the ways in which nationalist ideologies have built on gender inequality.
- 4) What is 'Third World Feminism'? Is it possible to imagine a 'Third World Woman' given the vast differences in their location and situation?
- 5) Write a short note on the Adivasi woman in India.

3.10 GLOSSARY

Adivasi	: lit. original inhabitant; name now used for 'tribes' or 'scheduled tribes'; self-renaming by movements of the people
Purdah	: lit. curtain; social system entailing women's seclusion; various forms of veiling of women
Reconquista	: lit. reconquest; the Spanish wars against Moorish occupation
Sati	: chaste and devoted wife; also the practice of immolating the widow on the funeral pyre of the husband
Varna	: colour, social division

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UNIT 4 MANIFESTATIONS OF POWER

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Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Notion of Power
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4.1 INTRODUCTION

After reading the earlier three units of this Block you would have understood how gender is situated with respect to class, caste, race and ethnicity. In the present unit you learn about various facets of power, how and in what form and ways it is manifested in interpersonal relationships. The unit also talks of what is the effect of power on the recipient and how power impacts the power wielding agency. The unit will introduce you to various theories of power and implications of power on class and gender. Towards the end we will discuss how and why women have been historically placed at the receiving end of power dynamics in society.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you would be able to:

- Define the concept of power;
- Explain different types of power;
- Analyze the effect of power on individuals;
- Examine gender differentiation in the use of power;
- Learn about theories of power; and
- Critically examine the position of women with respect to power.

4.3 NOTION OF POWER

Our century has foregrounded the role of power to an unprecedented extent: power over forces of nature, power over information, power of the people and power of some groups over others. Power has been embodied in empires, gangs and global corporations. We have seen power being exercised by force, compulsion, influence, propaganda, charisma and bureaucracy. Let us dwell on manifestations of power in the context of gender.

If you look at the development indicators you will find women at the lowest rung of the ladder. The UNDP Report of 2004 shows that the world has nearly one billion illiterate adults out of which two-third are women. According to another estimate, two-third of 130 million children worldwide who are school drop-outs are girls.

Participation in decision making is where the women world over are worst discriminated against. Their representation in political processes is negligible as well. The majority of women, on an average, earn about three fourth of the wages to that of males for the same work in both developed and developing countries. In most of the countries, women approximately take up double the unpaid work than what the men do. Participation of women in the economy is more in primary sector and less in secondary and tertiary sector (www.hrw.org). Globally, the health status of women is lower than the health status of men. The primary victims of today's armed conflicts are not soldiers but civilian women and their children. These facts reflect the reality that women are more powerless than men and become easy prey to exploitation and subjugation. But why have they become so powerless? Let us first define power and then analyse the theory of power in this context.

4.4 DEFINITIONS OF POWER

For your understanding let us first define what is understood by ‘power’.

Power, in its most general meaning is the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one’s environments. Gender stratification results from the unequal distribution of power between men and women.

Box 4.1

Definition of Power

Weber (1968) conceptualizes power as a form of legitimate authority derived from organizational positions that people occupy. Power is connected to authority, domination, exploitation and is an entity that an individual or group may possess. Power, to summarize, is the control, by one person, group or nation over the behavior and conditions of life of another. (Clegg, 1975, p. 57)

A general account of societies, their structure and history can best be given in terms of the interrelations of, the four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military and political relationships (Mann, 1986, p.2).

Power has two central aspects, ‘control over resources’ (physical, human, intellectual or financial) and ‘control over ideologies’ (beliefs, values and attributes). Thus, power is one’s capacity to have control over others. Scholars have, over the years, focused on the power found in specific institutions (i.e religion, business, education, government etc.) while little attention is paid to the study of power vested in individuals. Power is first and foremost an interpersonal concern. Let us first look at issues like what power is, how it influences the person who holds it, how it affects the relationship between people and finally, how it rests with some (men) more than others, specifically, women.

4.5 SOURCES OF POWER

You may know that there are various sources of power in human relationships and our dealings in day to day life. As said earlier, power can be exercised by an individual over another individual, an individual over a group of people, or a group of people influencing an individual, as well as when a group influences another. In this section we shall read about types of powers that are singularly or collectively manifested in human behavioral dealing.

Let us discuss the sources of power that Mann (1986) has discussed in his book titled ‘*Sources of Power*’ Volume I. He describes sources power in the following ways:

- **distributive and collective**

Power relations between men and women, when they take the form of domination of one gender over another, represent the distributive aspect of power. The extent of domination depends, then, on the collective power of each gender. Gender differences in political and economic power are connected with the distributive power of men over women and made it possible for men to control women's education and occupations. Distributive power of men over women is backed by the ideology of separate spheres, an ideology emphasizing traditional femininity.

- **extensive and intensive**

Extensive power is the ability to organize a large number of people over far flung territories in order to engage in minimally stable cooperation. Intensive power refers to the ability to organize tightly and command a high level of mobilization or commitment from the participants whether the area and number covered are great or small.

- **authoritarian and diffused**

If the social control or discrimination is exercised by social institutions such as universities or professional associations, we deal with authoritative power. Diffused power is relatively spontaneous, unconscious, decentralized and widely spread among the population. Diffused power results in similar social practices that embody power relations but are not explicitly commanded. It is more of compliance or obedience or rather understanding that these practices are natural or moral or result from self-evident common interests. Patriarchy is an example of diffused power.

Box No. 4.2

Sources of power

French and Raven (1965) listed six different types of powers that people use in their interpersonal relationships viz. reward, coercion, referent, legitimate, expert and informational.

4.6 INTERPERSONAL POWER

To begin with, it is important to understand what interpersonal power is. Also referred to as 'social power', interpersonal power is the ability to achieve ends through influence. It can also be said that when power enters into a relationship, power holders have the ability to achieve ends by

influencing the targeted persons. But how do people get others to achieve certain ends?

Let's take a hypothetical situation to analyse different types of powers and the messages that power transmits. Rani is being pressurized by her family to get sonography done to find out the sex of the child that she is carrying. Her husband says, 'I will buy you a gold chain if you get sonography done'. He is using the **power of reward**. He may also say, 'I won't let you visit your parents unless you get sonography done.' The **power being** exercised here is that of **coercion**. Third type of **power** that can be manifested by being '**referent**' (**pacifying**) e.g the husband mollifies the wife by saying that if she gets sonography done and know the sex of the child they can plan their future in a better way. Having **expertise** on the matter of reference can be yet another type of **power**. Here, it can be the doctor who says that it is a punishable offence to get sonography done to know the sex of the child. Another type of **power** can be **legitimate**, as acquired by way of social positioning. In this case it can be the mother in law who wants Rani to undertake this investigation. Lastly, **power** can be **informational** (ability to explain why the person should or should not change) e.g here in this case Rani's friends may support her by saying that it's unethical to go in for such investigations.

Next you will read about the bases of these six types of powers and their consequences on relationships between targeted persons and the power holders.

- A person possesses **reward power** when the power holder has some sort of resource or a thing of value for which the targeted person is willing to do something. Resources can be concrete or tangible (like money, gift) or personal or less tangible (like affection, friendship, cordial relationship). With this type of power play the targeted person feel encouraged towards the power holder who uses reward power.
- When we say **coercive power**, it is held by one who threatens to punish or withdraw a reward, unless the target person complies with the power holder's wishes. You can say that coercive power is one of the strongest forms of power that one can have over the other. It instills a strong dislike or even hatred for the power holder. Coercive power does not generally assure a long term compliance with the power holder's wishes, especially when the power holder is not present.
- A person who is admired or liked by the other has what is called **referent power**. For example if you like your mother, you are more likely to comply with her wishes than you would have had you not liked or respected her. Most of the time people with referent power do not know that they are exercising a kind of power over others. Here the

power holder enjoys a positive relationship with the target person and the compliance with the power holders wishes may last for a considerable time even in his or her absence.

- **Legitimate power** comes to a person by virtue of his/ her social position in society that confers authority over others. Here the basis is social roles or positions one holds in society (doctors, police, and judges). Suppose person X is being treated by a doctor. X's dos and don'ts of life are controlled by X's doctor. In most cases the target person feels indifferent towards the person with legitimate power and compliance is almost complete. This kind of a power is more complicated form of power as it entails knowledge of society's social structures and the roles played out by its members in their social statuses.
- **Expert power** is possessed by one who has superior knowledge or ability in a specific subject or area e.g one cannot interfere in the work of a plumber or an electrician as the person is more knowledgeable in the area of plumbing or electrical work. Again the target person is indifferent to the person with expert power and in most cases the target person goes by the wishes of the expert power holder so as to save oneself from trouble arising out of non compliance.
- A person with access to some information that others might find important or valuable, is one who holds **informational power**. One need not be knowledgeable or skilled to have informational power but simply be the possessor of some information that others desire to have. The essential feature here is that one person holds information that others will be influenced by. The power holder's personality or social status and other such attributes are of little importance.

Lets us now look into how power is used by both men and women in their day to day life.

Check Your Progress:

- 1) Define 'power' and list the types of power that you have studied in the earlier section of this unit.
- 2) Can you recall any instance from your life or in somebody else's life around you where there has been a display of interpersonal power? Discuss with others in your peer group or at the Study Centre.

4.7 GENDER DIFFERENTIATION IN POWER USE

It is important for you to know that people attribute different power bases to males and females. Traditionally males have been viewed as having and using both reward and coercive power more than females as the males have greater access to various concrete rewards (money, land etc.) making compliance mandatory. For centuries men have used coercive powers- threat and punishment to get their way. It might be suggested that women would be more likely to use referent powers than men because women are traditionally viewed as more sensitive to others, more concerned with harmony in groups and thought of as less aggressive than men. However, males are taught early that they should not identify with women ('boys don't cry') and to view women in negative ways ('women are always bad drivers'). In most societies men have an abundance of legitimate power because of their access to a variety of positions that sanction them authority over others especially women and children. In the conventional family for example, the mother has legitimate authority over the children but the father still has absolute authority over all the family members, including the wife. Men are always found in positions that bring with them some amount of expertise or superior knowledge. Till late during the last century, most people felt little need for anything more than just basic education for their daughters, although boys were sent to school to get knowledge and building skill. As a result, it was observed that in all high status professions, men out numbered women.

Men with their superior training and education are more apt to have more access to expert power as compared to women. Even when women do show evidence of expert power they are considered less likeable and less feminine. A similar situation arises when the gender base of informational power is analysed. As a result of socialization, males have greater access to information than women. Thus it can be said that men have greater informational power in comparison to women. Now it would be interesting for us to know how power affects the person who uses it and how it differs in its manifestations in different situations.

Box 4.3

Power bases of men and women

Men appear to have greater power bases than women and except for referent power bases all other types of power bases show a favourable inclination towards men.

4.8 EFFECTS OF HOLDING POWER

Here you will read about what the effects of holding power on the power holders are. Having power over others can have various effects. The most evident effect can be that it makes the power holder happy or it can be of greater personal satisfaction and pleasure in his/her life. According to Kipnis (1976) power can bring about a feeling of being lauded or worthlessness. People who have power over others think of themselves as superior to those over whom they have power, producing an exaggerated or enlarged self perception. On the other hand such superiority may foster resentment, anger, bitterness or hatred in the targeted person.

The other effect may be that the power holder assumes that he or she is in control of his or her life rather than being controlled by external forces. The power imbalances between men and women make men believe that they are more in charge of their life and women seeing themselves as being controlled rather than controlling.

Enhanced self-esteem can be another effect of holding power. People with power also hold more resources thus satisfying their desires. Power holders are more likely to be flattered or praised by targets of their power. But one with little power may not get the attention and will rely on tactics like helplessness to achieve their desires.

There may be a change in morality as a result of holding power as the person may feel above the common rules that govern others. In fact the person may frame his or her own rules of conduct especially if these values or norms are constricting his or her power base. Lastly, the power holder may view the target person with contempt or disrespect. Thus we see that power has significant effects on both the power holder and the target person. The notion that power can have a corrupting effect on an individual is not an idle observation.

4.9 SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF POWER

Till now we dealt with power more from a psychological point of view. Here we will enquire about power from a sociological perspective. As you may have concluded by now that power is a measurement of an entity's ability to control its environment, including the behaviour of other entities. The term authority is often used for power as its legitimate outcome. Exercise of power is seen as widespread amongst humans as social beings. Often, the study of power in society is referred to as politics. Much of the recent sociological debate on power revolves around the issue of the enabling nature of power. Thus, power can be seen as various forms of constraints on human action, but also as that which makes action possible, although in a limited way.

Because power operates both relationally and reciprocally, sociologists speak of balance of power between parties with regard to a relationship: all parties have some power with regards to all relationships. The sociological examination of power concerns itself with discovering and describing the relative strength equal or unequal, stable or subject to periodic change.

4.9.1 Theories of Power

Let us examine theories of power from the politico-sociological point of view in the upcoming section.

- **Plurist Theories**

Here power is seen to be apprehended by a range of groups in any society. Every society has some groups more powerful than others and these groups struggle with each other to hold power. Because of checks and balances built in the democratic government system no specific group is able to dictate terms to other groups i.e societal power is dispersed, widely shared and derived from many sources. On the other hand, the state stands for institutionalized power and authority, its key role being to promote harmony within the system, to safeguard equilibrium and order. Individuals with common interest exercise authority on decision makers by collective action. Thus, common citizens can have meaningful contribution to decision making.

A variant of this theory- elite pluralism focuses on elite rule and egalitarian principles. That is to say that democracy has changed from one of direct popular rule to that of competition between and within elites to control the state. Here elites are not a single entity but multiple centres of political powers. This theory also distracts mass participation in politics. This theory is criticized for its provincial focus and not on widely based application. Also there is no concern for sharing of power with masses.

- **Elite theories**

Societal power is vested in the hands of elite groups who are in control of major societal institutions and are invariably not accountable to the masses. That is to say that the elite hold sizeable power; use each and every means to hold on to power so that power becomes an end in itself. This theory propagates the idea that rather than there being a simple plurality of competing groups in society, there is a series of competing elite. These powerful competing groups impose their will on the rest of society. This theory is based on two basic ideas:

- a) The theory of '**circulating elites**' associated with writers such as **Pareto** and **Mosca**. Pareto stressed the psychological, intellectual and skill superiority of the elite. Circulation of the elite comprise of two processes- a process in which individuals circulate between

the elite and non-elite and the other one in which the whole group of elite is replaced by new one. Mosca laid stress on the sociological, organizational characteristics of the elite and the masses. Masses are more unorganized while the elite are organized groups. He believed that all societies are divided into two groups, the ruling class and the ruled. Personal characteristics like intellectual, material and moral superiority are influential and esteemed amongst the elite. Also the dominant interests of society comprising of the social and political forces gets reflected in the ruling class. Thus, the elite groups in any society govern the structures and values of that society.

- b) The **power elite theory**- a more radical form of elite theory has **C. Wright Mills** as its main proponent. Mills says that power in modern society is centralized in the power elite as a result of historical changes that made the top three institutions (military, political and economy) so similar and powerful. They combine their interest and might. Here power is resultant of position and not personal characteristics. The elite tend to come from the same background and interact socially to achieve shared interests.

- **Ruling Class Theories**

This is a Marxist form of theorizing which argues that power rests primarily with the owners and controllers of economic production i.e the bourgeoisie. Political power is drawn from economic ownership. Thus, the ruling class not only controls the means of production, distribution and exchange in capitalist society but also dictates and is in command of the institutions of political power. The theory of the ruling class is again seen in two main forms:

- a) **Instrumentalism** is associated with the work of **Ralph Milliband**. He focuses on the special relationship between the state and the capitalist class. The mechanisms of control of the state by this class transform it into a capitalist state. They do not occupy political offices but indirectly control political officials and institutions and directly influence state policies Thus; the theory emphasizes direct or indirect control of the state by a dominant ruling class.
- b) **Structuralism** is most ardently associated with **Poulantzas** who argues that by virtue of the system of production itself in capitalist society, it becomes a capitalist state even in the absence of direct control of state mechanism by the capitalists. That is to say, the direct involvement of members of the ruling class in the state mechanism is the effect and not the cause. He believes that the capitalist class is internally divided and the state protects the capitalist's interest in general. Thus the state is autonomous in its functioning.

- **Weber's Conflict Theory of Power:**

After establishing the fact that economic relations lie at the source of power and politics, Weber focused on the demonstration of class power exercised through the state. He consigns a quasi- autonomous role to the state in which bureaucrats appear to be serving their own interest and the bureaucracy appears to be a power unto itself. Bureaucracies are skilled bodies of specialists and experts, a kind of social machine with individuals as depersonalized objects. They have the monopoly of expertise and the capacity to carry out or not carry out the policies of the political leaders. Thus, citizens are removed from control of and contributing to political decision-making. Weber further argues that bureaucracy and power are manifestations of the real material forces that dominate socio-economic structure of modern society(Duke, 1976, p.38-39).

Gramsci's Neo-Marxist Theory of Power

Gramsci focused on the ideological apparatus of the capitalist state. He introduced the concept of cultural ideological supremacy i.e the ruling class controls and shapes the ideas and hence the consciousness of the masses. The dominant class uses its political, moral and intellectual leadership to create its vision of the world as complete and universal. This dominant class also shapes the interests and needs of the subordinate groups. The role of the state, he suggests is to perpetuate and legitimize the social class system. It also maintains and reproduces the capitalist system and its class relationships. . The state fosters prevailing ideology and values in the education system, media and other social institutions. It guarantees the conditions for capital production and accumulation, thus, financing economic growth.

Check Your Progress:

Can you recall the various theories of power and write two to three sentences about each of them.

4.9.2 Gender, Class and Power

After learning about different theories of power it will interesting to see how power affects class system in a society. Gender, class and power are three abstract nouns that refer to social relations. You have read in the earlier unit that whereas gender and class refer to socially specific sets of relations, power - the ability to impose one's will -refers to an ingredient of all these sets. Power can vary from hegemony, perceived as legitimate,

violence to threat of violence. Class is the relation to the means of production, especially the right to have direct access to the fruits of production. Gender has been used to mean the social form of biological sexuality, but is best understood as the relations between men and women. The three together constitute the fundamental social, economic, cultural and political relations that determine any social system.

Freud called attention to the sexual power struggle that underlay the bourgeois civilization of his days; it has become commonplace to describe bourgeois civilization as sexually repressive. **Foucault** in his work 'History of Sexuality' describes power by stating that "Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization: as the process which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontations, transforms, even reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system. And lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies". (Foucault's 1977, p.94)

He adds that power is everywhere not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere. It is permanent, repetitious, inert and self-reproducing. Power is not an institution and not a structure; neither it is certain strength we are endowed with: it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. Foucault says power is exercised through a web of relationships and that individuals circulate between its threads. They are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. Many followers of Foucault and postmodern philosophy have adopted a kind of ethical ultra-relativism that is, in part, based on the kind of deconstructive practice that Foucault developed.

Capitalist class relations and the modern state have long cooperated in promoting a universal gender system, based on the identification of gender identity and gender role or sexual differentiation in general and gender specific allocation of tasks in particular. In the next section we will learn about the relationship between power and violence.

4.10 POWER AND VIOLENCE

There is a good deal of evidence linking power concerns to violence, both at individual and collective levels. Numerous studies suggest that when a concern for power is more frequent in speeches or diplomatic communications, the likelihood of war also increases. On the other hand, it is observed that those cultures that do not take pleasure in domination

and killing have little differentiation of sex roles and no ideal of brave, aggressive masculinity. Whereas the vice-versa is equally true that cultures professing domination and killings have strict gender differentiation in all spheres of life. Rape is often an explicit tactic of war.

Rape and Power Display

Few other human acts bring across such a gory image as rape. It is undoubtedly a gruesome act of violence and sexual assault instigated by one or more persons against another human being. In the earlier times rape was considered as 'victim precipitated phenomenon' but later the psychiatric and psychological community concluded that rape is the result of a disordered sexual impulse in a certain group of men. Rape, as studied in recent times is an act of violence, politics and acting out of power roles. A prime ingredient in rape is the element of aggression which is so deeply associated with masculine traits. In this light it can be said that rape is not a deviant act but an act of super conforming to the notion of masculinity which in its fold brings in all the other desired masculine traits like force, toughness, strength, power, dominance, superiority, conquering over etc.

Rape is now being seen as the violation of human rights of an individual. World over there are more women victims of rape because of men holding more powers than women. Thus, there is increased concern over women's right as a result of women's activism and movements. There is a greater emphasis on studying extent and locales of sexual assault and their debilitating consequences for the victim. As a result social scientists have turned their attention towards understanding the dynamics of rapists and their motives, the institutional and cultural factors and the factors affecting the victim and their reaction to the trauma.

4.11 WOMEN AS RECIPIENTS OF POWER

Here we would be learning about what is the effect of power on women when they the recipient and why it so that women are the most vulnerable section of the society when it comes to power display.

The distribution of power is hierarchical in nature. Women generally remain at the lower echelons of the power hierarchy. The process of hierarchy has arranged the social groups in steep ordering where powerful few with social and economical command decide for the society per se. Women rarely questions this power hierarchy. On the other hand they accept this subjugation willingly placing greater value to stability and integrity of the family. Women experience issues of powerlessness not just in the household but also in and through the interaction of multiple social, political and economic institutions.

According to Kumar and Varghese (2005) there are three approaches to understand women's powerlessness.

- i) Because of factors beyond their control, there is a focusing of patriarchal kinship system determining women's roles and relationships
- ii) Psychological factors are responsible for prioritizing women's reproductive and productive roles within the household or place of work
- iii) Multiple domains working simultaneously or sequentially. Socio-cultural factors condition women's mind in particular ways in which gendered relations, specific ideologies, institutional processes, women's self perception as well as their own understanding of the world gets coloured.

Let us now look into specific areas where women have power in their own way or are targeted for power and how they respond to such power equations.

- **Women, food and power:** In all kinds of societies (peasant, tribal, rural, urban, and industrial) women always had primary responsibility for preparing food and giving it to others. Particularly to pre- industrial societies, women contributed heavily to producing, processing and distributing food. The predominant role of women in feeding is a cultural universal and a major component of female identity. Hence, the power of women is to a great extent identified with the power of food. Interestingly, although control of food can be the strongest weapon of coercion, for women it is not. In no culture is it acceptable for a woman to deny food to the family whereas it is acceptable for politicians/ traders (mostly males) to deny food to the entire population for political/ economic ends. Women feed their children and husband in return for love, favours, good behaviour and the power that comes from being needed. It is a power exercised over family members and occasionally beyond it to the members of wider society. Giving food connects women to close relatives through an intensive emotional channel, thus, becoming identified with the food they offer. Their identity has been traditionally based not on the satisfaction of their own needs but on altruism and self-sacrifice.
- **Women, power and sex segregation in higher education and occupations:** Higher level of sex segregation in our society can be traced to well developed capitalism which empowered men not women and subjugated women to domesticity. This subjugation provided further power to men over women. Both human capital theory and social control theory focuses on social and psychological processes such as differential socialization of boys and girls. Education and occupational choices of individuals are assumed to be rational and therefore different for men and women. There are also social pressures on women preventing them from entering fields of study and occupation earmarked as those for

males. That's why we see women heavily concentrated in a few fields of study and in a few lower status professions such as school teaching, nursing, social work, librarianship and secretarial jobs and why they have been drastically under represented in professions like medicine, engineering and law. The channeling of women in few fields of study and occupations was a result of the control being exercised by middle class men over higher education and the professional qualifications. Women's education to a large extent, however, was detached from occupational structure and its importance was defined in terms of its benefits for marriage and well run household. A few occupational options existed for unmarried college educated women coexisting with the belief that marriage and motherhood are the most important roles for women and at the same time incompatible with a professional career.

Despite significant progress in socio-economic status and a rise in the number of working women, inequalities in workplace power still remain. A popular explanation for ascriptive inequalities in workplace power invokes the metaphor of a glass ceiling that describes barriers that women often face as they climb corporate ladders. It implies that employers might let women into low positions of authorities; they are much less likely to let them into higher positions that involve greater control.

4.12 WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR POWER

We have just read that women are comparatively powerless. Women's struggle for power is justified from the point of view of social justice and human rights. The values of equality, fraternity and liberty are the noble humanitarian values in the democratic world. While women are equal partners of human destiny, there is no reason to ascribe subordinate status to half of the human race. Now there are economic reasons to justify women's struggle for equality and power as persistent inequality between men and women constrain the productivity of society and ultimately slows economic growth. Thus, women's struggle for equality and power balance is not only justified but desirable.

Gender subordination is seen as a complex, multi-dimensional, and all pervasive phenomenon affecting all aspects of women's life. This psyche is embedded at many different mutually reinforcing levels- individual consciousness, the home, the workplace, legislation, state structures and international economic and political systems. Consequently, addressing issues of gender equality also implies affecting wider structural changes needing collective solidarity through vertical and horizontal networks and movements. The empowerment of women results in women having 'power to' (e.g.

acquire ability to make choices), 'power within' (to have agency in seeking higher levels of access and control) and 'power with' (sharing power with men or others).

4.13 LET US SUM UP

Let us recapitulate what we have learnt in this unit. We started with definition of power as control over people, resources and environment, connecting power with authority. Then, we discussed types of power - distributive/collective; extensive/intensive and authoritarian/diffused. Interpersonal power has been discussed keeping in mind all six types (reward, coercion, and referent, expertise, legitimate and informational). Next, we examined the use of power by men and women- men are usually seen to be using all but referent powers and women rely more on referent power. There can be several effects of holding power on the power-holder- superiority, enhanced self esteem, over and above norms or disrespect towards the target person. You also learnt about the sociological point of view of power, including theories of power viz. plurist, elite, ruling class, conflict theory and the neo- Marxist. The unit thereafter discusses the relationship between gender, class and power. Following this is the relationship between power, violence and ultimate display of power by men on women resulting in sexual assault and rape being the worst form. Towards the end there is a critical analysis of women as power recipients followed by justification for women's struggle for power. You also read about how power is manifested through distribution of resources and opportunities in life. In the next Block you would be reading about the institutions that are affected by power dynamics in society.

4.14 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Critically analyze the types of power that men and women display.
- 2) Analyse the relationship between gender, class and power.
- 3) Discuss how power and violence are related.
- 4) Critically analyse the situation of women with respect to power dynamics that operate in the society.

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