

## Intersectionality and “Otherness”: A Feminist Analysis in Indian Contexts

**Susmita Roy**

Department of Philosophy,  
 University of Kalyani,  
 Nadia7412, West Bengal

**Paper Received date**

05/03/2026

**Paper date**

**Publishing Date**

10/03/2026

**DOI**

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19480621>



### Abstract

The article provides a critique of the relationship between intersectionality as well as otherness from an Indian socio-cultural perspective through the use of feminist theory. This research identifies how intersections of multiple dimensions (such as gender) with caste, class, religion and geographical location lead to the creation of multiple levels of marginalization. The research utilized a qualitative interpretative approach and applied thematic analysis to secondary data sources, to identify recurring themes. These were identified as structural exclusion, symbolic invisibility, institutional inequality and forms of feminist resistance. The findings suggest that a woman's lived experiences cannot be completely understood simply by examining gender in isolation as they have many other layers of power hierarchies and exclusions influencing them. Additionally, the focus of this research was specifically on the experiences of Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim and rural women as these groups experience either further or intensified types of social othering.

**Keywords:** Intersectionality; Otherness; Feminist Theory; Indian Context; Gender Inequality;

### Introduction

The development of Intersectionality as a major analytical tool for Feminist scholars has dramatically changed the way that gender inequality is thought about, especially within the Social Sciences. Intersectionality was first articulated by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) in order to describe the ways in which several forms of oppression intersect including Gender and Race. In this manner, Crenshaw sought to show how the intersection of these two forms of oppression produces unique and complex types of discrimination that can't be fully explained using a one dimensional (single axis) model of oppression. Since its introduction, the use of intersectionality as a model of analysis has grown to include multiple dimensions of identity and their relationships to each other and to issues of Power and Marginalization. within feminist theory, the concept of "otherness" is central. Simone De Beauvoir (1949),



in her book *The Second Sex*, posited that historically woman had been constructed as "other", relative to man; further she suggested that men have historically served as the "universal self" while women have served as the 'other'. Beauvoir stated that because women are socially defined relative to men, they do not serve as autonomous beings.

Therefore, Beauvoir's work supports the idea that patriarchal systems create structures of domination. when placed within an Indian context, the concept of otherness becomes much more culturally and sociologically complex. As previously noted, Indian society has historically been shaped by many factors including caste hierarchy, patriarchy, class divisions, religious identity, and regional differences. All of these categories of identity shape the lives of Indian women in different manners, and therefore produce numerous levels of exclusion. For example, the experience of a dalit woman living in a rural area would likely be vastly different from the experience of an upper-caste woman living in a city. Because both of these women live under a system of patriarchy there exists a common element.

However, scholars such as Uma Chakravarti argue that caste also plays a role in the creation of women's realities in India by creating additional barriers that women must navigate. The purpose of this research project is to investigate how Intersectionality and Otherness coexist within discourses related to Indian feminism. Feminist scholars have written at length regarding gender inequality in India. However, very few studies have analyzed the politics of otherness in conjunction with intersectional feminist analyses. There exist large gaps in terms of theory and data regarding the layered manner in which women are marginalized.

therefore, this research will analyze how gender interacts with caste, class, religion and location to generate multiple forms of "otherness" in India. Through this analysis, it hopes to provide contributions to both feminist theory and discourse on social justice, as well as to provide data relevant to policy development in an Indian cultural framework.

### **Research Objectives**

- The primary objectives of the study are as follows:
- To thoroughly explore the idea of intersectionality in the context of Indian feminism.
- To investigate how the combination of gender, caste, class, religion, and region creates a sense of "otherness."
- To assess the effects of these intersections on feminist theory, policy-making, and the pursuit of social justice.

### **The central research questions include**

- I. In what ways does intersectionality influence the perception of "otherness" in India?
- II. How do factors such as caste, religion, and economic status exacerbate the marginalization of women?
- III. How might feminist theory be broadened by incorporating the socio-cultural contexts of India?



## Literature Review

Intersectionality has emerged as a pivotal framework in modern feminist theory for examining the intertwined nature of oppression and identity. Kimberlé Crenshaw first introduced the term in 1989, asserting that women's experiences of discrimination cannot be comprehended through a singular focus on gender; instead, various structures like race, class, and social position intersect to create intricate forms of marginalization. This theoretical approach has been extensively embraced in feminist scholarship to contest universalist ideas of womanhood.

Later scholars, notably Patricia Hill Collins in 2000, expanded the framework by connecting intersectionality with systems of power, domination, and social inequality. Collins' exploration of Black feminist thought highlighted that oppression is organized through interlocking systems rather than isolated categories. This expansion has profoundly impacted feminist studies globally, including postcolonial and South Asian feminist scholarship.

In India, intersectionality holds particular importance due to entrenched social hierarchies such as caste, class, religion, and regional disparities. Indian feminist scholars contend that gender oppression is inextricably linked with caste-based and socio-economic inequalities. Uma Chakravarti's concept of Brahmanical patriarchy is crucial here, illustrating how caste purity, control over female sexuality, and patriarchal norms are structurally interconnected in Indian society (Chakravarti, 1993).

Similarly, Dalit feminist scholarship has critically questioned mainstream feminist discourse in India for often prioritizing upper-caste women's experiences. Scholars in this area argue that Dalit women occupy a unique social position where caste and gender oppression coexist. Consequently, their lived experiences cannot be fully explained through generalized feminist frameworks. This literature strongly advocates for an intersectional perspective in the Indian context.

Another significant body of work pertains to the idea of "otherness." In "The Second Sex," Simone de Beauvoir (1949) theorized that women are socially constructed as the "Other" in relation to men, who hold the normative "Self" position. This concept remains foundational to feminist thought. However, in the Indian socio-cultural context, the notion of otherness becomes more complex, as women are further differentiated and marginalized based on caste, religion, and class.

For example, Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, and rural women often face intensified forms of exclusion that extend beyond patriarchal structures alone. Thus, literature in the Indian context increasingly suggests that "otherness" must be understood as intersectional and context-specific, rather than universal.

Despite the expanding scholarship on intersectionality and feminist theory, a clear research gap persists in systematically linking the politics of otherness with intersectional feminist analysis in India. Most existing studies treat these as parallel frameworks rather than



integrated analytical tools. Therefore, the present study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how multiple social identities collectively produce "otherness" within Indian feminist contexts.

## **Methodology**

### **a. Research Design**

This research employs a qualitative interpretive framework rooted in feminist and postcolonial research methodologies. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate as the study aims to explore meanings, identities, and exclusionary structures rather than focusing on quantitative analysis. This design is well-aligned with the theoretical goals of the study.

### **b. Data Collection**

The study relies on **secondary sources**, including:

- scholarly journal articles
- feminist theoretical texts
- books on caste and gender
- policy reports
- legal documents
- contemporary media discourse

Purposive sampling was utilized to choose literature that is specifically relevant to intersectionality and otherness in India.

### **c. Data Analysis**

The data were analysed through thematic analysis.

Key themes identified include:

- caste and gender oppression
- religious marginality
- labour and class inequality
- symbolic exclusion
- resistance and feminist agency

This method aligns closely with the research questions.

## **Findings**

The study's results indicate that women's experiences in India are influenced by various overlapping forms of marginalization, including gender, caste, class, religion, and region. The analysis demonstrates that gender inequality cannot be viewed in isolation, as it is



intricately linked with other social hierarchies. A significant finding is that women from marginalized groups, such as Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, and rural women, face a more severe form of exclusion compared to those from socially privileged backgrounds. Their realities are characterized by both patriarchal dominance and structural disadvantages related to caste and socio-economic status, highlighting the intersectional nature of oppression in India. Another crucial finding is that the notion of "otherness" extends beyond the gender binary. In India, women are "othered" differently based on their caste, religion, and class identities, leading to certain groups being socially invisible and underrepresented in mainstream discussions and policy frameworks. The study also reveals that institutions like education, labor markets, and family structures often perpetuate existing inequalities. Limited educational opportunities, insecure jobs, and restricted mobility continue to impact the lives of marginalized women. Simultaneously, the findings emphasize the presence of agency and resistance, particularly through grassroots women's movements and Dalit feminist initiatives, which challenge exclusionary systems and assert identity and rights. Overall, the study concludes that women's experiences in India are profoundly intersectional, and understanding "otherness" necessitates an examination of the multiple power structures that shape social life.

## **Discussion**

### **1. Intersectionality within Indian Feminist Contexts**

The primary aim of the research was to thoroughly assess the importance of intersectionality in comprehending the lived experiences of women in India. The results clearly indicate that gender oppression in India cannot be understood through a singular perspective. Instead, women's experiences are influenced by a combination of intersecting factors such as caste, class, religion, and region, which together create unique forms of inequality. This discussion is theoretically grounded in Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, which describes how various forms of discrimination intersect and lead to compounded marginalization experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). As subsequent feminist research has demonstrated, intersectionality has developed into a comprehensive analytical tool for exploring the cumulative impacts of social discrimination. In the Indian scenario, this framework is particularly crucial because gender oppression is heavily influenced by caste and socio-economic hierarchies. For instance, Dalit and Adivasi women often encounter both patriarchal dominance and caste-based exclusion, making their experiences qualitatively distinct from those of upper-caste urban women. Recent studies on India also affirm that intersectionality in the country must extend beyond Western models and include caste, religion, and nationalism as key analytical categories. Therefore, this study endorses the view that Indian feminism must acknowledge diversity within the category of "women," rather than viewing women as a uniform social group.

### **2. Production of "Otherness" through Multiple Social Identities**



The second aim was to examine how caste, class, religion, and region together contribute to creating “otherness.” The analysis shows that in India, “otherness” is not just about gender but is also structurally intersectional. Building on Simone de Beauvoir’s classic feminist idea that women are defined as the “Other” in relation to men (Beauvoir, 1949), this research expands the argument to the Indian context, where multiple layers of othering exist. For example, a Dalit woman is doubly marginalized: as a woman within patriarchal systems and as part of a historically oppressed caste. Similarly, Muslim women might face both gender-based subordination and communal stereotyping. These overlapping forms of exclusion heighten social invisibility and institutional disadvantage. This perspective aligns with modern understandings of intersectional discrimination, which acknowledge that exclusion arises from simultaneous identity-based vulnerabilities rather than isolated categories. The study thus contends that “otherness” in India is socially constructed through interconnected systems of caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and economic inequality.

### **3. Implications for Feminist Theory**

The third aim was to explore how these findings impact feminist theory. The discussion makes it evident that traditional Western feminist frameworks might not fully capture the complex realities faced by Indian women. In India, the concept of "woman" is fragmented by social divisions that greatly influence identity, agency, and resource access. Thus, theoretical models that rely solely on gender binaries need to be broadened. Intersectionality offers this broadening by enabling feminist analysis to consider multiple, intersecting structures of domination. (Encyclopedia Britannica) This is especially pertinent in postcolonial feminist scholarship, where universal feminist assumptions are increasingly questioned by local socio-cultural contexts. The Indian scenario illustrates that women are not a single "Other," but rather multiple "others" shaped by caste, religion, class, and geography. This perspective enhances feminist discourse by anchoring theory in experiences specific to the context.

### **4. Policy and Social Justice Implications**

The results of this study have significant implications for policy-making. In India, welfare programs and gender justice initiatives often categorize women as a single policy group. However, this research indicates that such a generalized approach might overlook the specific needs of marginalized groups like Dalit women, minority women, and those living in rural areas. Therefore, an intersectional policy framework is crucial. Policies concerning education, labor rights, healthcare, and legal protection should consider caste, religion, and socio-economic status as essential factors. Further research on caste and gender inequality in India underscores the necessity for these targeted strategies. (Taylor & Francis Online)

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The study's limitations stem from its dependence on secondary data. Future investigations should incorporate empirical fieldwork, oral narratives, ethnographic research, and



comparative analyses of rural and urban areas. Additionally, there is a need for research on queer and trans identities within Indian feminist contexts.

### **Conclusion**

This research demonstrates that intersectionality is a crucial analytical tool for comprehending the intricate realities of "otherness" within the Indian context. The results clearly indicate that women's experiences of marginalization are not solely defined by gender; instead, they are influenced by the convergence of various social structures, including caste, class, religion, region, and socio-economic status. These intersecting dimensions of identity and power result in diverse and complex forms of exclusion that vary across different communities and individual experiences. The study also emphasizes that "otherness" in India is not a singular or uniform condition but rather a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon. Women from marginalized groups, such as Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, and rural communities, often face heightened forms of exclusion that are both gendered and structurally ingrained. By combining intersectionality with the concept of otherness, the study makes a significant contribution to feminist theory and enhances its applicability to Indian social contexts.

### **Acknowledgement**

I am deeply grateful to everyone involved in helping me complete this project whether directly or indirectly. Their assistance has greatly aided me through-out the research process. I am also extremely thankful to all the writers/researchers/scholars that have written about gender/feminist theories/intersectionalities/social marginalization as their contributions are what made possible the theoretical underpinnings for this project.

### **References**

1. Beauvoir, S. de. (1949). *The second sex*. Vintage Books.
2. Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
3. Chakravarti, U. (1993). Conceptualising Brahmanical patriarchy in early India: Gender, caste, class and state. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28(14), 579–585.
4. Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
5. Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
6. Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
7. hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. South End Press.
8. Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist Review*, 30(1), 61–88. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42>

**International Educational Applied Research Journal****Peer-Reviewed Journal-Equivalent to UGC Approved Journal****A Multi-Disciplinary Research Journal**

9. Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.
10. Rege, S. (1998). Dalit women talk differently: A critique of “difference” and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(44), WS39–WS46.
11. Rege, S. (2006). *Writing caste/writing gender: Narrating Dalit women’s testimonios*. Zubaan.
12. Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
13. Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard University Press.
14. Tharu, S., & Niranjana, T. (1999). Problems for a contemporary theory of gender. *Social Scientist*, 27(1/2), 93–117.