



Gender, Caste And Justice: Women's Empowerment In India Through Feminist Thought, Social Movements And Political Leadership

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Abstract

The social process of women's empowerment in India is considered complex, deeply intertwined with caste, class and cultural structures. This research paper analyses the relationship between gender, caste and justice in the context of women's empowerment in India. It brings together theoretical perspectives, historical critique and contemporary social realities to offer a comprehensive understanding of how women's empowerment is shaped by multiple factors. Tarabai Shinde offers a scathing critique of gender and caste in Indian society, arguing that patriarchy is not limited to male-female relationships but that women are also controlled by religion, tradition and the social system. Caste discrimination undermines women's status. Her writings play a crucial role in providing the ideological foundation for social justice and women's liberation. The study begins by analyzing the concept of justice through the ideas of B.R. Ambedkar and John Rawls. While Rawls emphasizes justice as fairness and equal opportunity within a structured society, Ambedkar highlights the need for social justice rooted in the annihilation of caste and the upliftment of marginalized communities particularly women.

This study uses a qualitative research methodology, primarily analyzing secondary sources such as books, research articles and historical documents. Textual analysis and comparative perspectives will also include the study of various feminist thinkers and social movements. Understanding the status of women in Indian society requires not only studying patriarchy, but the role of the caste system is also considered equally important. Dalit and marginalized women face double oppression. On the other hand, women face oppression in a patriarchal society, and on the other, caste discrimination also plays a significant role in affecting women's lives. Women's presence in India's regional politics has grown yet they continue to face strong social and institutional challenges. Barriers such as patriarchal attitudes, caste dynamics, party control and limited financial support restrict their progress. However, welfare-oriented politics and active involvement at the grassroots are opening new paths. The rising influence of women voters and digital platforms is also boosting their visibility. In the end, women are steadily navigating these challenges and strengthening democratic governance.

The role of social movements in women's empowerment has been highly significant. It is not limited merely to legal provisions but is also intertwined with social, economic, and cultural transformations. As a result of social movements, the status of women has improved, and they have become aware of their rights. Therefore, it can be asserted that these movements have challenged the gender-based discrimination and inequalities prevalent in society. However, several challenges such as a patriarchal mindset, a scarcity of resources, and social stereotypes persist within society, and concerted efforts are essential to overcome them. As Ultimately, the study concludes that true women's empowerment is possible only when both caste and gender are equally valued within the concept of social justice. This requires policy reforms, social awareness and an inclusive approach.

Keywords: Gender, caste, women empowerment, justice, social movement, Political Leadership

Introduction

Gender, Caste and patriarchy comprise the basic structure of Indian society that has for centuries sought to control social relations, the nature of power and the identity of the individual. If we look at the Indian social system, then the identity of a women is not biologically determined but socially formed. It defines social rules based on religion, culture, law and caste. Gender based inequality in our Indian society is most seen in domestic violence, barriers to education, lack of property rights and lack of political representation. Women from upper castes have suffered from patriarchy, while Dalit, Bahujan and Shudra women suffer from exploitation. Thus, in the Indian context, it is important to understand feminism not along gender lines but along caste and class lines. Tarabai Shinde was a 19th revolutionary thinker, whose famous book "Stri-Purush Tulna" (1882) explains that the exploitation of women in Indian society is linked to religion, caste and patriarchal mindset and exposes the roots of Brahminical patriarchy. Historically, Tarabai Shinde's writings do not talk about "women's rights" but rather justify the oppression of women by male power under the guise of religious texts, tradition and social morality. She also points out that women are blamed for being characterless, while men maintain their innocence. In the present, issues such violence, rape, domestic violence, labour-based exploitation of women, and religious-political fanaticism are still on the rise in Indian society. India is often described as the world's largest democracy, where equality and justice are guaranteed to all citizens. However, in reality many social inequalities still exist especially when it comes to gender and caste. Women in India do not experience inequality in the same way those belonging to marginalized castes often face discrimination not only as women but also because of their caste position. Because of this, women's empowerment in India cannot be understood in isolation. It must be studied by looking at how gender, caste and justice play an important role in this discussion. Different thinkers have explained justice in different ways, for example John Rawls talks about justice as fairness, where everyone should have equal opportunities and rights in society (Rawls,1971). On the other hand, B.R Ambedkar focuses more on social justice specially in the Indian context. He strongly argued that without ending the caste system true equality and justice cannot be achieved (Ambedkar,1936). Ambedkar also emphasized that women's rights are an important part of social reform and equality. To understand these ideas in a deeper way, it is also necessary to look at feminist thought, which questions the unequal structure of society. One of the earliest and most powerful critiques come from tarabai Shinde in her work "stri-purush tulana". In this text, she highlights how women are treated unfairly compared to men and strongly criticizes patriarchy and caste-based discrimination (Shinde,1882). Her work shows that gender inequality has deep historical roots and cannot be ignored. However, understanding inequality is only the first step. Real change happens when people collectively raise their voices against injustice. This is where social movements become important. In India women's movements have played a major role in creating awareness, demanding rights and bringing social and legal changes (Omvedt,1994). These movements help to turn theoretical ideas of justice into practical reality. At the same time political participation is also a key part

of empowerment. When women enter politics, they gain the power to influence decisions and policies. The political journey of Mamata Banerjee is a strong example of how a woman can rise in a male dominated political system and establish her leadership. Her career reflects both the opportunity available to women and the challenges they continue to face in politics. This article argues that women's empowerment in India is not achieved through a single factor. Instead, it is the result of the interaction between different elements of the idea of justice of social structure, collective action through social movements and participation in political leadership. All these aspects are interconnected and together shape the process of empowerment. Women empowerment is an important pillar for the development of any society. Women empowerment means giving women the power and freedom so that they can make their own life decisions and take an equal position in society. If we look at today's time, women empowerment has become an important dimension of social, economic and political development because development of any society is not possible unless women are given equal opportunities and rights in it. Historically, women have been limited in education, employment and decision making due to patriarchal structure, this weakened their position, but with time various social movements challenged this situation. Social movements bring awareness, confidence and collective power among women which enables them to make their own life decisions. Thus, social movement is an important medium for women empowerment. When we talk about the progress of women, we often see many inspiring success stories—women are making their mark in fields such as education, employment, and increasingly in regional politics. However, a deeper analysis of this progress reveals that the journey is still far from easy or equal. While women are encouraged to move forward, this support often remains limited to ideas and policies and does not fully translate into practice at the ground level. When women attempt to take on leadership roles in politics, especially at the regional level, they face not only political competition but also social expectations, traditional norms, and limited access to opportunities. According to B. R. Ambedkar, the progress of a society can be measured by the status of its women. If women are still unable to make independent decisions about important aspects of their lives, it indicates that the process of achieving equality remains incomplete. In this context, Indian regional politics presents both a challenge and an opportunity for women. On one hand, they must constantly struggle to prove their capability and leadership; on the other hand, it provides a platform to bring about meaningful social change. The rise of leaders such as Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, and J. Jayalalithaa demonstrates that women can deliver strong and effective leadership despite challenging conditions. Additionally, the contributions of Sushma Swaraj highlight that women's leadership is not confined to regional politics but can also have a significant impact at national and global levels. Thus, to understand women's empowerment in a more meaningful way it is important to first examine the concept of gender caste and justice, which provide the theoretical foundation of the study.

Research Problem

Women's empowerment in India is not limited to gender inequality, but is deeply intertwined with caste, patriarchy, and social structures. Dalit and marginalized women face dual discrimination (Caste and gender). Concepts like John Rawls' "Justice as fairness" and B.R. Ambedkar's "social justice" talk about equality and justice. However, these principles have not been fully implemented in Indian Society. Looking at feminist ideology, even beyond social movements and social leaders like Mamta Banerjee, there are many structural barriers to women's empowerment. The main problem is how are caste, gender, and patriarchy hindering women's access to justice and equality in India? What role have feminist ideas, social movements and Political leadership played in this?

Research Question

- a) How do the intersections of caste and gender in Indian society impact women's empowerment?
- b) How does patriarchy attempt to control the social, economic and political status of women?
- c) How are the theories of justice by John Rawls and Bhim Rao Ambedkar relevant to the Indian context?
- d) What challenges and opportunities do women leaders (especially Mamata Banerjee) face in Indian regional politics?

Research Objectives

1. To study caste, gender and patriarchy in Indian society.
2. To study the new theories of John Rawls and Bhim Rao Ambedkar and understand the Indian context.
3. To study the role of social movements in India.
4. To study how justice, equality and empowerment attempt to establish relationships.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research methodology. The primary objective of this research is to understand women's empowerment in India in the context of gender, caste and justice. It analyses the role of feminist thought, social movements and political leadership. This research is descriptive and analytical in nature, attempting to understand women's rights, caste discrimination and justice in historical and contemporary terms. Secondary data were used in this research. This includes books, research articles and journals. Tarabai Shinde's "Stri-Purush Tulna" is used as a primary source. The objective of this research is to understand the role of social movements and how these movements contribute to women empowerment. Through textual analysis, we will understand that Tarabai Shinde's language, arguments, and quotations provide a critique of patriarchy.

Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Indian Society

Gender is socially constructed. Society attempts to define the roles of men and women, and these roles are presented as natural. Women are seen and understood as gentle, tolerant, sacrificing, compassionate and domestic. Men, on the other hand are seen as powerful, decision-making, and representative of the outside world. Judith Butler, in his book "Gender Trouble", states that gender is a performative act, constantly being reenacted by society. (Butler, 1990) In Indian society, performativity is further reinforced by caste and religion. Patriarchy maintains this gender construction. It maintains or controls the marriage system, restricting women's educational and employment opportunities. Religiously, women's subordination is justified. Tarabai Shinde challenges patriarchal logic. She argues that men have created rules and are held accountable based on those rules. Historically, Uma Chakravarti, in her book "conceptualizing Brahminical patriarchy in early India," argues that in the Indian context, it is crucial to see patriarchy in relation to other social structures such as caste. (Chakravarti, 1995) Uma explains that women are controlled by their husbands and are ruled by the male sex. Women have begun to adopt their own moral code and develop a list of virtues to gain consent, which women themselves have come to adopt. Dalit feminists have highlighted specific aspects of caste patriarchy that oppress not only Dalit women but also stigmatize lower-caste men. It was in the early twentieth century that Sigmund Freud stated that "anatomy is destiny". Patriarchy is a social system that places men in power and attempts to control and subjugate women. It is not limited to the family but also exists in religion, culture, and politics. (Walby, 1990) It holds that women are to blame, which has become a tradition in society. Society itself has placed women in such circumstances and has established a system to declare them guilty. (Shinde, 1882/2007)

Patriarchy is not about sex but about gender, that is a social construct. V. Geeta explain that gender is perceived based on male or female genitals. Sex provides meaning about the reality of gender. Patriarchy means that in a male – dominated family, the father is dominant. Childbearing is a biological factor, and women's roles as mothers are determined by their social status. A mother's responsibilities include nurturing, educating and raising her own children. (Arya & Singh, 2015) Feminist theory holds that patriarchy attempts to control women's bodies and maintains biological control over women. Men oppress, suppress and exploit women and they do not inspire them to advance, leading to a backwardness. (Beauvoir, 1949)

The caste system forms the basis of India's social structure, dividing not only labour but also power. Caste determines a person's identity by birth and limits social opportunities. (Ambedkar, 1936) Caste and patriarchal society are viewed through three levels: the marriage system, sexual control and social respect and purity. Uma Chakravarti argues that controlling women's sexuality is essential for maintaining the continuity of caste, and this leads to attempts to keep women confined to the "home" and "family", and to suppress them. (Chakravarti, 2003)

Simon de Beauvoir in her book "The second sex" stated that women are not born but rather are made. Women are socially constructed, and the customs of society are imposed on them, which relegate them to a subservient position. Women are controlled by men and forced to obey their commands. Tarabai Shinde has written "Stri-Purush Tulna" inspired by an incident in which a Brahmin accused a widow of infanticide and was severely punished by the society. Tarabai Shinde exposes the double standards of morality. Tarabai Shinde says that the standards of morality for men and women are different in the society. If men commit violence and atrocities, it is considered normal, whereas if women commit any mistake, they are said to be characterless. This is considered patriarchal hypocrisy. Ms. Manisha Kale, in her article, "Tarabai Shinde's 'A comparison of men and women: A milestone in Indian feminism'" states that Tarabai explains the difference between gender and sex. Gender is socially and culturally determined, not naturally determined. She states that women are considered false and immoral in society. Tarabai Shinde challenges this image of feminism imposed by patriarchy.

Feminist Critique of patriarchy and caste

Women are socially constructed, that is, they are asked to behave in a manner that a woman normally does, such as being obedient, sacrificing and tolerant. This weakness of women is not natural but social. Patriarchy makes women dependent, which maintains power. If we look at Indian society, we can see that whatever work women do at home, their work is not given importance. This labour remains as a responsibility of the house, which is a form of economic exploitation. (Federici, 2004) In India, Sexual violence against Dalit women is not just a "gender crime." But also, a form of "caste oppression." Dalit women are socially marginalized. This is an attempt to demonstrate social power. (Paik, 2014)

Modern feminism has introduced the concept of intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw believes that women's oppression does not arise from a single factor, but rather identities such as caste, class, race and gender combine to create multi-layered exploitation. (Crenshaw, 1989) The aim of feminist criticism is not merely to demand women's rights but to engage with the politics of social justice. Ultimately, feminist criticism is a transformative perspective that attempts to show that women's subordination is not inherently present but is a social-political construction. Feminists strive to understand that true equality can only be achieved when the roots of gender, caste and patriarchy are attacked.

Justice and Equality in Theory

To understand women's empowerment in India it is important to first look at some basic concepts like gender caste, and Justice. These concepts help in building a strong foundation and make it easiest to analyse the issues discussed in this article. Without understanding these ideas, it becomes difficult to

explain why inequality exists and how it can be reduced. Gender is not just about biological differences between men and women; it is a social concept. Society assigns different roles and expectations to men and women, and these Roles often create inequality. For example, women are usually expected to take care of the household, while men are seen as decision makers. The social expectation limits women's opportunities in education (Menon,2012). Women's empowerment means giving women the ability to make their own decisions and have control over their lives. It includes social, economic and political aspects. Social empowerment involves freedom from discrimination and violence economic empowerment means access to resources and financial independence, and political empowerment includes participation in governance. However, empowerment is not the same for all women, as caste and class differences play an important role in shaping their experiences.

Caste is one of the most important social structures in India and has a strong influence on people's lives. It determines social status, occupation, and event relationship. At the same time, patriarchy is a system where men dominate and control most aspects of life. When cast and come together they create multiple layers of inequality for women. Women from lower caste often face both gender-based discrimination. This situation is sometimes described as “double oppression.” These inequalities are deeply rooted in society and are often marginalized, which makes them difficult to challenge. The ideas of B.R Ambedkar are very important in understanding this issue. He argued that the caste system is a major source of inequality and must be abolished to achieve true justice (Ambedkar,1936). His view highlights that social reform is necessary for women's empowerment.

The concept of justice helps us understand what a fair society should look like. Two important perspectives come from John Rawls and B.R Ambedkar.

John Rawls: Justice as fairness

According to John Rawls, justice means fairness. He argued that every person should have equal Basic rights and equal opportunities (Rawls,1971). He also introduced the idea that inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the least advantaged people. His theory is useful in understanding the importance of fairness in society, but it does not fully address specific social inequalities like caste.

B.R Ambedkar: Social Justice

In contrast, B.R Ambedkar provides some more practical understanding of Justice. He believes that justice means removing social inequalities that exist in society. For him, the caste system was the biggest obstacle to equality, and he strongly supported its abolition. He also emphasized the values of Liberty, equality and fraternity as the foundation of a just society.

Comparative Analysis: Ambedkar and Rawls

John Rawls and B.R Ambedkar both focus on justice and equality but their approaches are different. Rawls provides a general theory of fairness while Ambedkar focuses on real social conditions specially in India. In the Indian context Ambedkar's ideas are more directly reliable because they address issues like caste and social inequality. However, Rawls theory still helps in understanding the broader idea of fairness and equal opportunity.

While these theories explain what justice should look like, they do not fully capture the everyday experience of women facing caste and gender discrimination. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine feminist thought which provides a more critical understanding of these issues.

Social Movements and Women's Empowerment in India

To understand the role of social movement in women empowerment, various theoretical perspectives have to be deeply understood in this study. Social movements are efforts that awaken people against injustice, inequality and discrimination. Feminist theory has tried to understand the inequality and discrimination faced by women. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) said in her book *The Second Sex* that "women are not born but made" meaning that society and culture define women's identity. There are many types of feminism liberal, radical, Marxist and post-modern feminism. According to Naila Kabeer (1999) empowerment is a process in which women have the ability to change their situation. Three main elements have been talked about under this theory – resources, agency and achievements. When women get these three things then they become empowered. Social movements advance all three of these things.

Social movements bring people together to remove inequality and injustice in society. Movements are considered more important for women because these movements make them aware and also help in improving their condition (Sen, 1999) Women empowerment is not only about the ability to earn money but it also includes taking decisions of one's own life, not being dependent on anyone else, understanding one's rights and living life with respect in the society. Due to social movements, women have become better aware of their situation and also come forward to change it. At this time, they work not only for themselves but to bring change in the entire society. Thus, women become "change-makers in the society" and not just sufferers of problems (Kabeer, 2005). A very important aspect of the social movement is that in it the personal problems of women are made a social issue. In earlier times, problems like domestic violence, molestation and discrimination were considered to be private matters of the house but the social movement has shown that these are big problems in the society. The idea of "personality is politics" reflects this change. It made women realize that their problems are not alone and they should raise their voice against it (Hanisch, 1970).

Social movements break the silence created in the society. Many times, women were not able to express their views due to fear, shame or pressure from society. We must have seen around us that if a woman raises her voice against all this, then people silence her, but through the movement, they start openly expressing their problems. Due to this, not only their words are heard but these issues are discussed in society. This change gradually changes the thinking of the society as well (Freire, 1970). Another important thing is that social movements provide new opportunities and platforms to women. On these platforms, women can express their views, learn new skills and gain leadership. This gives them self-reliance and they are able to create their own identity in the society (Touraine, 1981). If we look at today's time, social media has made the social movement even stronger. Now women do not limit their views only to their village and city but can spread their views to the entire country and the world. Movements like "Me Too" have shown that women can come together and raise their voice against injustice even through digital platforms, this makes the movements faster and more effective (Castells, 2012).

The impact of the social movement is not limited only to the present, but it also affects the coming generations. When women fight for their rights and they become successful, they become an inspiration for the next generation. This leads to the development of new thinking in the society due to which it is considered necessary to give equal rights to women. Apart from this, social movements provide women with a new way of thinking. They help women to understand that the inequality that exists in the society is not from birth, but it is created by the society. When women understand this, they become aware to change it.

Social Movement Theory

In this theory it is said that people together can bring change in society. Under this theory, Resource Mobilization Theory, Political Opportunity Theory, New Social Movement Theory have been talked about. Firstly, the Resource Mobilization Theory which states that the success of a movement depends on how many resources it has. Political Opportunity Theory states that when any movement gets political opportunities, it becomes successful. According to the New Social Movement Theory (Alberto Melucci, 1989) modern movements are linked to identity, culture and lifestyle. This principle states that it not only creates movement but also becomes a medium to bring deep changes in the society.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) has pointed out that women's problems are not limited to gender only but are also linked to other factors like caste, class and religion. It has been said that the problems of Dalit and tribal women in India are different, hence when we talk about empowerment, we will keep all their aspects in mind.

Political Empowerment and Women's Leadership

The issue of women's empowerment and their participation in politics has been widely discussed by various scholars. Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as the process through which women gain the ability to make strategic life choices, especially in contexts where this ability was previously denied to them. Her work highlights that empowerment is not only about participation but also about access to resources and decision-making power. (Naila Kabeer, 1999) Similarly, Drude Dahlerup emphasizes the importance of women's representation in politics. She argues that increased participation of women in political institutions leads to more inclusive and representative governance. Her theory of "critical mass" suggests that when women reach a certain level of representation, they can influence policy decisions more effectively. (Drude Dahlerup, 2006)

In the Indian context, Zoya Hasan (2000) examines the role of social structures such as caste, class, and gender in shaping political participation. She points out that despite constitutional equality, women in India continue to face structural barriers that limit their political involvement, particularly in regional politics. Further, Bina Agarwal (1994) focuses on gender inequality in access to resources such as land, education, and economic opportunities. She argues that without addressing these inequalities, true empowerment of women cannot be achieved, as economic independence is closely linked to political participation. Additionally, Neera Chandhoke discusses the concept of power and democracy, highlighting how existing power structures often exclude marginalized groups, including women. Her work suggests that simply providing political rights is not enough; there must also be a transformation in social and institutional frameworks. Overall, the literature suggests that while significant progress has been made in promoting women's participation in politics, multiple structural, social, and economic challenges continue to limit their full empowerment. These studies collectively highlight the need for a more inclusive and supportive political environment, especially at the regional level. (Neera Chandhoke, 2005)

Mamata Banerjee represents a significant case of women's leadership in Indian regional politics. Her political journey highlights both the opportunities available to women and the structural challenges they continue to face. Rising from a grassroots background, she successfully mobilized mass support and challenged established political power structures, which reflects the idea that leadership is shaped by access to resources and agency (Naila Kabeer, 1999). Her government introduced welfare schemes such as Kanya Shree, aimed at promoting girls' education and empowerment, which aligns with the argument that women's participation in politics can lead to more inclusive policymaking. (Drude Dahlerup, 2006). However, her leadership has also faced criticism regarding governance style and decision-making patterns, indicating that women leaders, like their male counterparts, operate within existing political and institutional constraints (Zoya Hasan, 2000). This suggests that women's leadership in regional

politics is not free from limitations but is shaped by broader social and power structures (Neera Chandhoke, 2005). A comparative perspective with leaders such as Mayawati, J. Jayalalithaa, and Sheila Dikshit further reveals that women leaders navigate a complex space of power, challenges, and opportunities. While each of them adopted different leadership styles, they all faced similar structural barriers related to gender, political competition, and societal expectations.

The analysis of women's leadership in Indian regional politics reveals that it is not merely a story of individual success, but a complex outcome of the interaction between social structures, political opportunities, and personal struggles. The example of Mamata Banerjee demonstrates how a woman leader can rise from grassroots politics to a position of power despite challenges such as patriarchy, intense political competition, and constant public scrutiny. This reflects the idea that empowerment is shaped by access to resources and agency (Naila Kabeer, 1999). Similarly, Mayawati highlights that women often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. As a Dalit woman leader, her political journey reflects both caste-based and gender-based barriers, supporting the argument that social structures significantly influence political participation (Zoya Hasan, 2000). In the case of J. Jayalalithaa, her leadership illustrates that women in regional politics often need to continuously prove their legitimacy in a male-dominated system. Although she emerged as a powerful and influential leader, her governance style was sometimes viewed as centralized and personality-driven, reflecting broader patterns within political institutions (Neera Chandhoke, 2005). Moreover, Sushma Swaraj represents a model of leadership that extends beyond regional boundaries to national and global influence. Her effective communication skills and responsiveness to public concerns demonstrate that women's participation can lead to more inclusive and people-oriented governance (Drude Dahlerup, 2006). However, it is equally important to recognize that women's political leadership continues to be shaped by structural constraints such as patriarchal attitudes, limited access to resources, and the concentration of power within political parties. In many cases, women are given formal leadership roles, but their actual participation in decision-making remains restricted. Additionally, female leaders often face more intense and personalized criticism compared to their male counterparts, particularly regarding their behaviour, leadership style, and private lives. Therefore, the overall analysis suggests that while women's leadership in Indian politics has made significant progress, it still operates within unequal power structures. True empowerment cannot be achieved through representation alone; it requires meaningful participation, equitable access to authority, and a transformation of institutional and social frameworks that continue to limit women's leadership potential (Bina Agarwal, 1994).

Challenges

One of the major challenges in achieving women's empowerment in India is the deep-rooted nature of caste and patriarchy. These structures are not only social but also cultural, which makes them difficult to change quickly. Even today, many women, especially from marginalized castes, face discrimination both inside and outside their homes.

Another challenge is the gap between theory and practice. Although ideas of justice and equality are well developed in theory, their implementation remains weak. Laws and policies exist, but they are not always properly enforced, and many women are not fully aware of their rights.

Social movements have played an important role, but they often face limitations such as lack of resources, internal divisions, and resistance from dominant groups. Similarly, women in politics continue to face barriers like gender bias, lack of support, and unequal opportunities, which restrict their full participation.

Suggestions

To address these challenges, there is a need to focus on both social and institutional change. First, awareness and education should be strengthened so that people can question and challenge existing inequalities related to caste and gender.

Second, laws and policies related to women's rights should be implemented more effectively. It is important to ensure that justice is not only theoretical but also visible in everyday life.

Third, social movements should be supported and made more inclusive, so that they can represent the voices of all women, especially those from marginalized backgrounds.

Finally, increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles can bring long-term change. When women are actively involved in politics and governance, they can influence policies and create a more equal and just society.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that gender, caste and patriarchy are not separate entities in Indian society but are interconnected. Viewing women's exploitation solely as a function of gender inequality is incomplete, as the caste system also exacerbates women's status. Even today, Feminist discourses often discuss Brahminical patriarchy. Tarabai Shinde's writings are essential reading for her foundational feminist thinking. Her writings inspire society not only historically but also today. Women empowerment is a social process in which the role of social movements is more important because these movements make women aware of their rights. Development of any society is not possible unless women are kept at the forefront in it. It elaborates on feminist theory, empowerment theory, social movement theory and intersectionality. Social movements are a medium for women's equality, freedom and development. The rise of women's leadership in Indian regional politics reflects a significant social and political transformation, where women are not only asserting their presence but also gradually reshaping existing power structures. Leaders such as Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, and J. Jayalalithaa demonstrate that women are capable of delivering strong, decisive, and people-oriented leadership despite facing complex social and political challenges. However, it is equally evident that women's political empowerment remains incomplete, as it continues to be constrained by patriarchal norms, unequal access to resources, and the concentration of power within political institutions. In this context, increasing representation alone is not sufficient; what is required is the assurance of meaningful participation, equitable access to authority, and sustained institutional support. Therefore, women's leadership should not be viewed as a fixed achievement, but as an ongoing and evolving process that contributes to making political systems more inclusive, representative, and democratic. Ultimately, strengthening women's role in leadership is essential not only for gender equality but also for the broader goal of achieving a just and balanced society.

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