

Patriarchy in Caste Society and Control over Women's Sexuality in India

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Abstract : The caste system in Indian society plays an important role in subjugation of women. It creates divides and controls over women's sexuality in various ways. This paper attempts to look into various modes in which the institution of caste makes some forms of sexuality as socially "acceptable" norms, while deems others as obscene, immoral and against social ethos. Based on a review of existing literature in this area this paper attempts to understand the notion of sexuality in Indian context. It tries to understand how the emergence of norms and values of sexual behaviour has been entwined with the evolution of caste system and the subjugation of many sections of Indian society. It also attempts to trace the internalisation of patriarchal values in Indian society, and the role played by the colonial rulers in creating and maintaining stringent division of space into public and private ones. It is argued here that brahmanical patriarchy, which is a unique phenomenon of the Indian Subcontinent, plays a crucial role in subjugating and controlling women in general and their sexuality in particular. It also creates a divide among women of different castes. Furthermore, the process of colonisation played an important role in shaping the discourse of sexuality in its present form. There were contradictions as well as consensus between the colonial rulers over the questions of regulation of the private domain, as in introducing reform legislation in the nineteenth century informed the debate on sexuality in postcolonial India. The process of emergence of the dichotomous notions of 'good' and 'bad' sexuality, and the resistance to any 'deviation' from the 'normal' sexuality is located, not merely in the 'passive' evolution of society, but in the actual politics of it.

Keywords : caste, control, sexuality, regulation, brahmanical patriarchy, India

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