

Gender, Ethnicity and Education in the North East India: Understanding from the Perspective of Kamla Bhasin Work

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Abstract: *Discrimination on women is as old as mankind. With recent times, the crimes against women have increased. It has taken brutal form. The number of cases has increased worldwide. People are coming out to bring out changes in the way women are seen and treated. Kamla Bhasin one of the prominent feminists of India has done tremendous work on the upliftment of the status of girls and women. She used indigenous language and content that reach out to the public. She worked and succeeded in her line. Ethnic diversity is always seen as one of the reasons of discrimination faced by women to which roles associated by patriarchal society on gender and education as one of the grounds on which women are discriminated. This paper studies North-East States of India in the light of Basin's work. Secondary data is being used in the study to throw light on the society.*

Keywords: Discrimination, Education, Ethnic, Feminist, Gender, Indigenous, North East, Patriarchal

1. Introduction

Nature has blessed us with examples that man needs to learn: such as from a lotus that always blooms amidst dirt and a soothing rain that always calms down a soul and takes away the dirt. Societies that are so deeply rooted with orthodox beliefs where women are subjected to oppression and atrocities are never seen and recognized as equivalent counterpart of man. Very few people become the lotus in this dirt and people like Kamla Bhasin takes away the dirt of societies just like rain.

Women in India are socialized in a manner that they know and value custom and traditions better than the textbooks. The age-old belief and customs that are subjected to women where they are endowed with responsibilities and traditions that are put in their shoulder such as the responsibility of a long-lived husband, healthy children, well managed home, a wealthy home and so on. Women in the pursuit of keeping every family member happy, go through endless struggles under which they face domestic violence, marital rape, inequality in terms of education, basic rights of livelihood etc. Injustice becomes a part and parcel of their life. Women are discriminated, marginalized, harassed, and deprived of their rights just because of their gender. India is a patriarchal society where women across the ethnic and caste background witness discrimination. The growth of a society, a state and a country very much depend on the way a woman is treated and seen. Women a few decades ago were not even recognized and considered as a human being. They have always been seen as someone that can be subjected to oppression and it was only later that they have been given the due recognition which led the government and other organization in forming policies and plans to bring change to the status of women.

Discourses on women are always studied from the angles of gender, ethnicity and education. These parameters throw light on the status of women over the ages, the changes and the possible bright future and status. Gender and the roles associated along with the stereotype thoughts that often act as barrier in the growth of women, along with ethnicity under which women get discriminated even today need to be

studied. Women are always seen through the curtains of their ethnic background and are expected to showcase certain ways of behaviour. They are expected to carry the culture ahead with minimal in fact no choices of their own. Education is one such another dimension under which women have faced discrimination. The need to educate women, educating woman is another wastage just like their birth, educating women and making them equivalent all these were never an ideology in the society. Until very recent time no proper educational facilities and scope were provided but now things are changing but although a lot has to be done yet.

"When I'm raped, people say that I've lost my honour? My honour is not in my vagina. It is a patriarchal idea that my rape will defile the honour of my community. I'd like to tell everyone, why did you place your community's honour in a woman's vagina? We never did that. It is the rapist who loses his honour, we don't".

A famous quote that describes the life of a women in India. These words are Kamla Bhasin words that describes her tale of agony. The honor that is associated with us and the honor that society expect from us to be carried forward. She went through endless struggle and fought against all odds and brought changes into the society. Her tale is the tale of every girl in this world. Her feminism was never anti-men it was anti patriarchy. In the shackles of patriarchy, women are subjected to different actions and they accept everything in the name of patriarchy. In the words of Kamla Bhasin nature loves diversity. The world we live in is full of diversification. No two things are alike in this world. Nature makes diversity but not hierarchy and inequality. Societies convert this diversity into groups and make discrimination. Nature makes us human; the labels are assigned after we are born. Labels of caste, religion, rich and poor. The identity we are born with is human which is too big for the world but gets converted into a tiny identity based on all discriminating parameters. The biggest differences and discrimination we have on earth is between man and women. Indian constitution has given equal rights to man and women but society does not allow it. It allows such discrimination because of a system known as patriarchy. They believe they can do it without any logic.

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Patriarchy is ruling because they have control in resources, ideology and decision making. This system is global. And women are too a part of this system. The fight is against patriarchy. It's a fight of equality.

This paper will make a study on north east India and shall throw light on the issue of ethnicity, gender and education. The three parameters will be analyzed from the eyes of Bhasin work. North east India comprises of eight states where diversity is at prime, where different ethnic groups live together. The rays of development have always reached later in the north east regions for which women have always seen and undergo discrimination in the mainland. The identities of women from north east India holds a very deteriorating image for which endless crimes and discrimination are faced by them.

2. Literature Review

Bhasin. K. (2000) on "*Understanding Gender*" talked about the new incarnation of the word gender and how with time, it got different roles associated with it. Gender initially was just a word for categorizing man and women based on their biological differences but society and its structure made it view from the angles of roles being associated, how should both the category talk, walk, eat, do, dress everything was decided by society. How in all these attitudes are formed where in education, religion, caste, class and family all play a part in the hierarchal division. The division is also noticed in the labor and in all these the most severe crime against women is domestic violence. Women has accepted domestic violence as faith to which Bhasin opined that there is no need to be more silent.

Bhasin. K. & Menon. R. (1998) on "*Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*" talked in details about the horrific truth that lie behind the smooth partition. Extreme violence was witnessed by women which were deeply rooted in history. The plight undergone are not stories of victim but stories of battles over gender, the body, the sexuality and the nationalism-stories of women fighting for identity.

Bhasin. K. Thapar. B. (2004). in "*Laughing matters*" conveyed the idea of feminist humor in the most subtle manner. Women were laughed at and they themselves laugh for these many years. The movement that was started necessary requires laughter. This book is a collection of laughing matter created, collected and told and retold to us. It depicts creativity and joining all in the movement safeguarding women where there need to be lot of laughter to fight against the odd. The smile can never be taken away. Women has the right to smile and laugh their heart out.

3. Methodology

This paper tried to look into the states of north east India in the light of ethnicity, gender and education from the perspective of Kamla Bhasin work. The methodology adopted in the study was purely secondary sources where facts and writing are consulted. The facts related to women are taken from national survey reports. The places that are used are the states of North East India. Surveys on the districts of Assam are also studied to find out the crime rates against the districts.

4. Discussion

Women are talked, discussed and judgements are passed based on a piece of cloth that is wrapped around the body and how this piece of cloth become a canvas for statements about body politics. Women are expected to dress in a particular way and a slight change in the dress pattern calls for controversy and crime. Kamla Bhasin's creativity was boundless and in her creative work the agonies are depicted which aimed to bring changes in the society. She penned more than 200 songs, sung during feminist workshops, at protests and at events not only in India but across South Asia, and have even been translated into more than 10 languages. Her creativity shows the distance between theory and reality.

Nature has created man and women separately and we human as part of society create the biggest discrimination in the name of gender. Gender has now been associated with power. Society and the system that society follows i. e., the patriarchy has made men have more control on resources and decision making thus power gets associated with it. Society have started assigning roles and responsibilities as per the gender where even the professions get decided, colours are decided. From what to do to how to do society has decided everything for both the genders. Crimes and injustices against women are justified in the name of equality. The girl victims are question and not the culprits. The whole world has become so sexist that even the language we used has become one of the contributors to this inequality.

Patriarchy is the root cause of creating gender and nurturing the gender-based power hierarchies, it thrives on men being superior and women being inferior. Man has more control economically, politically, socially and culturally. Man has access to ownership and access to education and freedom for which they are making decisions and creating ideologies. Man, rule over every sphere specially in terms of religion. In the name of religion, the major crime is discrimination forced on women. One prime contributor is the mensuration cycle that stops women from visiting religious places. Patriarchy has two key parts: structure and ideology. There are structures which nurtures and protects the ideology and belief that men are superior. Men write constitutions, they design physical spaces, they make religions, they write books. Be it media, books we read, through our colloquial axioms and proverbs, the hierarchy between men and women is communicated. Gender is made to define girls and boys into boxes. For example, beauty is a box for girl and strength for boys. The movement that women are fighting is against patriarchy and they are fighting for equality and against this ideology.

According to WHO indicate that globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

Women face violence at every doorstep. Crimes against women in the name of gender is increasing. From depriving of a basic life facility to human right, the reality of women status is deteriorating in every region and corner. North east India is not left behind.

National Crime Records Bureau, (NCRB), 2020 data reveal that Assam tops the list of States in rate of crime against women during 2018. It also tops the list of cases registered under the category of murder with rape. The rising crime rates have turned this state in India's Northeast into the most unsafe place for women in the country. The NCRB reports also states that crime rate against women in Nagaland, another state in India's Northeast region, was the lowest in all the states. The rate of crime against women in Assam was 166 during 2018 against the national average of 58.8. Nagaland records lowest rate of crime against women with only 7.3. The crime rate is estimated as per lakh population.

States	Rate of crime against women (per lakh)
Arunachal Pradesh	51.1
Assam	166.0
Manipur	17.7
Meghalaya	35.7
Mizoram	42.2
Nagaland	7.3
Sikkim	55.5
Tripura	46.5
India	58.8

(Source: Rate of crime in North East and India, 2018, NCRB)

Taking about the districts of Assam such as Darrang district in north Assam has a crime rate of 338, nearly twice the state average of 177.8, while Karbi Anglong in central Assam has a crime rate of 35. Seven districts--Jorhat, Sibsagar, Hailakandi, Dhubri, Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Hojai--have crime rates higher than the state average. In 2016, Kamrup district was divided into Kamrup East and Kamrup Metropolitan district; the latter also have higher than average reported crimes against women. The districts reporting a high crime rate against women spread over the state, and are diverse in terms of the ethnicities and religious affiliations of their residents, according to Census 2011.

Kamla Bhasin have made endless effort in removing barriers that act as hurdles in the development of women. Her work was diversified in the way that it caters to women from all levels. She ignored the vertical hierarchy that exist in women and tried to bring development in all. Her work tried to change the ideology that exist amongst us. She tried to break the existing shackles and build a new world for everyone.

'Tod tod ke bandhanon ko dekho behne aati hai... aayengi zulm mitayengi... yeh to naya zamaana laayengi' – Kamla Bhasin

Bhasin wrote extensively on gender issues and emphasised how feminism is not a war between men and women, but a fight between two ideologies. She fought for equal rights for over four decades, and was best known for her work with South Asian feminist network Sangat, which has trained several thousand women on gender issues. Bhasin also authored several books on the feminist movement, including *Understanding Gender* and *What is Patriarchy*. Her books have been translated into over two dozen languages. She calls herself midnight's children generation. Bhasin was born in 1946, a year before the Partition, in Punjab's Shahidanwali village (now in Pakistan).

'My place of birth and the land of our ancestors became not only foreign, but an enemy country. I have spent my entire

adult life dreaming of, and working for, peace and cooperation between the two countries I belong to,'

Kamla Bhasin works and life is the life of many women who have faced the same oppression and injustice. Overnight becoming alien to the community, they belong, place they were born, the family they were born to. A marriage, a rape, a crime against women takes away everything from a woman. Women in North east India undergoes the same plight as they faced the discrimination in the mainland. One of the deteriorating terms used on women belonging from north east India in the mainland is *chinki*. Women getting addressed as belong from this region are always looked down upon. Everyone categories north east women as tribals and never welcome warmly. The rejection, the separation, the crimes faced are increasing. Equality is yet to reach women vertically and horizontally as women are categorised based on gender, caste, creed, religion, rich, poor and regionally as well.

5. Critical Analysis

Man dominated society has made literature men-centric, written by men with their perspective of the world. Men write more than 90% of the books, just like other industries, literature is heavily male-dominated. Men have more time, energy and resources to think and write books. When people who are facing oppression don't write their own stories, their realities are often misrepresented and distorted, often by people belonging the groups of oppressors. The need for women writers is thus very much required to hear out the unsung tales and untold agonies.

Kamla Bhasin worked on child genre and dreamed to bring radical changes in it. She opined that the ways our children literature are written and transmitted over the generation they are transferring and promoting the idea of inequality more. Representation of minorities be it gender, caste, class is minimal and disproportionate in children's book is witnessed. As long as the diverse voices in storytelling are missing, we would have this inequality of representation and excess misinterpretation. There are only limited books for girls which can offer them dreams of freedom and living their unique complex personalities. Many children's books have young girls as helpless waiting for help from men, most often prince charming. And the only strength that girls had in these books was their beauty. Women are portrayed as enemies of women. Thus, Kamla Bhasin used literature as one of the strongest weapons to bring the change she dreams of as literature is one of the prominent ways to bring ideological changes in people as emotionally and culturally literature is connected with people.

Feminist movements and activists have helped us all understand how adversely the misrepresentation has got into us. In 1983, Kamla Bhasin started a women's circle named *Women's Committee for Women's Portrayal in Media*, and they analysed the books for children and informed their communities about the problematic content in books for boys and girls. They emphasized that there was a need for more diverse and inclusive books for children. Textbooks need to be less sexist where man and women are shown to break the stereotype roles assigned to them. Books and textbooks can bring about a lot of changes in this need of equality.

Schools as a means of formal education came during industrialisation and has a big role to play in bringing equality. When systems of formal education through religious bodies or economic bodies were formed, the access was mostly exclusive for boys and not girls. For example, religious schools be it gurukuls of Hindus, Madrasas of Muslims and converts for Christians, Sangha for Buddhism, they were all mostly were accessible to boys and men. So, education systems were introduced as a gender unequal means right from the beginning. Even the most advanced and modern universities such as Harvard and Oxford, got women students centuries after they were established. Education systems in the current design has in fact fuelled inequality and made the existing inequalities even more robust. It is the reason why men wrote more books; noble prizes are won by men.

But with recent swiipe of modernity a few changes are seen although a lot has to be done and success is yet to be achieved. The day we stop discussing on women right for her equality and consider both man and women equal understanding that there is difference amongst the two genders physically and its natural for nature to grow. A day when we stop assigning roles to gender shall be the day when the dream of equal society shall be achieved. In the last five-six decades, women did start getting education and are taking leaps forward. The moment they got access, they showed their interest and potential. Many girls are now achieving and moving forward in life fighting against odds but did we create enough freedom for exploring their potential or do we still argue on their roles, their dress, their behaviour and most importantly their success based on their talent. Why do we still see sexuality being assigned to women success. If education meant equality, why do we still see injustice.

Till today we could not come out of the customs that bind our legs in the name of tradition and beliefs. Inequality exists all around us. In your homes, in your public spaces, in your offices, in your government everywhere. We don't see it, because we don't want to see it. Many a times we hear a woman cry and still move away thinking its okay to be beaten by husband. Why alone women, man are too victims of patriarchy. Under the ideology of it, man is expected to not cry, be bold, exercise boldness, strength and power. Any deviation from the set rules and norms calls for femineity and shame to mankind. Thus, it is equally important to emphasise that gender inequality because of patriarchy harms men too. But until women are not free, men won't be free too. No family, no societies and no nation wont progress without gender equality

6. Conclusion

An equal society where women are not seen through any curtains, where no one is expected of anything. Gender is just a part of grammar and not a discriminating parameter. A day when we can freely talk about success stories of women and a society where no crime is seen against woman and man in the name of gender is a dream. A dream seen by many. A dream that gets shattered in the hands of people who are so stuck to their masculinity. The biggest question we have today is when we will see the change, who will bring the change. The answer is within us. The change is with us. The change in attitude. The change in the way people is being socialized

will call for the change. Ethnicity calls for diversity along with different patterns of livelihood. The mainstream people who form the majority always find it difficult to accept people bearing diversified ways of livelihood. Women are often seen as contributors of the crime against woman, they take ahead the ideology of patriarchy along with man. A bright day will be seen when a family shall rejoice the birth of a girl as promptly as the birth of a boy. Customs on girl and boys shall not be different and everyone shall realize that both male and female are necessary for the nature to grow. Girls shall not be given work at the display corner and shall be recognized for their strength. Boys shall not be pressurized to show strength and attempts shall be made to normalize expression of emotions. Women's success shall not be associated with their sexuality. Women also sees disparity against pay where when one day they shall achieve equal pay. Thus, much role needs to be played by family and members of the society where individual get socialized. Women need to be treated equal right from the home, in the society only then they shall be treated as individual having worth.

North east Indian women are subjected to oppression and agony because of their ethnicity, culture and the stereotype outlook that are being associated with them. They face discrimination based on their physique, look, color and so on for which they are never accepted in the mainland. Although a few changes are seen in which social media, newspaper and the new generation that are being aware of their rights and duties are seen taking roles in bringing change to the set thoughts that are age rooted. A lot has to be done and it all can be achieved with the help of collective efforts.

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