

with race. Theories of the intersection of caste and gender are marked by debates on patriarchy, similar to theories of race and gender. Similarities include the gendered nature of subjugation that marks both caste and racial hierarchies, with the sexual use and abuse of women important tools of oppression (Béteille 1992). However, the complex intersection of caste and gender, marked by colonial discourses that redefined caste and gender relations, posed further complexities to the expression of difference. While low caste groups and federations demanded an equal treatment of their oppression on the lines of racism, lower caste women paradoxically defined their oppression as three fold, as women against men of their own caste, as Dalit women against men of higher castes and as poor women carrying out often difficult, low paid and inferior work (Kannabiran 2006; Rao 2003). While feminists have also demanded for the recognition of caste as a racial issue, their demands are specific to the double hierarchies and patriarchies suffered by lower caste women who have much in common with black American women (Kannabiran 2006; Bandhu 2003). Despite the fact that historically Dalit activists were the forerunners in critiquing gender based hierarchies, Dalit women's claim to a different voice based on their marginalisation within the larger Dalit movements as also in subaltern studies (Guru 1995) brought the critique of gender a full circle with critical reflections focussed on patriarchal structures and forms of organisation.

This call for a different voice was framed not only in the context of their lower caste identity but also their identity as women, thus challenging the homogenisation of women's issues, and challenging the direction in which mainstream Indian feminism had advanced. Much like the double exclusion experienced by black feminists in the United States, Dalit women's issues were contextualised in terms of their relations with men of their own caste, with refrain in dealing with issues of caste and thence oppression by men of higher castes. Further reflections on the hierarchy of "women's interests" also reveal the colonial influence on the project to reform gender relations, with privileged sites of legal and social reform often serving to benefit women of higher castes, while in some cases constraining low caste women (Sen 2000).

Contemporary feminist issues in India

Post independence, with the emergence of a new creamy layer from amongst the lower caste groups, a new identity based on class was argued as a site for reform, calling for affirmative action. The "Other Backward Classes" while technically defined as a "new" group, include those lower caste groups who were denied affirmative action on changing religion (for example Dalits who had converted to Muslims) as also lower classes of Muslims, who not only form India's largest minority but also form a major part of its poor. Thus class became a site of reform, with several groups demanding reservations in different sectors. While the battle continues with intense resistance from dominant Hindu groups, the issues of class and caste continue to profoundly influence feminist and gender studies in India. While work exists on the specificity of the challenges faced by, and the spirit of resistance displayed by poor Dalit women (Omvedt 1980), there is lesser work on the discourses that define the position of the poor Muslim woman in India that goes beyond the realm of personal law reform.

While issues of caste and class have been well identified and treated either as an issue of caste and gender or that of class and gender, there is little work that identifies an intersection that spans these three identities. In the particular context of political representation and reform, a theorisation of the specific position of women who experience these identities at the same time is important to an understanding of contemporary feminism in India. This poses specific challenges in the construction of self for poor and marginalized women. When possessing more than one identity, and assuming that "we" is constituted on the basis of suffering (Connolly 1996), which "we" becomes more important than the others? (Kannabiran 2006). While Kannabiran speaks of a response to the suffering that constitutes "we", the question I ask here is what happens when there are several "wes" in conflict? While feminists point to the intersectionality of identities that forge a collective women's identity that is based not only on gender but their specific gendered oppression in the context of the violence of the caste system (Kannabiran 2006, 67-68), the question that this work seeks to answer takes this one step ahead to the added issue of class.

While the "we" is formulated on the basis of collective suffering, there are differences of interests within the "we", with different classes

forming the “we” and therefore suffering on identical grounds, but suffering differently. This is crucial to understanding the channels that allow women equal access, equal as in equitable and not the liberal connotation of equality amongst equals, whereby all women can aspire to what is rightfully theirs. If class is the dominant factor that defines access, it will allow us to question the affirmative action based on caste, because clearly belonging to a lower caste does not always imply lower class, and in such cases caste becomes a useful instrument at the disposal of local elites.

The relevance of the political project

In response to the low socio economic status of women in India, political quotas were introduced for women at the local governance level in the 1980s reserving 33% of seats at the municipality and *panchayat* level for women. While this reservation was rather easily carried out, the difference amongst women, particularly that of class has prevented a similar reservation at the regional assembly and national parliament levels. Amongst the 33% seats reserved for women, a certain percentage is sub reserved for women from Scheduled Castes and Tribes (listed in the Indian Constitution as entitled for affirmative action). However Other Backward Classes (OBCs)¹, despite having low socio economic status, have no similar reservation within the women’s quota at the national level. While regional governments (state governments) may legislate to provide reservations to OBCs this is not mandatory under the Indian Constitution. As OBCs include low class Muslim groups as also lower caste Hindus who do not find place in the SC/ST lists, women from these groups are not entitled to affirmative action (unless provided for by state governments). However caste/religion and class do not always coincide and while there is work that identifies a “creamy layer” within groups that are entitled to affirmative action, there has been little work to analyse this issue in the context of the women’s quota at the local governance level in India.

¹ While the Indian Constitution has since long provided for reservation for SCs & STs in state employment, civil services, political posts, education (private and public), etc., a similar reservation has only recently been provided for OBCs but only for education. Thus in effect while the women’s quota is sub-reserved providing for SC and ST women, the same is not true of OBCs.

Women's political participation at the local governance level has been hailed as a success in India, with most Indian states having at least 33% women in local councils and some states having far greater numbers of women, such as Karnataka whose councils have 43% women councillors. However studies conducted of women councillors in different parts of the country reveal particularly low numbers of women from minority and low caste communities (Tawa Lama-Rewal 2001; Sooryamurthy 2000; Arora and Prabhakar 1997), with no representation of OBCs. The question of caste and class thus result in their own dynamics, resulting in the exclusion of some groups of women from political processes. Thus political engagement and mobilisation forms a fertile ground for analysing the manner in which women from different groups interact, strategise and ally in the political project of representing interests that are at times common to them as women and at times contradictory in the context of the differences of caste and class amongst them. The main questions asked are:

1. How does caste and class influence political commitment of poor and low caste women in India?
2. Which links can be established between the gendered organisation of society (both practical and symbolic organisation) and the forms of mobilisation amongst women?
3. To what extent are their agendas and initiatives dependent on gender?
4. Do gendered roles and sexual division of labour pose constraints or to the contrary advantages in their mobilisation (formal and informal) and the construction of their political identity as women?
5. How are gendered roles influenced by their political commitment?
6. How do caste and class structure the interactions between women and between women and men both within groups and between different groups?

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La crítica postcolonial desde el feminismo antirracista

Ochy Curiel

Antes que todo quiero agradecer la invitación a este importante Coloquio. Creo que es importante porque cualquier espacio que nos permita reflexionar, debatir, analizar nuestros feminismos articulando la práctica política con la teoría, pensadas estas desde lo local y lo global, apuntando a solidaridades transnacionales, es altamente positivo.

Quisiera expresar desde cuál posición les voy a hablar. Nací en un país del Caribe, lo cual define una genealogía cultural y política marcada por procesos de colonización, pero fundamentalmente por muchos procesos de resistencias y transformaciones que definitivamente sellan parte de lo que soy y de lo que pienso.

Mi marco teórico/político es el feminismo, pero no cualquier feminismo. Se trata de un feminismo lésbico, antirracista y anticapitalista que mezcla teoría y práctica, que retoma aportes de distintas disciplinas de las ciencias sociales, del arte y la literatura, de las experiencias de distintas mujeres de diversas zonas geográficas, un feminismo internacionalista que se propone derrumbar las fronteras, sean estas metáforas o realidades, imaginadas o construidas.

Toda esta visión marca entonces mi posición como activista del movimiento feminista, del movimiento lésbico feminista, del movimiento de mujeres antirracista y del movimiento antimilitarista, y también mi posición como académica en la Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Mi ponencia tratará de la crítica postcolonial desde el feminismo antirracista y destaco fundamentalmente los aportes de feministas afrodescendientes, de las chicanas y en menor medida de las indígenas