



INTERSECTIONALITY IN INDIAN LAWS: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE

Usha Sharma*

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class within the framework of Indian laws through a feminist lens. Despite legal reforms targeting gender-based inequalities, the experiences of women, especially those from marginalized communities, necessitate a more thorough analysis. The research focuses on key legislations such as the Indian Penal Code, the Dowry Prohibition Act, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, scrutinizing their intersection with social hierarchies. Employing an intersectional feminist perspective, the study explores how women from diverse backgrounds navigate the legal system, emphasizing the distinct challenges faced by Dalit, Adivasi, and economically disadvantaged women. The research also aims to evaluate the efficacy of legal provisions in addressing multifaceted discrimination, encompassing issues like access to justice, representation, and cultural biases entrenched in the legal system. By delving into these complexities, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on feminist justice within the Indian legal context, advocating for a more inclusive and intersectional approach in both legislative frameworks and their implementation. The findings aim to offer insights into gaps and challenges within the current legal structure, presenting recommendations for a more nuanced and equitable legal system capable of addressing the diverse needs of women in India. Ultimately, the research seeks to pave the way for a legal landscape that reflects a deeper understanding of the intersectional experiences of women and actively works towards their empowerment and justice.

KEYWORDS: Indian, Women, Laws, Justice, Legal System, Act.

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- Research Scholar at Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla H.P

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism entails advocating for women's rights to be on par with those enjoyed by men. It extends beyond a mere focus on equality and rights, emphasizing the importance of compassion, respect, and understanding from male counterparts.¹ Globally, women often face deprivation of social and economic rights, prompting a heightened awareness among them during the 20th century regarding their desires, sexuality, self-definition, existence, and destiny. The efforts of women worldwide to attain independence and self-identity marked a revolutionary wave acknowledged as 'Feminism' by analysts and critics. Contemporary writers continue this quest, striving to liberate women from the constraining socio-cultural norms and oppressive myths prevalent in their respective countries.² Historically, feminist legal discourse in India has primarily centered around issues affecting privileged or upper-caste women. An intersectional perspective urges a re-examination of these narratives, acknowledging the diverse experiences of women across various social strata. By doing so, it aims to expose and rectify the limitations and biases present in existing legal frameworks, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable legal landscape. This critique also examines the ways in which Indian laws might unintentionally perpetuate or exacerbate inequalities due to their failure to account for the intersecting dimensions of oppression. For example, laws addressing dowry-related violence may disproportionately impact women from marginalized communities who may face additional forms of discrimination.³

Furthermore, inter sectionality challenges the essentialist view of womanhood by recognizing that women's experiences are shaped not only by their gender but also by other social markers.⁴ This nuanced approach helps uncover the unique challenges faced by Dalit women, tribal women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups within the broader feminist discourse. As we delve deeper into this feminist critique of intersectionality in Indian laws, it becomes apparent that an inclusive and responsive legal framework is imperative for achieving true gender justice. This examination aims to contribute to ongoing discussions and advocacy efforts, urging policymakers, legal scholars, and activists to adopt a more intersectional approach in the pursuit of gender equality and justice in India.⁵

II. MEANING OF FEMINISM

The term "Feminism" originates from the Latin word "Femina," meaning woman. It embodies the principle that everyone should be treated equally irrespective of their gender, advocating for a society free from sex-based

¹ Women's Rights as Human Rights: Feminism and Universal Human Rights, available at: <https://academic.oup.com/book/35038/chapter-abstract/298884129?redirectedFrom=fulltext>. (Last visited on 05.02.2024).

² Gelsthorpe, L. (2002) 'Feminism and Criminology' in M. Maguire, R. Morgan and R. Reiner (eds).

³ Dr Madhumita Dhar Sarkar and Bibhabasu Misra, "Legal Feminism: Concept and Its Shades", Legal News & Views (Vol. 30, N - 8), Aug. 2016 p.2

⁴ Shashi Deshpande's Mall Remedies: Agony and Trauma UMA Of Women Under Male Chauvinism. Retrieved on October 10, 2018 from <http://www.researchscholar.co.in/downloads/78-dr.-adiramesh-babu.pdf> Barnes, A.

⁵ A Comparative Study of Shashi Deshpande's and Anita Nair's Feminism. Retrieved on October 27, 2018 from [www.https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume11/2-A-Comparative-Study-of-Shashi-Deshpande%27s.pdf](https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume11/2-A-Comparative-Study-of-Shashi-Deshpande%27s.pdf)

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discrimination. Feminism is grounded in the belief in comprehensive equality for women, encompassing social, economic, political, and personal spheres.⁶

According to the Oxford Dictionary, feminism is defined as "the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes." In essence, this implies that women should have equal rights and opportunities as men. Importantly, feminism does not promote female dominance over men, nor does it suggest women seeking superiority. Instead, it advocates for a balanced and equal partnership between the genders, emphasizing mutual support and collaboration. In a feminist framework, both men and women work towards achieving equality in all aspects of life.⁷

III. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINISM

The term "feminism" originated from the French word "feminisme," introduced by utopian socialist Charles Fourier. In English, it first appeared in the 1890s, linked to the movement for women's equal political and legal rights.⁸

First Phase: 1850–1915 During the period spanning from 1850 to 1915, the genesis of Indian feminism marked a significant epoch in the country's social landscape, coinciding with its encounter with Western concepts of freedom, egalitarianism, and solidarity. This era witnessed the pioneering endeavours of men who took the initiative to tackle prevalent social injustices, including the abolition of sati, the advocacy for widow remarriage, the eradication of child marriage, and the promotion of literacy. Indian feminism of this era was characterized by a multifaceted approach, spearheaded by male reformers who recognized the urgency of addressing systemic inequalities entrenched within Indian society. These reformers, drawing inspiration from Western ideals, embarked on a mission to challenge entrenched patriarchal norms and advance the cause of gender equality.⁹

The movement's primary focus was to dismantle oppressive customs such as sati, the practice of widows immolating themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres, which symbolized the most extreme form of patriarchal control over women's lives. Additionally, efforts were directed towards advocating for the rights of widows to remarry, challenging the stigma and social ostracization attached to widowhood. Furthermore, the movement aimed to confront the pervasive practice of child marriage, recognizing its detrimental impact on the lives of young girls who were forced into premature unions, often resulting in curtailed educational opportunities and increased vulnerability to various forms of exploitation.¹⁰ Moreover, the promotion of literacy emerged as a cornerstone of the feminist agenda during this period, acknowledging education as a potent tool

⁶feminist jurisprudence, available at: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/feminist_jurisprudence.

⁷ Bharati Law Review, April – June, 2018 47 Feminist Jurisprudence And Women Rights In India *Dr. Kalpana Devi Prof. Dr. S.N. Sharma, http://docs.manupatra.in/newslines/articles/Upload/11DBD81F-4929-4F33-92BB-7B97D045BF52._Devi-Prof._Dr._Sharma_Asst._Prof.-Prof_47-56__Jurisprudence.pdf

⁸ Status of Women in Indian Society. Retrieved on October 5, 2018 from www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol3-issue6/F363336.pdf Pati, D. (2015).

⁹ Shashi Deshpande's the Binding Vine: A Critique of Rape Culture in India. Retrieved on October 7, 2018 from <http://www.researchscholar.co.in/downloads/63-ms.-ravinder-kaur.pdf> Mohapatra, H. (2015).

¹⁰ Usha Ramanathan "Images (1920-1950) Reasonable Man, Reasonable Woman and Reasonable Expectations"

for empowering women and fostering their socioeconomic independence. In essence, the first phase of Indian feminism between 1850 and 1915 exemplified a concerted effort by enlightened male reformers to challenge entrenched social norms and pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive society.¹¹

Second Phase: 1915–1947 Between 1915 and 1947, a pivotal period in Indian history unfolded, characterized by the intensification of the anti-colonial struggle and the ascendancy of nationalist sentiments. Against this backdrop, Indian feminism entered its second phase, intricately intertwined with the burgeoning nationalist fervor. Influenced by Victorian ideals, Indian womanhood assumed a central position in the broader cultural revivalism sweeping the nation. Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a towering figure during this era, his philosophy of non-violent civil disobedience not only galvanizing the struggle for independence but also legitimizing women's active participation in public life. Gandhi's advocacy for women's empowerment underscored their indispensable roles in the nationalist movement, elevating their status from passive observers to dynamic agents of change.¹²

Simultaneously, women's organizations such as the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged as formidable platforms for advancing feminist agendas within the nationalist discourse. These organizations addressed pressing issues including women's political participation, access to the franchise, communal representation, and leadership opportunities. The period witnessed a dynamic interplay between the nationalist cause and feminist aspirations, with women assuming increasingly prominent roles in both spheres. As the struggle for independence reached its crescendo, Indian feminism experienced a renaissance, propelled by the collective efforts of women who sought not only political liberation but also the realization of gender equality and social justice.¹³

THIRD PHASE: POST–1947 Following India's independence, the trajectory of feminism entered a transformative phase, marked by a reevaluation of women's roles in society and a departure from traditional gender norms. This post-1947 era witnessed a shift away from the acceptance of rigid sexual divisions within the workforce towards a more inclusive and equitable approach. As the early twenty-first century unfolded, the feminist agenda evolved to prioritize the empowerment of women, emphasizing their agency in shaping their personal lives and exercising self-determination.¹⁴ The movement transitioned from merely advocating for women's utility in society to asserting their inherent rights to equality, autonomy, and decision-making. Central to this evolution was the recognition that true liberation for women extended beyond mere participation in the workforce; it encompassed the freedom to chart their own destinies and define their identities on their own terms. Consequently, Indian feminism embraced a holistic approach that addressed not only systemic barriers to

¹¹ Lynn Hankinson Nelson, 'Who Knows: From Quine to a Feminist Empiricism, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990, p202.

¹² Feminist Concerns in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors and Small Remedies*. Retrieved on October 22, 2018 from

¹³ *The Female Offender. Girls, Women and Crime*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. Grosz, E. (1987)

¹⁴ Constitution Itself Is Feminist Justice Chandrachud on Transformative Constitution & Feminism, Live Law, available at www.livelaw.in/constitution-itself-is-feminist-justice-chandrachud-on-transformative-constitution-feminism/

women's advancement in various spheres but also challenged entrenched patriarchal structures that constrained their autonomy and agency.¹⁵

The post-1947 phase of Indian feminism thus represented a paradigm shift towards a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of gender equality. It sought to dismantle patriarchal norms and foster an environment conducive to women's empowerment, wherein they could fully realize their potential and contribute meaningfully to society while asserting their rights to self-determination and equality.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lloyd's Introduction to Jurisprudence, 7th Edition; Sweet and Maxwell (2001): This book has in details described various feminist schools. The Schools are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Cultural Feminism, and postmodern Feminism. Through various illustrations and case laws, legislation feminism especially postmodern feminism has been explained here to be an alternative viewpoint of a legal system and subjective life experience of an individual woman. She can't be stereotyped as emotional, caring, attached. She is not a social, patriarchal construct but a distinct, separate and independent feminine identity.¹⁶

N. K. Chakrabarti And Sachi Chakrabarty "Gender Justice" R Cambray And Co Publication (2006): This book provides a comprehensive examination of the current violent nature of discrimination against women. The book contains several research articles authored by competent professors, judges and advocates. The book examines Indian women's life situation in contexts like, prostitution, domestic violence, offences under Indian Penal Code and Other Penal statutes in the backdrop of Kolkata of West- Bengal and around.¹⁷

Dr G.B. Reddy "Women the Law" Gogia Law Agency (2007): The author has done well in spreading the canvas wide and dealing with the Constitutional provisions affirming women's right to reservation, right against exploitation and has covered the subject with lucid brevity. Various family laws rooted in divergent religions side by side their dowry laws have been discussed. The Prevention of Immoral Traffic Legislation, Equal Remuneration Statute, the menace of sex discrimination rackets has also been reviewed.¹⁸

Rekha Rastogi, "Gender Justice and Sexual Discrimination" Sumit Enterprises (2007): Gender discrimination now denotes differentiation between people on grounds such as gender, colour, sexuality, disability or class. Discrimination in a political system can be explicit, or covert.¹⁹ South Africa was under Apartheid, a glaring example of State Recognized institutionalized exclusion of black people from public political life. Similar explicit exclusions are practiced against women in so many spheres. Besides, discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and gender is galore in numerous sectors, though, at a comparatively informal level. Level of education, employment, political representation, percentage convicts living in poverty

¹⁵ Feminist Legal Theory: An Anti-Essentialist Reader, ed. by Nancy E. Dowd and Michelle S. Jacobs, New York Univ. Press, 2003, ISBN 0-8147-1913-9

¹⁶ Lloyd's Introduction to Jurisprudence, 7th Edition; Sweet and Maxwell (2001).

¹⁷ N. K. Chakrabarti And Sachi Chakrabarty "Gender Justice" R Cambray And Co Publication (2006)

¹⁸ Dr G.B. Reddy "Women the Law" Gogia Law Agency (2007).

¹⁹ Chief Justice A.S. Anand, "Justice for Women" 3rd Edition, Universal Publication

and soon have been employed as measures by organizations monitoring discrimination in various societies to indicate how informed exclusion operates.²⁰

V. IMPORTANCE OF FEMINISM

The significance of feminism lies in its core belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. In our current world, gender disparities persist, negatively impacting both men and women. Despite feminism's positive contributions to societal progress, some individuals remain unconvinced. In the contemporary landscape of robust social rights movements, feminism encounters resistance from certain men who perceive themselves as occupying a superior social position. Instead of recognizing that feminist ideals benefit both genders, these individuals launch a vigorous assault against its empowering principles.²¹

As women progressively integrate into society, certain groups of men resort to outdated and immature arguments like questioning whether they can resort to violence against women or expressing fears about losing rights. Such arguments hinder the pursuit of equality, a goal at the heart of feminism, which aims to establish a level playing field for men and women. The essence is clear: violence is not acceptable, and equal rights do not diminish the rights of any gender. Men and women should collaborate, not compete. The importance of feminism for men is rooted in the simple fact that the concept of equality is not a threat. To strive for equality, men must acknowledge the societal reality that currently places them in a position of power. This acknowledgment is not meant to diminish men's feelings but to emphasize that feminism seeks to elevate women to the same social and economic level, which currently places men in a higher tier.²²

VI. INDIAN LAWS

When conducting a feminist critique of intersectionality within Indian laws, several key legislations can be analyzed to understand how they intersect with social hierarchies and contribute to or address inequalities based on gender, caste, and class. Here are some laws that could be discussed under this topic:

Indian Penal Code (IPC)

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) contains sections addressing crimes against women, including rape and domestic violence, which intersect with socio-economic and caste dynamics. These provisions offer insights into the complex challenges faced by women, particularly those from marginalized communities. Sections pertaining to rape and domestic violence within the IPC acknowledge the prevalence of gender-based violence and seek to provide legal recourse for victims. However, socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of education, and unequal power dynamics can exacerbate women's vulnerability to such crimes. Additionally, caste dynamics

²⁰ Feminist Jurisprudence and Its Impact In India. An Overview <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-1859-feminist-jurisprudence-and-its-impact-in-india-an-overview.html>

²¹ Richards, David A. J. *Women, Gays, and the Constitution: the Grounds for Feminism and Gay Rights in Culture and Law*, (1998).

²² Feminism in modern jurisprudence, <https://blog.ipleaders.in/feminism-in-modern-jurisprudence/>

may further compound these vulnerabilities, with women from lower castes facing heightened risks of violence and discrimination.²³

Provisions related to honor crimes within the IPC address the brutal reality faced by women from marginalized communities who defy societal norms and expectations. Honor killings, often perpetrated against women who choose their partners against caste or community norms, highlight the intersection of gender, caste, and patriarchal control. These crimes reflect deep-seated prejudices and reinforce oppressive caste hierarchies, perpetuating cycles of violence and discrimination. The impact of honor crimes on women from marginalized communities is profound, leading to loss of life, livelihood, and dignity. Women who dare to assert their autonomy and challenge caste-based restrictions face ostracism, violence, and even death, highlighting the urgent need for legal and societal reforms.²⁴

While the IPC provides a legal framework for addressing crimes against women and honor crimes, its effectiveness in protecting women from marginalized communities depends on robust enforcement, awareness-raising, and dismantling of discriminatory social norms. Efforts to combat gender-based violence and caste-based discrimination must be intersectional, addressing the complex interplay of socio-economic, gender, and caste dynamics to ensure justice and equality for all women.²⁵

Dowry Prohibition Act:

Dowry, once a practice limited to Hindu traditions, has spread across diverse communities in India, prevailing extensively and blurring the line between customary gifts and coercive demands. While gift exchanges between families are common globally, the escalation of dowry demands has become a significant societal issue. Despite legislative attempts to combat it, the practice persists, fueled by consumerism and materialism. Historically, early efforts to address dowry included the Sindh Deti Leti Act of 1935 and state-specific laws in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 was India's first nationwide attempt to outlaw dowry, although its success has been limited. Definitions of dowry vary, but it generally refers to property or gifts exchanged in connection with marriage.

Contrary to popular belief, laws against dowry apply to all communities in India, not just Hindus. Dowry's pervasive nature crosses religious and regional boundaries, affecting Muslims, Christians, and others alike. Despite legislative measures, confusion persists between genuine gifts and coerced dowry demands, perpetuating this social ill. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 plays a crucial role in addressing this issue by prohibiting the giving or taking of dowry in marriage. Offenders face penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment, with the burden of proof on them to demonstrate that the dowry was not related to the marriage.

²³ Dr. S.C.Tripathi and Vibha Arora, "Women And Children"6th edition page1-4.

²⁴ Versha Sharma, Constitutional Provisions Relating to Women and International Instruments on Rights. 16-17 ALJ (2001-02).

²⁵ *Ibid.*,

Despite the existence of this law, the practice of dowry continues, prompting ongoing efforts to enforce its provisions and tackle the underlying causes.²⁶

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA):

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) aims to safeguard women experiencing domestic violence, particularly focusing on those at the intersection of caste and class. Analyzing the effectiveness of the PWDVA involves examining its ability to provide adequate protection for these vulnerable women. The PWDVA serves as a vital legal framework for addressing domestic violence by offering various protective measures such as protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief. However, its efficacy in protecting women at the intersection of caste and class is often questioned due to several factors. Firstly, women from marginalized communities, particularly those belonging to lower castes and lower economic strata, may face additional barriers in accessing legal remedies and support services under the PWDVA. Discrimination, lack of awareness, and socio-economic constraints can hinder their ability to seek help and navigate the legal system effectively. Secondly, the implementation of the PWDVA may vary across different regions and communities, leading to disparities in access to justice and support services. In some cases, entrenched social norms and caste-based hierarchies may perpetuate domestic violence and hinder women's ability to assert their rights under the law.²⁷

Furthermore, the intersectional nature of caste and class can exacerbate the vulnerabilities faced by women, with factors such as economic dependence, social stigma, and limited access to resources contributing to their experiences of domestic violence. While the PWDVA represents a significant step towards addressing domestic violence, its effectiveness in protecting women at the intersection of caste and class depends on various factors, including awareness-raising, capacity-building among law enforcement agencies, and efforts to address systemic inequalities. Ensuring the meaningful implementation of the PWDVA requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the complex interplay of caste, class, and gender dynamics in domestic violence situations.²⁸

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act:

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act aims²⁹ to combat crimes against women from marginalized communities and address gender-specific forms of violence within Scheduled Castes and Tribes. This legislation acknowledges the intersecting vulnerabilities faced by women belonging to these

²⁶ Justice Deepak Mishra, Women Empowerment and Gender Justice, Special Training Programme for all District Judges and Chief Judicial Magistrates. Special Training Programme for all District Judges and Chief Judicial Magistrates, Tamil Nadu, Tamil Nadu State Judicial Academy(2013) 3 LW (JS) 45.

²⁷ MP Jain, Indian Constitutional Law With Constitutional Documents, (6th Edn., 2010).

²⁸ Santvana Kumar¹ and Ekata Baksh, The Dominant Post-constitutional Indian Feminist Discourse: A Critique of its Intersectional Reading of Caste and Gender, CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion Vol. 3 No. 1 pp. 49–68 April 2022 ISSN 2639-4928.

²⁹ The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 No. 33 OF 1989 [11th September, 1989.] An Act to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against the members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, to provide for Special Courts for the trial of such offences and for the relief and rehabilitation of the victims of such offences and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

communities and seeks to provide them with enhanced protection under the law. The Act includes provisions that specifically address crimes perpetrated against women from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, recognizing the unique challenges they face due to their social and economic status. It delineates various offenses such as rape, sexual harassment, assault, and intimidation committed against women from these communities as atrocities, ensuring stringent penalties for offenders.³⁰

Furthermore, the Act mandates special courts and exclusive public prosecutors to expedite the trial process and enhance access to justice for victims. It also provides for the establishment of special cells and committees at the district level to monitor and address cases of atrocities against women from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, ensuring a more comprehensive response to their specific needs. However, despite these provisions, some critiques suggest that the Act may not adequately address all gender-specific forms of violence experienced by women from marginalized communities. For example, it may not explicitly address issues such as marital rape or domestic violence within these communities, which are significant concerns for women's safety and well-being. Additionally, challenges in implementation and enforcement may undermine the Act's effectiveness in protecting women from Scheduled Castes and Tribes against all forms of gender-based violence. Overcoming these challenges requires not only robust legal provisions but also concerted efforts to address underlying social and economic inequalities that perpetuate violence and discrimination against marginalized women.³¹

Maternity Benefit Act

The Maternity Benefit Act encompasses provisions aimed at safeguarding the rights of women during pregnancy and motherhood, considering their socio-economic circumstances and the specific challenges encountered by working-class women. This legislation addresses maternity benefits and leave, recognizing the importance of supporting women's health and well-being during this crucial phase of their lives.³² The Act mandates that eligible women employees are entitled to maternity leave with full wages for a specified period before and after childbirth.³³ This provision aims to ensure that women can take adequate time off from work to care for themselves and their newborns without facing financial hardship. However, the duration of maternity leave may vary depending on factors such as the woman's socio-economic status and the nature of her employment. For working-class women, accessing maternity benefits and leave under the Act may pose challenges due to factors such as informal employment, lack of awareness, and financial constraints. Many women in low-paying or precarious jobs may not be aware of their rights under the Act or may face resistance from employers in availing these benefits.³⁴

³⁰ Shashi Deshpande's the Binding Vine: A Critique of Rape Culture in India. Retrieved on October 7, 2018 from <http://www.researchscholar.co.in/downloads/63-ms.-ravinder-kaur.pdf> Mohapatra, H. (2015).

³¹ MacKinnon, Catharine. "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence." *Signs*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1983. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3173687.

³² Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (No. 53 of 1961) [12th. December, 1961] An Act to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for certain period before and after child-birth and to provide for maternity benefit and certain other benefits.

³³ Ensuring equality and empowerment available https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/012524_booklet_ministry_of_labour_employment_revised2.pdf

³⁴ Maternity Benefit Act: Maternity Leave Applicability, Rules, Eligibility, Benefits, available at: <https://cleartax.in/s/maternity-benefit-act>.

Furthermore, the Act does not cover all women, as it applies only to certain categories of employees in the organized sector. This exclusion leaves a significant portion of working-class women, including those in the informal sector, without access to maternity benefits and leave, exacerbating their socio-economic vulnerabilities. To address these challenges, there is a need for greater awareness-raising about the provisions of the Maternity Benefit Act among working-class women and their employers. Additionally, efforts to expand the coverage of the Act to include women in the informal sector and enhance its implementation are crucial for ensuring that all women can exercise their right to maternity benefits and leave, regardless of their socio-economic status.

Personal Laws:

Personal laws pertaining to marriage, divorce, and inheritance vary across religious communities and have significant implications for gender, caste, and class dynamics. These laws, rooted in religious traditions, govern various aspects of family life and often intersect with broader social hierarchies and inequalities. Across different religious communities, personal laws can reinforce traditional gender roles and norms, placing women at a disadvantage in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. For example, some personal laws may restrict women's autonomy and agency, dictating their roles within the family and limiting their ability to make independent decisions. Additionally, personal laws can intersect with caste and class dynamics, further shaping individuals' experiences within their communities.³⁵ Caste-based discrimination may influence marriage practices and inheritance rights, with certain caste groups facing greater social and economic barriers. Similarly, class disparities can exacerbate inequalities in access to legal resources and support, impacting individuals' ability to navigate personal law systems effectively.

Moreover, personal laws may perpetuate patriarchal norms and power structures, disproportionately affecting women from marginalized backgrounds. Women belonging to lower castes or lower socio-economic classes may face additional challenges in asserting their rights within the framework of personal laws, further entrenching their marginalization. Overall, the analysis of personal laws across different religious communities highlights the complex interplay between religion, gender, caste, and class. Efforts to address inequalities within personal law systems require a nuanced understanding of these intersecting dynamics and a commitment to promoting gender equity, social justice, and human rights for all individuals, regardless of their religious or social identities.³⁶

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA):

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has had a significant impact on women's economic empowerment, especially those from marginalized communities, by providing them with increased access to employment opportunities. This legislation has played a crucial role in addressing gender disparities in the labor

³⁵ S.Krishnaleela, Comparative Study of Personal Law in India, International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities Volume: 7 Issue: 4 Month: April Year: 2020.

³⁶ Explained: How Uniform Civil Code will impact marriage, adoption, inheritance, available at: https://www.business-standard.com/finance/personal-finance/explained-how-uniform-civil-code-will-impact-marriage-adoption-inheritance-124020800227_1.html. (last Visited on 01.02.2024.)

force and promoting inclusive development in rural areas.³⁷ NREGA has been instrumental in creating job opportunities for women in various sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation. By guaranteeing a minimum number of days of wage employment, the act has enabled women to earn a steady income and contribute to their households' economic well-being. However, women from marginalized communities may face intersectional challenges in accessing NREGA employment opportunities. Factors such as caste, class, and geographical location can impact their ability to benefit from the program fully. Discrimination, social stigma, and lack of access to resources may limit marginalized women's participation in NREGA worksites and hinder their overall economic empowerment.

Moreover, structural barriers such as limited access to education and training programs may further exacerbate inequalities faced by marginalized women in the labor market. Without adequate support and resources, these women may struggle to access and retain NREGA employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion. Addressing the intersectional challenges faced by marginalized women in accessing NREGA employment requires a comprehensive approach that addresses underlying structural inequalities. Efforts to enhance women's participation in the program should focus on providing targeted support, including skills training, financial literacy programs, and social protection measures. Additionally, promoting gender-responsive policies and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities are essential for maximizing the impact of NREGA on women's economic empowerment in marginalized communities.³⁸

Anti-Manual

Scavenging

Laws:

Anti-manual scavenging laws aim to address the abhorrent practice of manual scavenging and protect the rights of women engaged in such work, particularly those at the intersection of caste and gender. These laws serve as a critical component of feminist critique within the Indian legal framework, offering insights into the complexities of addressing intersectionality. By examining the provisions, implementation, and impact of these laws, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women from diverse backgrounds. The laws seek to dismantle the deeply entrenched system of manual scavenging, which disproportionately affects women, especially those marginalized by caste and gender.³⁹

Despite legal prohibitions, manual scavenging persists due to socio-economic factors, lack of enforcement, and entrenched social norms. Women engaged in this work often face exploitation, discrimination, and unsafe working conditions, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. Anti-manual scavenging laws provide a foundation for addressing these issues, offering legal mechanisms for enforcement, rehabilitation, and support for affected individuals. However, their effectiveness is hindered by systemic challenges, including inadequate implementation, lack of awareness, and societal attitudes towards caste and gender.

³⁷ Objective of NREGA, available at: <https://megsres.nic.in/objective-nrega>

³⁸ Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Mgnregs), available at: <https://haryanarural.gov.in/mahatma-gandhi-national-rural-employment-guarantee-scheme-mgnregs/>. (last accessed at 02.02.2024.)

³⁹ Prohibition On Practice Of Manual Scavenging, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, 19 JUL 2022 available at: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1842703>

To effectively address the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class, there is a need for comprehensive legal reforms, targeted interventions, and grassroots advocacy. Empowering women from marginalized communities, providing alternative livelihood opportunities, and challenging discriminatory practices are essential steps towards achieving meaningful change. In conclusion, anti-manual scavenging laws play a crucial role in advancing gender and caste equality in India. However, addressing the intersectional challenges faced by women engaged in manual scavenging requires sustained efforts across legal, social, and economic spheres to create a more just and inclusive society.⁴⁰

VI. FEMINIST IN PRESENT TIME

Feminism in the 21st century has evolved to encompass a broad spectrum of movements, ideologies, and activism aimed at achieving gender equality and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination. In this era, feminism has embraced intersectionality, recognizing that gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. One of the key features of contemporary feminism is its emphasis on inclusivity and diversity. Feminist movements strive to amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized groups, including women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, disabled women, and those from low-income backgrounds.⁴¹ This intersectional approach acknowledges that gender inequality is shaped by multiple intersecting identities and experiences. Moreover, digital technology and social media have played a significant role in shaping 21st-century feminism. Online platforms provide spaces for organizing, activism, and raising awareness about feminist issues on a global scale. Social media campaigns, hashtags, and online communities have facilitated grassroots mobilization and collective action, enabling feminists to connect, share resources, and challenge patriarchal norms and structures.⁴²

In addition to digital activism, contemporary feminism encompasses a wide range of strategies and tactics, including advocacy, policy reform, legal challenges, and community organizing. Feminist movements work towards dismantling systemic barriers to gender equality in various spheres, including politics, the workplace, education, healthcare, and the media. Furthermore, the Me Too movement and other initiatives have brought increased attention to issues of sexual harassment, assault, and violence against women. These movements have sparked important conversations about consent, power dynamics, and accountability, leading to calls for cultural and institutional changes to combat gender-based violence. Overall, feminism in the 21st century is characterized by its diversity, inclusivity, and commitment to intersectionality. As feminist movements continue to evolve and adapt to changing social, political, and technological landscapes, they remain dedicated to challenging inequality, promoting justice, and building a more equitable world for all genders.⁴³

VII. CONCLUSION

⁴⁰Shiv Prakash Katiyar, Public Policies on Manual Scavenging: A Case Study of India, available at: <https://www.iipa.org.in/cms/public/uploads/159961652179097.pdf>

⁴¹New Feminist Activism, Waves And Generations, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Discussion-paper-New-feminist-activism-waves-and-generations-en.pdf>. (last accessed on 02.02.2024)

⁴² *Ibid.*,

⁴³ Feminist Perspectives on Globalization, available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-globalization/>. (last visited on 02.02.2024)

In conclusion, the analysis of intersectionality in Indian laws offers a critical feminist perspective on the complexities of addressing multiple forms of oppression and discrimination within legal frameworks. This examination underscores the interconnectedness of gender, caste, class, religion, and other social identities in shaping individuals' experiences and access to justice. Through a feminist lens, it becomes evident that Indian laws often fall short in adequately addressing the intersecting inequalities faced by marginalized groups, particularly women. While legal provisions may exist to protect women's rights, the implementation and enforcement of these laws remain uneven, leaving many women vulnerable to systemic discrimination and violence. Furthermore, the feminist critique highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of intersectionality within legal frameworks. This involves recognizing the intersecting identities and experiences of individuals and acknowledging the unique challenges they face as a result of these intersections. It also requires adopting inclusive approaches to policymaking, legal advocacy, and enforcement that center the voices and experiences of marginalized women.

Moving forward, addressing intersectionality in Indian laws requires comprehensive reforms that prioritize gender equity, social justice, and human rights for all individuals, regardless of their background or identity. This entails not only revising existing laws to be more inclusive and responsive but also challenging entrenched power structures and social norms that perpetuate inequality and discrimination. Ultimately, by centering intersectionality in legal discourse and practice, Indian laws can become more effective tools for promoting gender equality, social justice, and human rights for all members of society. This feminist critique serves as a call to action for policymakers, legal professionals, activists, and communities to work towards a more inclusive and equitable legal system that upholds the rights and dignity of every individual, irrespective of their intersecting identities.

