

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Reinforcing Caste Boundaries in Everyday Social Interactions: A Critical Analysis of Bania Women
in India

By

Nioshi Shah

July 2021

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts degree in the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Professor Omar McRoberts

Preceptor: Professor Amit Anshumali

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep appreciation to my thesis advisor, Professor Omar McRoberts, and my preceptor, Professor Amit Anshumali.

I'm deeply indebted to my friend and research partner, Ravikant Kisana for my understanding of caste, and for helping me find the researcher in me.

I am extremely grateful for Ben Caldwell, Courtney Marsh, and Jiyoun Yoo for being my support systems, and for their constant and sincere interest in my work.

This thesis would not have been possible without Bucky, who stayed up with me as I wrote the paper.

Abstract

The Caste System stratifies Indian society into a hierarchy where the upper caste groups such as Brahmins have more power and privileges over those belonging to lower castes. The Banias are an upper caste trading community who have been the biggest supporting allies of the Brahmins in maintaining the caste order. Within the community, the Bania women play the role of tradable commodities used to cement kinship ties between families and forge credit crucial to business expansionism. While Bania women are controlled by Bania patriarchy in regard to their social and reproductive agency, they are active participants in reinforcing the caste system that benefits upper caste women for their caste status. This paper aims to investigate the role of young, upper class, urban Bania women in reinforcing caste boundaries in their everyday social interactions. Interviewing 7 Bania women, the field study focuses on reinforcement of caste in three everyday social scenarios: Food Practices, Dating and Marital Relations, and Interactions with Lower Castes.

Keywords: Caste, Gender, Bania women, Food Practices, Dating and Marital Relations, Interactions with Lower Castes, India, South Asia.

Introduction

The Caste System is one of the oldest standing forms of social stratification in India that is based on the system of graded inequality (Ambedkar, 2014a). This means that the caste system forms a hierarchy in society where those who are higher up in the caste hierarchy have greater power and status, and those who fall lower on it have less or almost no power or status. The hierarchy comprises four caste groups, with the Brahmins at the top, and the lower castes falling at its bottom. The Dalits, who fall outside the hierarchy are deemed as ‘untouchables’, and hence excluded from the structure itself. The ultimate purpose of the caste system is to maintain Brahminical power over Indian society (Ambedkar, 2014a).

For decades now, scholarly work on Caste-Gender intersectionality has focused mainly on Brahmins or Dalits, creating a sort of binary in the discourse of caste. While the Brahmins control the ideological framework of the caste system that is oppressive towards Dalits, other upper caste groups such as the Baniyas help maintain the Brahminical ideological system. The Baniyas are an upper caste trading community who have been the biggest supporting allies of the Brahmins since the colonial era (Ilaiah, 2009). While the Brahmins run the intellectual apparatus of the country, what is less known is the social role that Baniyas have played in sustaining the caste system through millenniums. Being the money lending caste in India who supports the Brahminical ideology that dictates the caste statuses of everyone beneath them, Baniyas maintain a hegemony over the country’s wealth. The Baniyas who own most capital due to their upper caste status, also emerge as some of the wealthiest people in Indian society (Patel, 2009). Additionally, to accumulate wealth, Bania empires are built on the appropriation of lower caste labor. Hence, as the upper caste, metropolitan Baniyas own the capital of the country, structural inequity becomes a basis for any transaction in the Indian society.

Historically, the most common way to maintain capital within the same caste group is by favorable marital matchmaking (Graeber, 2012). In a community of traders who make transactions everyday, Bania women have a different role to play. They are tradable commodities used to cement kinship ties between families and forge credit crucial to business expansionism (Shah & Kisana, 2020). Bania women are used for building marital relations with appropriate upper class, metropolitan Bania men, in order to maintain fiscal securities, hence ensuring the upper class and caste status of the community. The control over Bania women's social and reproductive agency makes sure that there is no conflict in the Bania family structure, and hence no chances of anomaly in the caste group.

While Bania women are controlled by Bania patriarchy in regard to their social and reproductive agency, they are seen to readily accept the caste system that subordinates them by their gender (Chakravarti, 2018). This can be explained by understanding the intersectionality of caste and gender that favors upper caste women for their caste status, while it subordinates them for their gender. Upper class Bania women enjoy the benefits of a luxurious lifestyle due to their family's financial privileges. Additionally, their high reliance on the labor of lower caste people such as domestic workers and sanitation workers stems from the privilege of their caste that allows them to appropriate lower caste labor. Hence, Bania women not only enjoy the benefits of their caste and class status, but are seen reinforcing the caste system as it rewards them for their upper caste position.

Pluralizing sites of caste hegemony by complicating the academic anti-caste discourse that is limited to the Brahmin-Dalit binary, I take a critical look at the social relations of Bania women. This paper

aims to understand how caste remains the dominant variable in Bania women's everyday social life. I investigate the role of young, upper class, metropolitan Bania women in reinforcing caste in their everyday social interactions.

Literature Review

To understand the role of Bania women in reinforcing caste, it is first crucial to take a deeper look into the position of the Bania community within the caste system in India.

1. Banias within the Caste System

1.1 Debt Societies and Caste

Societies that have been built on violence are often justified by making them seem 'moral' in the language of debt (Graeber, 2012). In such a society, a violently unequal transaction is turned into a relationship where the victim feels like she is in debt. For instance, abusive men have been able to justify abuse to their victims by telling them that they owe them this. If nothing, at the least 'they owe them their lives' as the victim has still not been killed. While the victim feels inadequate and makes horrible apologies to themselves, the abuser comes out of this as the magnanimous person. With this context, Graeber comes to define debt as a 'business transaction' where there is a sense of obligation, and hence a feeling of inferiority (Graeber, 2012).

In the Indian setting, Graeber describes the nature of debt by dwelling into the country's caste based past (Graeber, 2012). Historically, lower castes in India have lived in a 'permanent debt' situation where they have been obliged to solicit loans from upper castes due to the structural inequality in

owning land, and forced to pay it back in the form of interest by providing their labor. The upper castes justify this unequal transaction by telling them that *at least* they are provided food and shelter in return. In many situations, lower caste people were left with no choice but to borrow money from the oppressive castes for big life expenses such as their daughters' weddings. In such transactions, often the bride herself was taken away by upper caste groups as 'security' until she paid off her fathers debt by working as a prostitute. In every such business transaction, the person who is owed the debt, is an upper caste money lender (Graeber, 2012).

With the rise of the merchant groups in society, the language of a marketplace was incorporated into relationships. Being in debt meant being in a commercial relationship. However, economic exchanges are only one type of transaction and human relations are based on many kinds of exchanges. Levi Strauss extended the imagination of exchanges in life to kinship, or exchange of women (Graeber, 2012). In this sphere, a marriage can be interpreted as a transaction that involves a suitor to pay the value of a woman's honor and become its owner. Hence, with the transition from a human economy to a market economy, 'debt' turned human relations into commodities, and by extension women's bodies into financial bonds (Graeber, 2012).

In the Indian context, it is important to note that debt and duty are not limited to financial transactions but are intrinsically related to the ideology of purity. The Brahminical texts proclaim that it is the duty of the Brahmin to preserve his caste (Ambedkar, 2014b). Brahminism speaks of life as a debt to the gods. The Brahminical text insists that people are born as debt not only to gods, which they must repay or sacrifice, but also to sages who are the creators of the Brahmanical texts (Graeber, 2012). In Hindu society, the idea of debt equates sages with gods, hence maintaining the

idea of the caste system by keeping the Brahmins in power. In this way, debt is intrinsically connected with caste in India (Ambedkar, 2014c).

The Hindu texts present a tolerant attitude towards the lenders and make warnings against karmic revenge (Ambedkar, 2014c). Karma is a Brahminical construct that is used to justify the violence and discrimination against the lower castes by attributing it to their bad karma. Hence, in a Brahmanical society, as the notion of debt broadens to include social responsibilities in the form of debts, debt in a caste based society proves to be not just fiscal but also social and spiritual (Ambedkar, 2014c). Finally, the Hindu texts also mention the obligations of debts. It is emphasized that if any lower caste person who is a debtor is not able to repay, and transgresses their social and spiritual debt, then they would be born a slave in the house of the creditor in their next life (Ambedkar, 2014c). Additionally, lower castes would never be allowed to have people to serve them as the debts that were enforced on the debtor also extended to their children and grandchildren and so on (Ambedkar, 2014c). As a majority of population in India continues to be a working population of laborers, the lower castes remain in debt servitude of their upper caste creditors (Ambedkar, 2014c).

1.2 Social smugglers

In Hindu society, Brahminical texts assigned exclusive rights to certain castes and exclusive duties to other castes (Ambedkar, 2016). Being on top of the caste system, the Brahmins assigned themselves the exclusive right to deal with knowledge and divinity. All other castes, including Banias, were excluded from spiritual duties that were the exclusive rights of Brahmins. Hence, even though they belong to upper caste groups, no Banias would be allowed to be priests

at the temple (Ilaiah, 2009). However, the Brahmins also had the exclusive right to own business, which was an exclusive right assigned to the Banias by Brahminical texts. Other than Brahmins and Baniyas, no castes were allowed to handle the trade economy. In this process of assigning rights, the Brahmins took the rights to draw wealth that was gained through spiritual means, while Banias were given the status of upper castes for their allyship (Ilaiah, 2009). In this way, the Brahmin-Bania hegemony was formed and the economy of a caste society was under the complete control of two caste groups; the Brahmins and the Banias (Ilaiah, 2009). As Banias agreed to be subordinates to the Brahmins and became their allies, the Brahmins sanctioned a way to permanently acquire social wealth for their consumption of national wealth (Ilaiah, 2009).

The Bania households collected the largest amount of gold and silver reserves of the country through the consent of not only the Hindu religion but also the modern state system (Ilaiah, 2009). This unequal wealth distribution has persisted even after independence as the Bania caste group currently has ownership over a majority of the country's private property. In the book 'Post Hindu India', Kanchah Ilaiah writes about the way in which Banias preserved casteist private property as 'Guptadhana' [hidden treasure], a form of black money that is kept underground without any social use. Ilaiah explains that the merchant community constructed the concept of *guptadhana* to hide wealth from lower caste rulers of certain regions (Ilaiah, 2009). In this context, Ilaiah characterizes the Banias as 'social smugglers' as they secretly defy rules while escaping legal entitlement (Ilaiah, 2009).

According to Ilaiah, a unique attribute of the Bania caste that allows them to acquire such wealth is the 'art of lies' (Ilaiah, 2009). Business transactions turned into a 'lie trading process' as

Banias would buy goods at extremely low prices from lower caste sellers and ask for extremely high prices from lower caste buyers. One common technique of deception to smuggle money from the seller was through manipulating the scale of the weighing machine that was used to assess the price of the goods (Ilaiah, 2009). In this way, deception became a part of Bania life and their transactions negated any sense of accountability. Hence, Banias often used 'mistrust' to hide their wealth. Soon this culture of mistrust seeped into family life. Often, the father in a Bania family hid his wealth without his son's knowledge and parallelly the son hid their wealth without their parents' knowledge (Ilaiah, 2009).

In Indian society, as Banias gained mercantile capital of the country, they did not ensure social rights for all castes. They continued to accumulate wealth within the Brahminical ethics (Ambedkar 2014c). According to Brahminical texts, there is no compassion for 'the poor, the destitute, the disabled and the diseased' (Ilaiah, 2009). Using the labor power of the lower castes through business, Banias immorally destroyed peasant economies. The labor of the lower caste groups was appropriated by Banias to accumulate additional wealth in the name of business transactions. If any lower caste group accumulated more wealth, the Banias would organize a social boycott against their families (Ilaiah, 2009).

Another area where the Bania community has been actively exclusionary of the lower castes is in their food politics. In the Western world, while vegetarianism is commonly seen as a food preference that is concerned with ideas of environmentalism and animal welfare, in the Indian context, dietary preferences and food choice have a complex connotation that is deeply rooted in the caste system (Sathyamala, 2018). Enforcing the Brahmanical idea of purity, Banias and other

upper castes believe that eating meat is seen as ‘dirty’ and is associated with polluting one's body (Kuffir, 2020). Maintaining this dominant caste ideology, it is the upper caste groups, predominantly the Banias, who are vegetarians in India (Ambedkar 2014b). However, diet preference, especially when it comes to consuming meat, has never been a matter of ‘choice’ for lower caste groups. Being forced to work in occupations that are seen as ‘dirty’ or ‘polluting’, historically the lower caste groups have had no choice but to touch dead animals while disposing of bodies, or shedding their skin (Ilaiah, 2009). Even today, lower caste groups are relegated to occupations that enforce untouchability (Dubey & Murphy, 2020). Many Bania owned restaurants are seen actively promoting vegetarianism by putting out boards that say ‘Pure Vegetarian’. The main purpose of this is to depict their own purity marker while excluding the meat eaters, who are predominantly the lower castes. Since the lower castes eat meat, Bania owned businesses such as restaurants and universities conduct caste based segregation of dining spaces, disbaring lower caste people from entering in the same space as upper caste vegetarians and hence enforcing untouchability (Ambedkar, 2020).

1.3 Bania political economy

The Bania community has never played a role in the country's labor production (Ilaiah, 2009). However, they heavily depend on the labor of lower castes who have been forced into this occupation. Brahminical ideology dictates that field based manual labor is seen as ‘polluting’, and hence to be conducted by lower caste groups (Human Rights Watch, 2007). While the Banias have avoided playing the role of labourers, they continue to dominate the country's economy by exploiting lower castes who are laborers (Ambedkar, 2014c).

Ilaiah explains that in a class based economy, the social position of the actors involved such as buyers, sellers, laborers, and businessmen is mobile (Ilaiah, 2009). This means that they can change their positions if their economic position changes. Unlike a class based economy, Bania business in India is structured in caste. This means that the social position of the buyers and sellers is not pronounced by Brahminism and hence it remains immobile. In this way, caste impacts the political economy in India allowing only the Bania community to dominate the capital (Ilaiah, 2009).

The Bania community's dominance over the country's wealth and its allyship with Brahmins is not a matter of the past, but continues even today. In contemporary India, Banias have emerged as the exclusive business caste as they mobilize capital and enjoy leisure centred lives while allowing the ongoing connivance led by the Brahmin leaders (Ambedkar, 2017). Statistically, 46% of people in Corporate boards in India are Banias, followed by 44.6% of Brahmins, while the lower castes collectively make up only 3.8% (Patel, 2009). The latest Sensex states that the 30 largest trading companies are owned by Banias and Brahmins (Patel, 2009). Taking over from Birla and Goenka; two wealthy Bania businessmen whose accumulation of capital was used to fund Gandhi in the 20th century, some of the wealthiest businessmen in India today are Banias (Ambedkar, 2017). Mukesh Ambani, the owner of Reliance Corporations is listed as the richest Asian (Patel, 2009). Along with Gautam Adani, the owner of Adani Group; a multinational trading company, Ambani is also part of Forbes list of India's billionaires (Patel, 2009). Despite the statistics that Brahmins, Banias and Jains comprise only 6 percent of the entire country's population, they own almost all of the country's economy (Patel, 2009).

For instance, the banking sector is dominated by Banias who predominantly own banks in India, such as HDFC and Canara bank (Patel, 2009). Additionally, the two largest English newspapers, Times of India and The Hindu, are Bania owned (Patel, 2009). A similar pattern of Bania-Brahmin hegemony can be observed in top tier educational institutes such as Jio University, Flame University, and Jain University, all of which are Bania owned (Patel, 2009). Unsurprisingly, there is not a dearth of Banias in e-commerce companies, with Flipkart, the largest online retail company in India being Bania owned (Patel, 2009). This hegemony extends to software companies like Infosys and airlines like Jet airways (Patel, 2009).

2. Social relations & negotiations among Bania women

2.1 Caste & Gender

The ideology and practice of the caste system is influenced by the belief of purity and pollution (Ambedkar, 2014a). The idea of purity proclaims that the castes that rank highest in the hierarchy are seen as pure, while those that rank at the bottom are seen as polluted or ‘dirty’ (Ambedkar, 2014a). Dr. B.R Ambedkar explains that there is no scientific origin of this characteristic, and the belief of purity and pollution is not a consensual one as it privileges the viewpoint of upper caste people and their caste location (Ambedkar, 2014a).

The belief of purity and pollution perpetuates upper caste power that dominates the social relations between different caste groups. An important part of maintaining caste purity is controlling women’s social and reproductive agency (Chakravarti, 2018). To dominate the caste system, Brahmins wield caste power over society, including patriarchal power over women. The mechanism of patriarchy in

a Brahmanical society works on the ideology of caste, the control of women, and punishments for disobeying patriarchal orders (Chakravarti, 2018).

To maintain homogeneity of caste groups, it becomes necessary to enforce control on sexual relations of women. Endogamy, one of the main features of the caste system without which it cannot be reproduced, is the practice of marrying within one's own caste group (Ambedkar, 2016). Maintaining the patriarchal practice of caste, endogamy becomes a tool that perpetuates both caste and gender subordination. In this way, caste reproduction is organized by the control over women's sexuality and their sexual relations (Chakravarti, 2018).

In his earlier writings such as 'Annihilation of Caste' and 'Castes in India', Dr. Ambedkar wrote about how the hegemony over women's agency through social measures such as endogamy and the sexual ownership of women's bodies perpetuates the hierarchy of castes in India (Ambedkar, 2016). According to him, caste continues to exist due to the patriarchal dominance over women, and curtailing women's freedom is a way of maintaining these caste hierarchies. Hence, subjugation of women is inherent to the caste system. As controlling women becomes key to maintaining power in the hierarchy (Ambedkar, 2014a), caste shapes the lives of women belonging to all caste groups and forms an important part of the ideology and practice of the caste system (Chakravarti, 2018).

Despite being subordinated and controlled by upper caste men, upper caste women invest in the caste system as it rewards them for their caste privilege. While their reproductive power is controlled by upper caste men, upper caste women maintain control over the productive power of the lower castes (Chakravarti, 2018). They appropriate the labor of lower caste workers who are

forced into occupations such as domestic work, sanitation work and manual scavenging (Ilaiah, 2009). Additionally, they perpetuate casteist behaviours of untouchability and segregation of food and spaces to avoid 'pollution'(Azad, 2014). For instance, upper caste women deny domestic workers who clean their homes from using their toilets (Shah, 2020). It is a common upper caste practice to segregate utensils to maintain caste purity by not allowing domestic workers to eat food in the same utensils as them (Shah & Kisana, 2021). Lower caste domestic workers are employed for extremely low wages by upper caste employers who make them work for long hours, without compensating them for any extra hours of labor (Shah & Kisana, 2021). Maintaining Brahmanical ideology, upper caste women become complicit in the caste system and are responsible for the oppression of men and women of lower castes.

2.2 Forms of social control

While there may be one patriarchal agenda of the caste system, patriarchy operates on different levels in different castes. This depends on how patriarchy is enforced among each caste group. The larger caste system prescription of women commonly involves not being allowed to marry outside their caste, forbidden sexual relations, lack of property rights, rigid household rituals (Ambedkar, 2016). This can be observed in upper caste groups such as the Bania community, which subordinates its women through the use of stringent rules and controls over their social and reproductive agency.

To maintain purity of upper caste groups, upper caste women are institutionally prevented from having sexual access to lower caste men (Chakravarti, 2018). This is done through an effective system of surveillance and control over the social and sexual agency of upper caste women. For instance, in the Bania community, in order to maintain homogeneity of caste groups, it becomes

necessary to enforce control on sexual relations that Bania women have. For this, the Bania community has restrictions on who a Bania woman can date, have sexual relations with, or marry (Shah & Kisana, 2020). Another common way in which Bania women are controlled is by secluding them during their menstrual cycle (Sowjanya, 2017). According to the Brahminical text of Manusmriti, menstruation is seen as innately impure (Singhal, 2020). The pollution caused by blood when a woman menstruates is seen as dangerous or threatening to the purity of the upper caste group (Singhal, 2020). The Bania caste group also has rules on what clothes are acceptable for a Bania woman to wear (Sowjanya, 2017). These rules are meant to control Bania women from their sexual desires in their access to men of different castes. Bania families also control women by surveillancing who they are meeting and socializing with (Shah & Kisana, 2020). Hence, the main purpose of this surveillance is to prevent inter caste mingling and to promote homogeneity.

In the Bania community, men have the upper hand over women. However, despite controls and surveillance, Bania women are co-opted into the framework of the community that benefits them for their caste status. Ultimately, Bania women are seen to be investing in the caste beliefs of their community while being subordinated by Bania men at the same time. While upper caste women may be controlled by their gender, they retain and exploit their power due to their upper caste location (Shah & Kisana, 2020).

2.3 Deception & negotiation

In the article 'Enduring Illusions: The Social Organization of Secrecy and Deception', David Gibson theorizes how organizations that are based on secrets and lies are successfully maintained

for decades or even longer periods of time. Gibson suggests that one way that social order may be maintained in such organizations is through deception (Gibson, 2014).

In a Bania community, the use of deception to avoid conflicts within family structures is not only remarkably consistent, but can also be seen in every sphere of their lives (Ilaiyah, 2009). Just like Bania men who use deception in making business and familial transactions, Bania women too represent this value in everyday choices they make as they learn to use deception to avoid conflicts. Applying their caste training, Bania women use the instrument of deception to make negotiations in the rigid family structure that allows them a deceived form of independence.

Bania women use 'white lies' to negotiate with any conflicting situations and to avoid causing any sort of distrust within the family. An important feature of the white lies is that their family would not be informed about the lie by anyone else, making it possible for Bania women to deceive them. A break of trust within the family would mean harsher restrictions and controls on the Bania women (Shah & Kisana, 2020). To avoid these, and to negotiate with the control imposed on them, Bania women used white lies.

Research Question

As upper caste women, Bania women play a crucial role in maintaining the community's caste status. While they face patriarchal control by men in the community, they ultimately benefit from their upper caste status (Chakravarti, 2018). Benefitting from their privileged caste status, Bania women choose to be around people like them, that is other people of upper castes. Right from childhood, Bania women are sent to private, top tier Jain-Bania schools that have predominantly

Jain and Bania students (Shah & Kisana, 2020). As their social circle begins to develop in school years, Bania women surround themselves with other upper caste students. These Bania boys and girls in their classrooms have also undergone similar upper caste conditioning and casteist upbringing in their homes (Shah & Kisana, 2020). As Bania women grow older, and continue to socialise with people of upper caste and class background, they enter romances within the community or with other upper castes contiguous to theirs (Shah & Kisana, 2020). The pattern of homogeneity and privilege continues as Bania women don't ever consider including lower caste people in their social lives. The only presence of lower caste people in Bania women's lives is for the consumption of their labor.

While previous literature on gender and caste intersectionality is centered around Brahminical patriarchy or Dalit feminism, research on Bania women and their role in reinforcing caste in upper caste social circles has been completely evaded. As caste and gender intersect to form the social life of Bania women, this research aims to analyse the role of young, upper class, metropolitan Bania women in reinforcing caste in their everyday social interactions.

This research paper attempts to contribute to the academic discourse on Gender-Caste intersectionality, while focusing on critical issues within the upper castes. I hope to add nuance to this Brahmin-Dalit dichotomy by complicating the academic anti-caste discourse and taking a critical look at everyday social interactions of Bania women.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research was qualitative in nature. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Bania women. Each interview lasted between one to five hours. The researcher interviewed 7 Bania women between the age groups of 20-30 years. All respondents belong to the upper class, and live in metropolitan urban areas in India such as Vadodara, Delhi, Mumbai, and Jabalpur. Since the researcher is a Bania woman, acquaintances were used to gain initial access to the women in the community. Later, snowball sampling was used to further recruit participants. Due to safety restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted virtually on Zoom. The interviews were recorded with permission of the interviewees, and transcribed for further analyses. Overall, the interviews were conducted in three languages; English, Gujarati, and Hindi, as per the comfort of the respondents.

The Field Study

I interviewed 7 upper class Bania women living in metropolitan areas in India. Respondents were from the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. While the geographical distribution of the Bania community prevails across the country, a myriad of Banias are found in states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. Hence, Bania women residing in some of these states have been recruited for the interviews. The respondents are young, upper class Bania women from the above mentioned states. Their ages range from 20-30 years.

While a Bania woman has a very specific role to play in the family, which is the role of marrying a Bania man in order to maintain caste purity, a Bania woman goes through various preparatory stages in her life to get trained and ready for this marriage. However, even after marriage, she has an important cultural role to play within the community; which is the role of indoctrinating the next

generation of Bania women to maintain the patriarchal power structure and caste purity of the community. For this study, the respondents range from women who are entering an age that is considered as the ideal ‘marriageable age’ for Bania women by the community to women who are going to get married in the near future, and finally, some respondents are recently married Bania women. As the aim of the research is to understand the role of young bania women in reinforcing caste boundaries in their everyday social interactions, the participants recruited for this study follow an age range that allows the researcher to capture the various ways in which Bania women reinforce caste in their early adulthood.

In this section of the paper, *The Field Study*, I look at everyday interactions in which Bania women reinforce caste based narratives and thematically arrange the findings into three social scenarios; i. *Reinforcing Caste Boundaries in Food Practices*, ii. *Reinforcing Caste Boundaries in Dating and Marital Relations*, and iii. *Reinforcing Caste Boundaries in Interactions with Lower Castes*. I analyse the role of Bania women in reinforcing caste in their everyday social interactions.

1. Reinforcing Caste Boundaries in Food Practices

In Indian society, food is an important factor in understanding the practice of caste. Vegetarianism is an upper caste custom that is an indicator of purity. Brahmanical texts associate eating meat with polluting one's mind and body. However, unlike the wealthy upper castes, historically, the lower castes did not always have the option to choose a diet and had to rely on meat for survival. The upper castes discriminate against lower castes who are viewed as ‘dirty’ for eating meat. This Brahminical belief of purity and pollution in food practices extends to the Bania community. The Bania Community is strictly vegetarian. Bania women strongly, and proudly express this belief:

Baniyas are purely vegetarian. (Shreya, personal communication, June 11, 2021)

I have never ever tried meat. (Ria, personal communication, April 25, 2021)

I am a pure Vegetarian. Even eggs are not allowed at my house. (Maya, personal communication, February 27, 2021)

The Bania community enforces the practice of vegetarianism from childhood onwards. This conditioning is often carried out by the elder Bania women in the family. In addition to instilling the exclusionary custom of vegetarianism, Bania children are also taught to show repulsiveness for meat. While some respondents suggested that they were vegetarians by choice, others said they disliked the texture of meat, along with its smell. However, these women made this 'choice' without ever tasting meat. While all respondents were enforced with the caste custom of vegetarianism childhood onwards, they all confessed that they would never eat meat even if they had the option to. Eventually, the caste conditioning is internalized and Bania women refuse to eat or touch meat even when they are in their early adulthood where their everyday choices are not directly under the control of their parents.

Since childhood I have been given vegetarian food and I got used to it with time. I had an option of trying non vegetarian food once with friends but I was too scared to do it. I don't know why, so I never tasted it. I don't really like it because of the texture. So for me, it's like I'm a vegetarian by choice. (Priya, personal communication, May 11, 2021)

I don't like non vegetarian food because I just don't like it. It's not based on any religion or anything like that. I would have eaten it, but it's just that I personally don't like the taste and texture of it. Initially vegetarianism was forced upon me because I never had an option. I did not understand it. But now I have an option but I will not eat meat. (Rishika, personal communication, February 28)

Since childhood I have been a pure vegetarian. Baniyas are purely vegetarian. I can't even see a fish, and can't bear its smell, and other non veg dishes too, including egg. The first time I saw a mushroom was when I came to the hostel. Since childhood. They (family) even count mushrooms as non vegetarian. Even jackfruit because it looks a little like mutton, after you cook it it looks like red meat. (Shreya, personal communication, June 11, 2021)

As does with conditioning of disgust towards any culture, the repulsiveness that Bania women show for meat-eating transitions to repulsiveness for meat-eaters. Bania women not only start using separate utensils for vegetarian food, but also start segregating spaces to avoid being in contact with lower caste people who eat meat. Some respondents claim to separate utensils in their home if there is a rare and unavoidable occasion when eggs have to be used in food preparation. As they exclude interactions with meat eaters, Bania women also choose to avoid socialising with them. In this way, Bania women contribute to the reinforcement of caste as they show disgust for lower caste people for eating meat.

Since childhood, we did not have an option with our diets. When we started learning how to talk and started going to school, and if our friend is eating an egg and we come home and tell our parents that, then they say, 'Chee, uske paas mat jaana' (yuck, don't go close

to him). So it has now become a mindset that now I can't even see meat. (Maya, personal communication, February 27, 2021)

I have never-ever tried meat. My friends sometimes say that I should try one piece, one spoon only. But I say, no, I will die but I will not eat non-veg. My mindset is like that, I would choose death over eating non vegetarian. But there are some people in Baniya families like some of my friends who go secretly with their friends and eat non-veg and hide it from their parents. But I am not like this, I can not do that. (Janvi, personal communication, March 7, 2021)

I am a pure Vegetarian. Even eggs are not allowed at my house. My mom and my grandmother don't allow eggs in the house. At one time eggs started coming in the house as I am a chef and I had to use them for other people. But they still follow the same rules. I have to use separate utensils for egg preparations. (Tanvi, personal communication, March 13)

Overall, Bania women interviewed show extreme disgust for meat as some even claim that they would choose 'death over meat'. The disgust arises from the Brahmanical need to maintain caste purity. As disgust towards meat and meat eaters transitions from an enforced custom to a 'mindset', Bania women reinforce caste as they prohibit interactions with lower caste people in their everyday practices of diet.

2. Reinforcing Caste Boundaries in Dating and Marital Relations

Endogamy is an important basis for continuing the caste system. It is through the practice of endogamy that upper caste communities maintain purity in their caste groups. In order to maintain endogamy, the Bania community enforces controls and restrictions on women's sexual and social agency. However, Bania women are not victims of endogamy, but rather active participants who benefit from endogamous marriages. In order to understand how they benefit from endogamous marriages, it is crucial to take a look at how Bania women participate in the social structure of dating and marriage.

One way to understand how Bania women reinforce caste and benefit from it is to analyse how they make choices in selecting partners. The respondents state that their requirement for the person they date or marry is that he has to be a 'good' or 'proper' guy. When probed further about what it means to be 'a good or proper guy', Bania women say that they look for certain 'red flags' in their potential partner before taking the decision on whether to be in a relationship with them or not.

All this depends on whether my parents like the guy or not. Just because I like him does not mean they will. And I have accepted that. I told them that I believe that you have raised me in a way that I have that sense that I won't just date any guy. If I am having a serious relationship, it will be with a proper, good guy and there are no obvious red flags. Especially really bad ones, to which they will say 'no, what is this, this is not allowed'.
(Maya, personal communication, February 27, 2021)

Some things can be avoided from the start. Certain red flags you get to know and then you can avoid it as these things might be an issue. (Priya, personal communication, May 11, 2021)

The 'red flags' that Bania women refer to are influenced by social structures, predominantly one's caste status in society. Respondents state that caste becomes a red flag when their partners don't belong to the same caste group as they do. Bania women claim that they can not be in a romantic or sexual relationship with someone from a different caste due to the differences in caste customs. For instance, a difference in diets and rituals would be a major reason for Bania women to refuse to date people of other castes. Respondents say that these differences contribute to the need for adjustments and compromises on personal, social, and financial levels. As Bania women refuse to adjust or compromise any needs, they conclude that inter-caste marriages are not compatible. In this way, Bania women reinforce caste in their everyday interactions in dating and marital relations.

I can not be with someone from a different caste, there will be no compatibility. Their ways are different, our ways are different. You will not be able to adjust in their homes. You will have to wear whatever they say in everything. Their rituals are different, ours are different. Their diet is different from ours. I am purely vegetarian. Baniyas are purely vegetarian. Their diet is different, they are non vegetarians. So how will you adjust in their home? Because you can't even bear the smell of fish, how will you cook it for them? This is correct. I agree with them. I can't even see a fish, and can't bear its smell, and other non veg dishes too, including egg. Then how will I cook it for them? (Shreya, personal communication, June 11, 2021)

I was really scared that how do people do inter-caste marriages? You should stay within your community because you are used to the things that your generation and your caste. (Janvi, personal communication, March 10, 2021)

We all know that our parents' mindset and our mindset is not going to be the same regarding our personal future. So sometimes they say some stereotypical things that you don't believe at first. You think that it is nonsense, who considers this? But then when you actually think about it, you realise that oh my god you are glad you considered this. So how I am and how my family is socially, on a personal level, financially, that should match. The difference should not be a lot. Because then it is difficult to reach a middle ground. Either I have to compromise, or there will be some compromise on the guy's part, which might lead to arguments or issues which can be avoided beforehand, before I get seriously involved with the guy. I should get to know him overall, not just him personally but everything about him. (Tanvi, personal communication, March 13)

In the Bania community, the marital goal is not just marriage, but marriage to an appropriate, caste-specific boy, who is usually factored into the family business. Marital relationships in Bania families are dictated by rigidity of castes, as well as an additional framework of calculating business compatibility between families. Families will often account for the business succession, transition, and strategic plan, while factoring in capital resources and personnel that will be brought in by a favourable marital association. The respondents suggested that the lifestyle of their potential partner would be a 'red flag' if it was not at least at the level of their family's lifestyle. 'Lifestyle' according to Bania women includes the size of their partner's house, living conditions, and financial status. Anything that did not match up to the 'level' of their lifestyle, was seen as a red flag by the respondents.

Right now I am here in my room. I have the whole room for myself. If i am living with my husband or partner in the room, then if the room -- how do i say it-- space is less, or if

it is cramped up, or if there are more people living in the house, it will feel crowded. So that is a red flag. (Shreya, personal communication, June 11, 2021)

We are living in a place, in a way, where the facilities that I have been provided with since birth and which we are getting now, everything we are getting, the way I live, in the future if I was to live with someone in a way that is a little less than what I currently have, in terms of the living conditions, then if it is not like ours, I will have to adjust. So it's very important to keep that in mind. If their family is better off than ours then well and good. But if it is less than ours, then I will have to adjust. (Tanvi, personal communication, March 13)

When you grow up you will be earning your money and if you are living with someone, it is obvious that you will divide your expenses. So it would not- how do i frame it- it will be better if your husband or boyfriend is also earning on the same level at least. If there is some difference then that's ok, but not a huge difference. Because you are going to divide the expenses, and if there is a huge difference then money can be the cause of a lot of arguments. This is a fact that we know. So this can be avoided from the start. Certain red flags you get to know. That these things might be an issue. (Ria, personal communication, April 25, 2021)

In addition to creating a system of red flags to separate 'proper men' from lower caste men in the process of selecting a partner, Bania women maintain endogamy by actively participating in intra-caste matchmaking within the Bania community. For instance, the community has special marital magazines which are created by Banias for matching potential Bania partners. Young Bania men and women send their personal information to

the magazine organizers, who then publish their pictures with their personal information in the magazine. Then, Bania women and their families look through the booklet and seek an appropriate Bania man.

A similar event that Bania women participate in is a socializing event known as ‘Parichay Sammelan’ [Introductory Meet]. Respondents speak about attending these marital matchmaking events that are organized by the Bania community to introduce young Bania men and women to one another and to promote endogamy. While Bania women believe that they have the freedom of making choices between the men they choose in the magazines and the events, their active participation in these events is crucial in maintaining endogamy and reinforcing caste.

If you know, there is a magazine (patrika) in our community and we match that and then get married. My family said that we should get her details printed in the magazine. She is 24 now. (Priya, personal communication, May 11, 2021)

One time, my mother secretly got my details printed in the patrika and it got matched with someone else. They said that the man’s package is very good. It was a 17 lakh package, and they wanted to initiate conversations. (Rishika, personal communication, February 28)

Some small towns also have something called the 'parichay sammelan' (meet and greet), where boys and girls come and meet and give an introduction. So my family wanted to

take me there. We even got a proposal from there. (Tanvi, personal communication, March 13)

In addition to the red flags that arise from the caste location of the partner, Bania women claim that outside of caste, their decision to date or marry someone also depends on the financial status, race, and religion of the individual. Bania women's perpetuation of caste based discrimination coincides with their degrading opinions on relationships with people of a different class, race and religion. Additionally, respondents refuse to date or marry people with disabilities.

It's the same thing with Muslims, I comparatively have more knowledge on them because we have been told explicitly to not socialise with them. But there will be riots in my family if I actually socialise with Muslims. I have socialised with one or two Muslim people only. I found them to be normal. They say that everything is normal only till the time it is going ok. Once you get married that's when shit starts. Then they are very into their religion. So any issue related to religion, muslim-hindu lifestyles contrast largely, that's when the issue starts. (Shreya, personal communication, June 11, 2021)

I haven't personally socialised with diversified people. Dalit, I am not sure. Because at home we never speak of Dalits. I still don't know whether my family is for or against them. Muslims we know they are strictly against. But Dalits we never speak about. (Maya, personal communication, March 11, 2021)

Disabled....I cannot actually. I am actually feeling bad because disabled is a completely different thing, it comes with its own challenges. If there is a situation where I have to take care of the person, then it would be a situation I would not like to find myself in. I

would try not to end up in that. People say that love is not everything, you have to pay attention to other things, you can't just be blind. So I feel this is one of the things. My family, I don't think they will be ok with it either. If it is a normal thing like the hand is not working then it is fine. But if they can't walk, or if they are paralysed, or something, then that would be a big issue. (Janvi, personal communication, May 8, 2021)

In brief, Bania women's preferences in selecting potential partners ultimately depends on the caste of the individual. Bania women themselves benefit from dating or marrying Bania men of similar class status. This not only allows them to continue living the luxurious lifestyle they have had growing up, but also privileges their social position in society as they remain wealthy upper caste women. Further, this privilege comes with exclusionary views about diverse populations who are often marginalized in society, such as racist views against marrying black or arab people, islamophobic opinions regarding marrying muslims, and the downright inconsideration and inability to imagine the possibility of being married to a disabled person. In these ways, Bania women maintain endogamy, reinforce caste in their choices of selecting a partner, and continue to remain an insular, exclusionary and elite community.

3. Reinforcing Caste Boundaries in Interactions with Lower Castes

The everyday life of Bania women is highly dependent on the labor of lower caste people. Lower caste people have been systematically forced into certain occupations that are seen as 'dirty' by upper caste people. Some of the labor that lower caste groups provide as a result of this enforcement is in the form of domestic work and sanitation work including sweeping streets, manually segregating excrements, and cleaning toilets in upper caste homes. In Bania households, the everyday interactions that Bania women have with lower caste people are limited to their

consumption of lower caste labor. While they exploit lower caste labor, Bania women also invisibilize them as people. Not only do the respondents show repulsiveness and disgust towards taking up an occupation such as manual scavenging or street sweeping, which are occupations historically relegated to lower caste groups, but they also refuse to date, or marry someone working as a street sweeper or manual scavenger due to the stigma around the occupation. The stigma against lower castes that is perpetuated by upper castes is used by Bania women as a mechanism to avoid building any social relations with the lower castes. Hence, by attributing lower caste specific occupation to be 'red flags', Bania women refuse to see lower caste people as potential partners. In this way, Bania women reinforce caste in avoiding social interactions with lower caste people.

Occupation wise, I'm so sorry but no (embarrassingly giggles). Seeing specifically the occupation and the profession, I would not date a street sweeper. (Janvi, personal communication, May 8, 2021)

The main problem is the occupation. The stigma that is associated with it. My family will say why did you even get involved in something like this. You should have thought better. We are taught that we should not get involved with Muslims, and they say that there must be good muslims, we are not saying that there are no good muslims, but why are you taking a chance, why are you getting involved? You could have simply avoided this. Similarly in the case of manual scavengers. So the main problem will be the occupation. (Ria, personal communication, April 25, 2021)

If we speak about manual scavenging, the job description and what they are supposed to do, because it has never been seen as a good profession since the beginning, so it has

always been at the bottom of the hierarchy in all the generations. Due to which hardly there are people or elders who will think it is ok. And we have to respect the elders.
(Shreya, personal communication, June 11, 2021)

In addition to their disgust for occupations that lower caste people are forced into, Bania women claim to actively avoid social interactions with lower caste people due to the difference in their lifestyles. Young Bania women who are currently unemployed students claim the difference between the salary earned by a manual scavenger or a street sweeper, as compared to their own potential future salary, as one of the reasons. Respondents also mention education to be one factor influencing their status. While it is the Bania community's accumulation of capital and their caste privilege that allows Bania women access to top tier private education, Bania women play the role of reinforcing their upper caste status by excluding people of lower class status and caste privilege from their social circles. Additionally, Bania women state that they do not consider the personality of lower caste people when they look for partners as their consideration of lifestyle comes first. As Bania women want to maintain their caste privilege, they refuse to adjust and live a lifestyle that lower caste people are forced to live. In their limited interactions with lower caste people, Bania women reinforce casteism by refusing to see lower caste people as humans worth socialising with.

Because I feel that our lifestyles won't match. Personality is second to the matter. First of all, 99 percent of our lifestyle won't match. Personality is a very far away thought. Because lifestyle becomes the first thing we pay attention to because when we hear the words street sweeper, the first difference that comes to my mind is that of lifestyle.
(Rishika, personal communication, February 28)

See if he is a sweeper, the salary or how much ever he is earning wont match. Right now I'm educated, if I do end up going abroad for studies I will be earning good. So that wont match. There will be a huge difference in that. (Maya, personal communication, March 11, 2021)

In order to maintain caste homogeneity, the Bania family trains Bania women not to be romantically or sexually involved with a lower caste individual. Bania women accept this caste conditioning as they dont want to be 'disrespectful' of their elders. This is another unique caste training particular to the Bania community, where Bania parents teach their children that they must always respect their elders. However, respecting elders implies respecting their beliefs. As Bania children are trained to respect their elders, Bania women are innately expected to respect Bania men.

Despite this patriarchal expectation, Bania women grow up learning this caste training and accept it as it ultimately benefits their caste privilege. Hence, Bania women's interaction with lower caste people is restricted not only by familial caste training and status norms expected by upper caste society, but also by Bania women's conscious and active decision to reinforce caste homogeneity.

I feel that if my parents' views were not drilled in my mind, both the good and bad, then my outlook on life would be very different. Now that I am thinking about a manual scavenger, all those things drilled in my mind are going on in the back of my mind. So I am thinking, what will people think? Since childhood it has been drilled in my mind that however you are, you have to make sure that you have a life like that in the future. You should not compromise on anything. Since childhood we have been taught not to disobey our parents. So it's not a normal situation that we disobey our parents and do what we

want to. At least not for me. So I feel that it will be an issue. I will never just be fine with it. (Priya, personal communication, May 11, 2021)

Right now even if he is in a better position, i think my family will mind because if they have to tell someone about me, or if i am getting engaged to him, they will have to tell other people. And because families are so big, they all come to know from somewhere that yes he was a manual scavenger and she knows him from here. So it is very easy to get to know the small details about any person's life. When other people ask, people outside, extended relatives, the society, then that's an issue. Because we have to see what the boy is doing and if it is ok, and also what the family does, what the family scenario is? People pay a lot of attention to it. But that's how our society works. (Rishika, personal communication, February 28)

Bania women's reinforcement of caste in their social interactions with lower caste people can be further explored by looking at their personal role in handling their own waste. Cleaning waste is an occupation that is inherently enforced upon lower caste groups. While Bania women use lower caste labor for cleaning waste produced by their upper caste homes, they express extreme discomfort in handling any one else's waste. Respondents claim to never contribute to handling their personal waste, much less that of other people in their social lives.

I feel, unless it is like a rule where every person has to do it for a week, and if it is something that everyone is doing and it is equally divided as chores, then I may be fine with it. But if only I had to do it, then I would not be alright with it. Because I would not want someone else to handle my waste. Suppose it is my waste, then I would not be comfortable if someone other than me is taking care of it. So if I wouldn't want someone

other than me to take care of my waste, I would definitely not want to reciprocate. I am hoping-- now I feel guilty, because you mentioned that someone else must be handling my waste and I am thinking.... Shit. (Ria, personal communication, April 25, 2021)

Bania women refuse to socially interact with lower caste people. However, it is crucial to note that not only have Bania women never surrounded themselves in a shared social space with lower caste people where such interactions can take place, but they continue to reinforce caste homogeneity by excluding lower caste people from their privileged social spaces. For instance, right from school years, Bania women are sent to private educational institutes that are predominantly Bania owned. This means that a majority of their peers are also from their community. The only diversion can be found in peers from other upper caste groups. Growing up, Bania women refuse to date anyone outside their caste status. This means that their social interactions in romantic and sexual desires are also limited to men from the same caste group. As they grow up internalizing the casteism enforced by the community, they become active participants and beneficiaries of the caste system.

Not only do Bania women never interact with lower caste people in their social lives, but some respondents also claim to never have had a 'small talk' longer than 15 minutes with someone from the lower caste.

I genuinely won't be ok with it. Actually, it might pose a problem. I think the reason being that I have never been around people who do manual scavenging so I am not used to it. For example something that you are used to since childhood, then in the future it happens, you won't notice a difference because you have seen it your whole life. But I have never seen manual scavenging.

So I have no experience with it. So I am sure it will be like “oh my god”-- shocked. So I feel like there is a really high chance that it might be something which I would not be able to adjust with or to be able to accept. (Maya, personal communication, March 11, 2021)

To be honest, I have not been around such people in my life. I cannot easily imagine what I would go through if I was with someone like that. It is not something that is a decision that I can make immediately. I can not say yes or no and do it. And 80 percent it will not end up working out for all practical reasons. When my family finds out I am involved with this person, they will tell me why are you falling into this problem, and find someone better. I get it that he is a nice guy and all, but just try, find someone better. Parents want the best for their kids. (Janvi, personal communication, March 20, 2021)

Personally, I do not know anything about the issue going on with dalits. I don't know about it in depth because in my family this is never discussed, nor have I been taught about it in school. And I was never inclined towards learning about it more. See i have never come into contact with a dalit person yet so i dont know what the main issue is. (Ria, personal communication, April 25, 2021)

My dad has had an office for many years so I have been to the office many times and sometimes I have small talks with the sweepers there. That is never an issue. Normal small talk is never the issue. But I have never been in a situation where I have had a proper 10-15 min conversation where it is something more than small talk. (Shreya, personal communication, June 11, 2021)

Bania women's investment in the caste system can be visibilized by analysing their interactions with lower caste people. As seen earlier, Bania women follow casteist acts of separating in food

and dining, as well as perpetuate endogamy by selecting partners from the same caste as theirs. While the everyday life of a Bania woman is highly dependent on lower caste people, their everyday interactions are restricted to consuming the labor of lower castes while they actively invisibilizing them as humans. When asked whether they would eat with, date, marry, socialise with, or take up the occupation of lower caste people whose labor they rely on everyday, Bania women outrightly refuse to do so.

Conclusion

As Bania women show disgust towards meat eaters, they reinforce caste by excluding lower caste people who eat meat from their social interactions. They perpetuate ideals of purity not only through food practices, but also through the practice of endogamy. Bania women do not consider lower caste people in their spheres of dating or marital relations. In romantic and sexual interactions too, Bania women reinforce caste homogeneity. Finally, Bania women are seen reinforcing caste in their interactions with lower caste people. While Bania women consume and exploit lower caste labor, they avoid any form of social interaction with people who they employ to clean their houses, toilets, streets, and even their excreta. In these ways, Bania women are active participants of the Bania community who benefit from the caste system as they reinforce caste in their everyday social interactions.

In the context of the above mentioned findings, it is important to discuss the implications of positionality in the Gender-Caste discourse. While upper caste feminist scholars have taken the liberty to reframe the struggles of the lower caste women for generations now, what is missing from the is commentary by upper caste women on the structural violence and complicity of their

own social systems in perpetuating caste-gender violence upon lower caste women. The major need for gender studies in India and South Asia at large, is to De-Brahminize its epistemology, and to flip the 'upper caste academic gaze'. One way in which upper-caste feminists can contribute significantly to the Gender-Caste intersectionality, without appropriating the lower caste discourse is to focus on critical issues within their own caste groups. What remains understudied is the role of upper caste communities in maintaining casteism and upper caste women's allyship in caste-gender violence upon lower caste women. The scope of such research is to create more studies among upper caste communities to build a scholarship that sheds light on accountability and scrutiny of upper caste women and contribute to the opening up of the larger feminist movement in India towards more diversity and true intersectional solidarity.

References

- Ambedkar, B. R. (2014a). *Annihilation of caste*. Ssoft Group, INDIA.
- Ambedkar, B. R. (2014b). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, writings and speeches VOL 1* (2nd ed.). Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.
https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf
- Ambedkar, B. R. (2014c). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, writing and speeches VOL 3* (2nd ed.). Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.
https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_03.pdf
- Ambedkar, B. R. (2017). *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Ambedkar, B. R. (2020). *Beef, brahmins and broken men: An annotated critical selection from the untouchables : who were and why they became untouchables?* Columbia University Press.
- Ambedkar, D. B. (2016). *Castes in India: Their mechanism, Genesis and development*. Ssoft Group, INDIA.
- Azad, A. K. (2014). *Casteless kitchens of casteist households*. Round Table India.
https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7879:pragmatics-of-caste&catid=129:events-and-activism&Itemid=195
- Chakravarti, U. (2018). *Gendering caste: Through a feminist lens*. Sage Publications Pvt.
- Dubey, S. Y., & Murphy, J. W. (2020). Manual scavenging in Mumbai: The systems of

oppression. *Humanity & Society*, 016059762096476.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597620964760>

Gibson, D. R. (2014). Enduring Illusions: The Social Organization of Secrecy and Deception. *Sociological Theory*, 32(4), 283-306.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275114558631>

Graeber, D. (2012). *Debt: The first 5,000 years*. Melville House Publishing.

Human Rights Watch. (2007). *Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India's "Untouchables"*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/02/12/hidden-apartheid/caste-discrimination-against-indias-untouchables>

Ilaiah, K. (2009). *Post-Hindu India: A discourse in dalit-bahujan, socio-spiritual and scientific revolution*. SAGE Publishing India.

Kuffir. (2020). *How the brahmin beat Corona*. Round Table India.

https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9853:how-the-brahmin-beat-corona&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132

Patel, A. (2009, August 28). *When will the brahmin-bania hegemony end?* mint.

<https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/3u2QUPuXBEFPaBQXU2R8mJ/When-will-the-BrahminBania-hegemony-end.html>

Sathyamala, C. (2018). Meat-eating in India: Whose food, whose politics, and whose rights? *Policy Futures in Education*, 17(7), 878-891.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318780553>

Shah, N. (2020, May 3). *The right to pee: The gender and caste privileges of urination*.

Feminism In India.

<https://feminisminindia.com/2020/04/10/right-to-pee-gender-caste-privileges-urination/>

Shah, N., & Kisana, R. (2020, November 22). *Wanted: A bania-feminist consciousness for true emancipation*. Feminism In India.

<https://feminisminindia.com/2020/11/23/bania-caste-feminism-india/>

Shah, N., & Kisana, R. (2021). “Even if I die I won’t get a holiday”: Daily indignities and vulnerabilities of women domestic workers in Pune, India. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 27(2), 295-311.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2021.1932114>

Singhal, H. (2020, October 27). *How the Manusmriti, and not the Vedas, informs us about impurity of menstruation*. Youth Ki Awaaz.

<https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2020/10/tantric-rituals-consider-menstrual-blood-as-pure-and-sacred/>

Sowjanya, T. (2017). *Why are the debates on menstrual taboo one-sided?* Round Table India.

https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9187:why-are-the-debates-on-menstrual-taboo-one-sided&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132