



# Empowering Women and Education: A Discourse Analysis

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the attempt to establish a discourse of false liberation whereby adhering to age old practices is being upheld instead of breaking free from rigid beliefs and traditions that assume women's subjugation to be a natural phenomenon. In light of the present controversy about 'hijab', it could be useful to assess critical discourse of social justice, which questions the stereotypical role assigned to women and advocates for their inclusion in all aspects of life. In a society already devastated by caste patriarchy, it is claimed, poses a new obstacle forcing women to continue to live in subservience to male dominance. The paper is based on critical discourse analysis relating to Indian social justice settings on challenging patriarchy in the light of present 'hijab' issue. With this end in mind, education as a prerequisite for social and cultural liberation is to be based on an ethical and political purpose which has the power to broaden the possibilities for human existence and freedom. And it is hoped that individuals will be able to promote change in society through such education.

**Keywords:** discourse analysis, women empowerment, feminism, education, hijab issue

## **Introduction**

Discourse analysis seems to be a form of analysis rather than a concept; as well as it implies success which stems from a surge in curiosity in qualitative methods and methodologies for examining the evidence it generates that began in the late twentieth century. Discourse analysis derives out from the domain of sociology. This strategy is especially important when 'examining the way knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts' (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 200). I expand social constructivist techniques in which discourse is a reflection of an individual's intellect and state of mind - in this case, Indian social justice settings on women's liberation and social rights. As per social constructionism, theories are often used in understanding, because theories are all in the common sphere of nature, impacted either by variety of societal or cognitive circumstances (Lee and Roth, 2006). Individuals and their own actions are still not naturally visible realities and therefore are perpetually moulded mostly by culture surrounding us. Truly Indian Constitution has ensured that women's rights are adequately represented in India's political discourse and laws. This paper looks at how the word 'empowerment' is frequently utilized in Indian political and social arena to make women feel that they are already empowered. The goal of emancipation is not just to comprehend the condition or authoritarianism, as to modify things in order to eliminate inequity.

## **Debate around Emancipation of Women**

Inequality appears to be one of the most pressing issues in today's world. The ingrained requirement for power hierarchies in our everyday social and political system makes it difficult to completely eliminate inequality in our lives. This inequality is beginning to pose a threat to societal harmony. Every community builds a hierarchic order of justifiable disparities which is determined by one's position, age, sex, and nationality (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994). Patriarchy is a hegemonic power structure built on gender norms that define the roles of men and women. Women and girls in this system have historically, and devastatingly been oppressed, subjugated and deprived, keeping in mind at the same time that there are other groups as well which do not comply to the prevailing binary norms of gender and sexuality. Women's autonomy as well as choice of their bodies have been entirely undermined. Gender equality, in fact, stresses the gendered components of injustice, along with groups that are frequently oppressed by male domination. It is possible that this note refers to promoting gender equality implying a challenge to patriarchy in the struggle against gender inequality. The patriarchal structure facilitates this inequality as also contributes to its perpetuation. Personal talents as well as competences, inherent supporting networks including attitudes are all connected to public policy and cultural transformation by empowerment (Rappaport, 1981, 1984 & 1987). Transformational leadership is a journey of gaining confidence in someone's ability to govern person's circumstances as well as assert one's personal rights. Empowerment allows one to conduct over their own power and advocate their personal objectives inside a competent and self-determined manner (Zimmerman, 1993). While this empowerment may be concerned with people developing capacities to function successfully within the present system and structures of power, emancipation concerns itself with critically

evaluating, resisting, and confronting the existing power systems. Emancipation is about individual choices. It has to come from within.

In academic writing and public discourse, the terms 'gender' and 'caste' have been used extensively. Between structuralism to post - structuralism, scholar's beliefs on gender have changed over the decades (Basu, 2011; Chakravorty Spivak, 1983; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1995; Culler, 1982). As per structuralism, gender is a sexual identity, whereas post-structuralism is more interested in formation of gender inside a socio-cultural narrative. It is indeed a broad issue which thus involves aspects including trend of dress, physical behaviour, as well as interaction strategies in addition to biological sex (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1995; Culler, 1982). Critical theorists employ discourse analysis to investigate gender expression. To put it more simply, discourse analysis may be described as 'the analysis of discourse' (Chakravorty Spivak, 1983; Scott, 1988). Discourse analysis explores how language is used in socio-cultural environment in addition to the formal elements of language. In the end, discourse analysis looks into the connection among languages including written, verbal – conversational, structured modes of discourse and the context it is being used. What matters is that the text appears to be well-organized. People in a range of academic fields and departments have used the term 'discourse analyses' to characterize what they do, how they do it, or both (Chakravorty Spivak, 1983; Scott, 1988; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1995; Culler, 1982). Discursive psychology is a popular form of discourse research in the field of social psychology (see more, Coulthard, M. & Montgomery, M. 1981). Discursive psychology looks at how human beings communicate around or create concepts like opinions, experiences or feelings, as compared to conventional cognitive psychology, that uses the language as a tool to deduce what's happening within someone's head (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Gender identification is formed as well as maintained within a society and community. People are expected to follow the standard and accepted culture, and they are indoctrinated and structured in such a way that predetermined ideas and values are continuously reproduced which denies that gender or, for that matter, any other identity is dynamic and changing. Discursive theorists contend that discourse is used to construct genders. Such metaphorical acts help to develop as well as recreate gender identity in a broad perspective. This applies to the discourse of caste as well. Addressing the realities of the caste system in Indian society at large, and especially the Dalit community and Dalit women, involves a comprehensive examination of caste, class, and gender connections (Irudayam, Manghubhai, & Lee, 2014). The rise of Dalit women is viewed as that of an intolerable decline of control by dominant groups, that retaliate violently against anyone who challenges their authority. Thus, the categorization of men as 'respectable' is founded on honour and respect, and is distinguished by societal isolation from women due to their upper-caste status and desire to maintain their perception of self-purity. According to Velaskar (1998, 2007), women act just like 'gateways to caste', allowing 'caste purity' to be questioned and 'caste rank' to be claimed (p. 391); 'it may well be argued that fighting caste requires fighting patriarchy' (p. 8). The so-called privileged classes strive to unearth the links between caste, class, and gender in order to secure their predominance in the narrative on how caste and gender are intimately intertwined in terms of both employment and interpersonal relationships through caste violence.

### **Indian Social Justice Settings – ‘Hijab Issue’**

This study focuses on Indian social justice settings in women's liberation through mobilising women as opposed to caste and gender hierarchies. Old tradition wanted women to be the forerunners of a newly restructured society that is casteless and classless at its core. To do so, women had to be liberated from the restraints imposed by the old Brahmanical social structure, which regarded them as subordinate to males and completely reliant on them. As a consequence, contemporary texts advocated for a male-female partnership that is reciprocal. According to Ambedkar, ‘endogamy ...was a fashion in Hindu society and as it had originated from the Brahmin caste, it was whole-heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin subdivisions or classes, who in their turn became endogamous castes’ (Mohanty, 2004, p. 133). Significantly the essential course of endogamy in the development and continuation of untouchability discourse is emphasised broadly in Ambedkar’s gendered understanding of caste (Rege, 2013). Here as consequence of endogamy, as well as the need to preserve the theological but also ideological context of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’, female sexuality began to be regulated, and women were gradually marginalised (Mohanty, 2004; Rege, 2013; Still, 2014).

Brahmanical patriarchy is centred on untouchability as well as femininity throughout India, so traditionally is upheld by alliances between families from the same caste. This aspect of the caste hierarchy, endogamy, is regarded by Ambedkar, for example, as ‘a key to the mystery of the caste system’ (Mohanty, 2004, p.136). As per him, caste is a representation of social classification, in other words, Ambedkar puts this issue further and says that it is ‘graded inequality in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt’ (Chakravarti, 2003, p.7). This power scheme in society places women at an eternally disadvantageous position to the extent that women are unable to assert their identity. It is a matter of shame that in a multicultural society like us innumerable patriarchal practices still dominate our being and becoming; be it the right to education, property or reproductive freedom. Because of her reproductive capacity, the woman bears the burden of sustaining caste purity, and she thus becomes a threat that must be subjugated and controlled for the caste system to survive and function properly. In his comparative study of caste in Ceylon and Malabar, Yelmen (1963) discusses how female sexuality is perceived as a threat to be avoided by a variety of ceremonial processes aimed at preventing female *contamination*. Because it is seen as the sole legitimate level of chastity, it is required not just after marriage; but also prior to marriage. The fundamental cause of evil in a social order, as shown by *Manusmriti*, is women's sexuality (Rege, 2013). In addition, Buhler (1886) deliberately claimed in his translation of *Manusmriti* that ‘a woman must particularly be guarded against her wicked desires, however insignificant (they may look); for, if they are not guarded, they will bring misery upon two families’ (Buhler, 1886, p. 28). *Manu* appoints male family members to serve as honour enforcers. Buhler (1886) says that male family members have equal responsibility for a woman’s chastity. It highlights the necessity of fathers, husbands and sons in safeguarding women’s glory.

Likewise, hijab or headscarf has been portrayed as either a symbol of religious devotion or a form of physical oppression. The immediate background is its ban in classrooms in Udupi district of Karnataka, which has created an impasse between female students and the college administration. The

students requested their right to education and the liberty to practise their faith, whereas the authority invoked Article 133 (2) of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983, which requires students to dress in conformity with fellow students. While the students filed a lawsuit declaring the hijab to be an ‘essential aspect of Islam’, the Karnataka High Court issued an injunction prohibiting students from wearing religious symbols in the classroom. Through numerous discussions of hijab discourse, the use of hijab – is recontextualized and redefined, and eventually it became a mirror of modernity, owing to women having superior social status. This discourse analysis investigates how the various perspectives on the hijab creates a false contradiction between Enlightenment beliefs about progressive secular rationalism and Islam’s apparently premodern, patriarchal nature. It creates an environment in which removing the hijab makes her feel ‘less Muslim’, ‘lacks the force of faith that the hijab once provided’, and ‘feels less appreciated by male Muslims around her’ (Wagner *et al.*, 2012, pp. 521-541). As a result, she believes she has lost her reputation as a respected hijabi Muslim woman in her community.

*The Quran and Hadith* both require Muslim women to wear hijab to cover their heads and chests. For Muslim women, hijab is more than just a piece of clothing to cover their heads; it is also a symbol of modesty and a reminder to live according to their faith. As a piece of clothing, the hijab identifies women as Muslim. Juneman (2011) also mentioned that theological reasons, institutional constraints, psychological (social pressure to wear hijab), and lifestyle are all factors. As a result, it may be pointed out that wearing the hijab is not always associated with devotion; instead, Muslim women wear it for a variety of reasons. In the past, both the pressure to wear hijab and the restrictions on wearing hijab as a form of religious expression diminished women's capacity to express and use their bodies at their will.

Though the respect of a family and caste in India are heavily influenced by women’s behaviour, men and women respectively embody the concept of ‘honour’ from distinctive perspectives. Male ‘honour’ is characterized by its ability to govern bodies of women (Welchman & Hossain, 2005, p. 21), whereas female ‘honour’ is dependent on adherence to appropriate and approved roles and behavioural norms (Still, 2011, pp. 1119-46; Grover, 2011, pp. 76-116). This same ‘obsessive drive for control over women’, according to Chakravarti (2004, p. 582), is central to Brahmanical patriarchy, and it would be towards the centre of gender-specific honour debates. Women (Chakravarti, 2004) is, therefore, considered as the honour guardian, whereas it is the male who controls it. In secular countries, the veil has been deemed as a danger to modern democratic values. Then the query is how hijab has been shifted from a marginal practice to a mainstream trend. Herein the question of agency comes in. What role then individual choices play? To be the repository of honour why do women have to wear the veil, and more importantly why do women always have to be the repository of honour?

Women who contest patriarchal canons face negative social consequences and are stigmatised. In both circumstances, women’s independence is opposed and questioned on a regular basis. Control over women’s sexuality demonstrates that all women, regardless of caste, are oppressed in a patriarchal, caste stratified society. Honour and shame are ideological notions directly tied to a woman’s sexuality in upper caste patriarchal society. The transgression of caste limits by a woman is interpreted as a source of concern and shame. The caste scheme is founded on having *absolute* dominion over wellbeing and minds of

women. This overall structure of marital relationship, sexual orientation including offspring is important to understand caste's whole identity in relation to *absolutism*. This is essential in the construction and preservation of inequality. Casteism is a significant and pervasive kind of socio-economic discrimination that makes the sufferer even more vulnerable and precarious. Furthermore, Dalit women are subjected to a great deal of social pressure as nothing more than a factor of their gender identification and caste. Ambedkar (1916) observes, Casteism really was a set of societal oppression towards Dalits, and it was also a structure of unfettered socio-economic abuse. They are unable to realize their essential human rights notwithstanding constitutional provisions. Abuse against Dalit women is not only one facet of our society's crime against women, it is intimately intertwined with caste oppression and hierarchy, with women repetitively becoming the helpless target. It is a terrifying amalgamation of two evils manifested as caste and gender identity; it would be the type of patriarchal oppression which prevails in India in order to keep the caste mechanism in place, which assigns each person either a unique privileged position or marginalisation. The Dalit women, who are born at the lowermost layer of the Brahmanical order, have to struggle the most. As a result, the patriarchal strain on Dalit women is compounded (Geetha, 1992). Although mainstream feminism pluralizes patriarchy, it takes a one-dimensional strategy and overlooks non-Brahminic feminist ideas. Abuse of Dalit women has even been labelled as an untouchability issue or a sexual catastrophe. However, under these settings it may be claimed that this 'caste determines the division of labour, sexual division of labour, and division of sexual labour' (Rege, 1995, p. 2), where the challenge of gender cannot be handled without responding to the question of caste.

Therefore, the only way to integrate Indian feminist theory as a feminist movement is through a Dalit feminist perspective (Rege, 1995; Guru, 1995) that challenges patriarchy's Brahmanical nature, not merely as a feminism for Dalits. This requires confronting the dominant feminist rhetoric in India. This dismisses Dalit feminist scholarship and undermines Dalit women's agency. As a result, a gender-just theory cannot be established without the majority of fortunate feminism's 'representatives' held accountable for their prejudices and ignorance. As a result, developing a liberatory feminist school of thought from a Dalit feminist standpoint is critical (Rege, 1995; Guru, 1995; Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991; Akerkar, 1995).

### **Empowerment and Educational Discourse**

Addressing the power imbalance for the marginalised individuals then hijab, or caste, shifts the discourse of gender discrimination to centre on agency and power. Together at political and ideological level, enterprise is the purposeful power to do as well as perform. Women's enterprise always integrates their power to regulating their individuality along with their combined potential to influence public policy (Lister, 1997). In this context, it may well be acknowledged that women's power is addressed by enterprise such as self-organization as well as their ability to jointly mobilize and affect institutional politics. It might be interpreted as an initiative to integrate the realms of state, market and civil society, implying various forms of engagement and eventually leading to the question of women's social and political identities. Discourse analysis explores how linguistics is used in socio - cultural context in addition to formal

characteristics of language. As a consequence, critical theory investigates the connection underlying syntax and indeed the setting it is being used. It is then important for the text to be logical and well-organized in such a way that it can communicate to its receivers. an assertion of her identity in a society. The hijab is staunchly opposed for two reasons. Firstly, it is a religious symbol, and religious symbols in public areas, educational institutions and other places should be avoided. Secondly, it is a patriarchal symbol that restricts women's rights, and therefore it should be resisted. The rhetoric of hijab and related oppression stems from a recognition of the similarity of oppression that women endure at the hands of ethno-nationalist patriarchies, although to varying degrees. It is inferred that women who adhere to these religious or cultural symbols are powerless or have internalized them to such a degree that they refuse to follow anything else. Any effort to talk from such a position is ruled out as a case of mistaken identity. Even if women are included into this ostensibly gender-neutral world with hidden uneven power dynamics, they are relegated to 'lesser men', with men still deciding the boundaries (see more, Hobson, Lewis and Siim, 2002).

In this way it ignores the many ways in which women can challenge patriarchy. As a result, it is critical that our understanding of these challenges liberate us from the false sense of liberation or false consciousness. Internalization of sentiments and a feeling of powerlessness are usually highlighted as reasons of women's subordination, making empowerment even more important. Any approach of women's empowerment must acknowledge their capabilities and enable them to use those qualities to wield power. Through the lens of patriarchal oppression then hijab represents a battle between men and women, oppression and freedom, patriarchy and liberation confining women to their immediate identities as victims of patriarchy, denying them their agency and, as a result, looking at the world in a restricted perspective.

Women communicate with males from a position of equality instead of everlasting dependence once they have been empowered. When social, cultural, economic, and political restrictions to women's independence are removed, they are empowered to reach their highest potential. With this process wherein women redefine themselves it enhances what really is acceptable for each of them to become and do under situations because they had formerly been restricted in comparing to men (Mosedale, 2005). It may be stated that women's hierarchy, ideas as well as thoughts will be eliminated by such a framework. Patil (2016) reinforces Ambedkar's notion that women may be considered the 'gateways' to the caste system, claiming that male dominance based on caste is grounded in restrictions on female sexuality and labour. Upper-caste women are subjected to severe regulation over their sexuality across the parameters of purity and impurity in order to preserve endogamy, whereas the lower-caste women seem to be freely accessible for sex to upper-caste males owing to the crystalline phase of caste hegemony. Empowerment of women can be the outcome of a single woman's action, such as a single woman's reluctance to tolerate anything she has experienced in silence till now, or it could be collective. It could be the outcome of an organisation acting in response to women's protests, campaigning and agitation. Command over resources and agency have been highlighted as two crucial components in the empowering process (Mosedale, 2005). People's ability to make strategic decisions in ways that affect their life can thus be defined as empowerment.

The responsibility for establishing this agency should be sought in the process of socialization. And, education is expected to create an essential part in the technique of cultural transmission. The question of

inclusion and exclusion must be addressed as part of this socialisation process. The problem of women's exclusion and inclusion further puts the idea of politics to the foreground. The three aspects of politics, according to Wendy Stokes (1998), are actors and political forms of activity; policy content and how politics is conducted; and the framework of the polity as characterised by institutional arrangements, culture, laws and discourses (Stokes, 1998, cited in Siim, 2000). As a result, women's participation in democratic representation can indeed be viewed as beneficial to advancement of a new heterogeneity in democratic country, as well as a new type of collaboration that encompasses not just women but all marginalised and disadvantaged groups of people. Thus, agency denotes a dynamic idea of power, namely, the ability of people or organisations to impose their beliefs on other people (Lister, 1997).

Empowerment, therefore, refers to women's agency in shaping their individual lives as well as their potential to affect politics, signifying both an individual and a social dimension. The division between equality and diversity must be confronted, and education is the only means of instilling in the thoughts of individuals the relevance of autonomy and independence for all while bearing the interests of everyone in account. For Antonio Gramsci (Freire and Macedo, 1987), literacy is a double-edged sword that can be "wielded for the aim of self and social empowerment or for the preservation of repressive and dominating relations" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.2). In education, Freire (1987) advocates critical thinking, often known as 'pedagogy of knowing'. He refers to this as critical consciousness, which is marked by respect for individuals and variety of perspectives.

Literacy, it has been observed, is more than just a technical skill to be learned; it is a basic principle for cultural action for emancipation, implying a self as well as normative provider (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Women must claim their right and obligation to comprehend and modify their own experiences, as well as to re-establish their relationships with others. In this way, knowledge is critical to aggressively creating one's voice as part of or throughout the empowering process. Freire and Macedo (1987) write, it should consequently be seen as "one of the key vehicles through which 'oppressed' individuals might engage in the socio-historical transformation of their society" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 157). In this sense, education entails not only technical acquisition but also a critical knowledge of societal norms. This new understanding has the potential to 'demythologize' (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 157) the incorrect perceptions prevalent in society. As a result, education must be measured in the context of the social environment in which it is founded.

## **Conclusion**

Women who dare to transgress patriarchal norms endure harsh social repercussions and a humiliated status in society. It is the autonomy of women that is contested and continuously challenged. Mechanisms to address the culture of violence as also the culture of silence must be subtle enough to the intersectionality of societal affiliations and systems. Inability to acknowledge the overlapping nature of oppression results in ignoring caste-based oppression and religion-based issues. Thus, it is vital to record and highlight their voices as well as give them the room to air their grievances. It has to be realised that Dalit women, Muslim women, and all women, for that matter, act on the same compulsion, inclination and rationale as everyone



else. This realisation can be the first step toward acknowledging women's agency and individuality. As Rege (2013) points out, accepting women as active and politically equivalent Indian citizens, rather than just bearers of “the ‘honour’ of the family, clan, and society” (p. 193), might be a significant move in the correct direction. Political democracy, as this paper correctly noted, cannot continue unless it is based on social democracy. And social democracy refers to a way of life guided by the principles of individual freedom, inclusion as well as solidarity.

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