

Caste of Women: An Inquiry into the Differences in Inter-Caste Marriages in an Adivasi Samaj

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Abstract : The paper attempts to argue that the regulation of the rural lower caste woman's life-world is at the core of the reproduction of hierarchy in an Adivasi samaj (society). It has been established in studies on caste and Adivasi that the two societies are distinct and operate through different structures, norms, rituals, beliefs, etc. This is as opposed to the colonial and certain post-independence anthropology in/of India that collapsed the two into single categories for analysis. However, how the two seemingly different social structures affect each other has attracted little attention. The paper is inspired by an action-research at Gadh-Bansla, an Adivasi village in the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh that houses different caste groups - OBCs and SCs, as well as two different Adivasi groups: Gond and Halba. The action-research, taken place across a year, has worked with six families of the different groups present (i.e., Gond, Halba, OBCs, and SCs) in which inter-caste marriages have taken place. Through in-depth interviews and free association discussions with these six families, the paper presents the ways in which the samaj and caste society have interacted. It has been observed that there is a difference in treatment in marriages between a lower caste woman marrying into an upper caste or Halba household, and an upper caste or Halba woman marrying into a lower caste household. While the upper caste woman is easily accepted into the Adivasi samaj and the husband's family, the same does not hold true for the lower caste woman. The lower caste woman has to face humiliation through untouchability, fine on the family, or in some cases excommunication of the couple. The paper concludes with a need to use caste as a central analytic to understand gender discrimination even in Adivasi contexts.

Keywords : caste, Adivasi, Samaj, humiliation, woman

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