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Bodies, Boundaries, and Resistance: Gendered Power and Women's Agency in Gita Ramaswamy's *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman*

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Abstract: *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman: The Memoir of a Lapsed Revolutionary* by Gita Ramaswamy is a self-reflexive account of political awakening, feminist resistance, anti-caste awareness, and grassroots activity in Telangana. Gender is an equally significant structure inside Ramaswamy's personal and political journey, even if the book has often been understood in relation to caste, land disputes, Naxalite politics, and Dalit resistance. This essay looks at how the memoir reveals various but related forms of gender inequality, such as caste-based sexual exploitation of Dalit women, patriarchal family authority, dowries, sexual harassment, domestic violence, menstrual taboos, restrictions on women's education and mobility, and Brahminical regulation of female bodies. It sets apart the structurally more precarious situation of Madiga women who are concurrently subject to caste, class, gender, and landlord dominance from Ramaswamy's experience as a Savarna lady revolting against Brahminical patriarchy. The paper explores the shift from individual rebellion to collective feminist consciousness and social activism, drawing on intersectional and Dalit feminist viewpoints. Gender justice is inextricably linked to issues of caste, class, land, labour, and dignity, as demonstrated by Ramaswamy's participation in women's associations and later in the Ibrahimpatnam agricultural labour movement. In the end, the memoir portrays women as questioning subjects, organisers, labourers, political participants, and agents of change rather than just as victims of patriarchal systems.

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Introduction

Land, Guns, Caste, Woman: The narrative of a Lapsed Revolutionary by Gita Ramaswamy is a social history of resistance in Telangana, a political witness, a feminist self-examination, and a personal narrative. The title's four nouns—land, weapons, caste, and woman—indicate institutions that are not discrete issues but rather frequently overlap. Guns evoke revolutionary politics and coercion; caste represents hereditary hierarchy; land represents material ownership and agrarian power; and "woman" introduces the gendered body upon which various types of discipline are imposed by family, community, caste, labour, and political authority. As a result, gender is not an additional issue in the narrative. From Ramaswamy's upbringing in a traditional Brahmin home to her involvement in feminism, Naxalite politics, publishing, and the plight of landless Dalit agricultural labourers in Ibrahimpatnam, it is evident.

However, gender in the memoir needs to be considered in terms of social location. Ramaswamy is not a woman of Dalit descent. She frequently considers the constraints of describing groups whose historical experiences she cannot claim as her own, and she openly acknowledges that she is a member of the affluent Savarna side of caste system. The book is unique, according to Visweswara Rao Chenamallu, since Ramaswamy "critically examines her long-standing involvement with Dalit communities and movements in Telangana while writing from a savarna perspective" (623). For gender analysis, this distinction is very crucial. The experiences of Madiga women, whose gender oppression is exacerbated by caste shame, landlessness, agricultural exploitation, and vulnerability to dominant-caste men, cannot be compared to Ramaswamy's uprising against Brahminical patriarchy.

As a result, intersectional analysis offers a suitable framework for analysing the narrative. Dalit women continue to be at "the lowest end of a social structure" structured by caste and gender inequality, according to Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal and Wandana Sonalkar (47). Their discovery highlights the fact that not all women experience sexism in the same way. In a Brahmin home, Ramaswamy faces limitations on menstruation, attire, marriage, education,

sexuality, and mobility; Madiga women in Ibrahimpatnam also face economic reliance, caste degradation, bonded labour, landlord power, and sexual vulnerability.

The fundamental claim made by Gopal Guru that "Dalit women talk differently" undermines attempts to incorporate their experiences into a universalised definition of womanhood (2548). Guru goes on to say that "the independent and autonomous organization of dalit women" has the capacity to oppose patriarchy from both bigger external organisations and oppressed communities (2548). Because it changes the interpretation from victimisation to political voice, this framework is helpful for understanding the women who appear in Ramaswamy's story. Women's experiences become a source of resistance, organization, and knowledge.

Dalit feminism is likewise described by Smita M. Patil as an "epistemic departure" from conventional Brahmanical feminist research (37). Her analysis of Land, Guns, Caste, and Woman is essential. The narrative shifts from Ramaswamy's early feminist understanding—which was influenced in part by her university education and middle-class Savarna upbringing—to a more nuanced political knowledge developed as a result of her experiences with caste and agricultural exploitation. The feminist consciousness itself changes.

When gender and caste are taken into account simultaneously, the necessity of this change becomes evident. According to Bhushan Sharma and K. A. Geetha, feminism is insufficient if it solely focuses on gender and ignores the "intersection of multiple operational identities" (1). This restriction is reaffirmed throughout the memoir. While both the sexual exploitation of a landless Madiga woman and the sexual regulation of a Brahmin girl are examples of patriarchy, their social structures and outcomes differ. The degree and kind of women's vulnerability are determined by caste, class, land, labour, and gender.

However, Ramaswamy's memoir does not limit women to being oppressed subjects. According to Kranti Lodhi and Nisha Indraguru, the "New Woman" in Dalit feminist tales is "a figure of transformation as well as uprising" (67). Their focus on change is essential to the memoir's shift from organised action to gender consciousness. Following Ramaswamy's campaign against sexual harassment and objectification with her university classmates, rural

women go on to take part in Sangam fights, oppose landlord control, pursue land and salaries, and enter formerly male-dominated political spheres.

According to Chenamallu's interpretation of Ramaswamy's memoir, as oppressed people start to organise, challenge authority, and take part in group decisions, resistance alters their "political self-perception" (628). Even if caste is the main subject of his research, the idea is equally crucial for comprehending gender. When women start to see social constraints as structures that can be challenged rather than as inevitable, agency begins to develop.

Thus, gender as a growing political consciousness in *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman* is examined in this essay. It starts with Ramaswamy's experience of Brahminical patriarchy and physical control, moves on to education, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, feminist organisations, and the paradoxes of radical politics, and concludes with the caste, class, and gender oppression of Dalit women in Ibrahimpatnam. The memoir demonstrates that recognising gender as a separate category would not lead to women's independence. It must address the material structures—family, caste, property, land, labour, sexuality, education, religion, and political power—that perpetuate patriarchy.

Review of Literature

Prof. Visweswara Rao Chenamallu's "Beyond Caste Boundaries: Identity, Dignity and Dalit Resistance in Gita Ramaswamy's Memoir *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman*" (2026) analyses a direct critical interaction with the main text. Chenamallu largely uses caste consciousness, Savarna self-reflection, dignity, and collective Dalit resistance to understand the narrative. His contrast between Ramaswamy's identity and her support for Madiga people is very significant. He contends that the memoir's intellectual strength is found in its recognition of the narrator's privileged social standing rather than its concealment. His research serves as a crucial basis for the current paper, which explores how women hold unequal positions within caste system and expands on this self-reflexive approach to gender.

"Dalit Women and Their Journey toward Self-Emancipation" (2026) by Prof. Visweswara Rao Chenamallu explores the ways in which Dalit women confront marginalisation based on gender, caste, and class. As crucial paths to self-emancipation, the study highlights

education, social consciousness, political engagement, solidarity, dignity, and literary expression. The transition from suffering to agency is what makes it relevant to Ramaswamy's memoir. In *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman*, rural women are not just the beneficiaries of activist action; they are becoming more involved in battles for social dignity, wages, land, and bonded labour. Chenamallu's method aids in framing emancipation as proactive self-assertion as opposed to altruistic liberty.

P. Gayathri and Dr. Jeripotula Malavi's "From Caste Silence to Caste Consciousness: Dalit Resistance and the Politics of Recognition in Gita Ramaswamy's *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman*" (2026) focuses on the memoir's shift toward overt caste consciousness. Ramaswamy acknowledges that radical left politics did not initially offer a sufficient grasp of caste, which makes their work noteworthy. Her perspective is changed by her experience with Dalit struggles, especially the political ramifications of caste violence. This movement is similarly pertinent from a gender perspective since caste-specific mechanisms must be acknowledged in order to properly understand the oppression of Dalit women through class politics or a universal category of women.

One of the key interventions in Dalit feminist discourse is still Gopal Guru. In "Dalit Women Talk Differently" (1995) Guru questions the notion that Dalit women may be inevitably represented by either mainstream feminism or male-centered Dalit politics. His focus on independent articulation highlights the various systems that may subjugate the voices of Dalit women. Guru's paradigm, as applied to Ramaswamy's book, warns against letting the feminism of the Savarna female narrator supplant the voices of Madiga women. Rather, when rural women show up as participants with their own political knowledge, methods, experiences, and demands, the memoir gains its greatest value.

In "Dalit Women in India: At the Crossroads of Gender, Class, and Caste" (2015) Sabharwal Nidhi Sadana and Wandana Sonalkar examine a clearly integrated framework for comprehending the socioeconomic status of Dalit women. The authors show how caste marginalisation and economic hardship are inextricably linked to gender discrimination against Dalit women. Because of their experiences with agricultural labour, poverty, landlessness, caste

dominance, and sexual vulnerability, their research is especially helpful for studying the women of Ibrahimpatnam. Thus, the essay aids in distinguishing between types of gender oppression that are exacerbated by caste and class power and basic patriarchal limits.

In M. Smita Patil's "Revitalising Dalit Feminism: Toward Reflexive, Anti-Caste Agency of Mang and Mahar Women in Maharashtra" (2013), makes the case for a Dalit feminist viewpoint based on the unique social contexts of marginalised women. Without acknowledging Dalit feminism's epistemic challenge to mainstream feminist theory, Patil criticises frameworks that include it. Because Ramaswamy's memoir is so self-reflexive, her theory of reflexive anti-caste agency is helpful while reading it. Ramaswamy gradually realises that challenging patriarchy, her inherited caste privilege, and the shortcomings of previous political philosophies are all necessary for solidarity.

Sharma Bhushan and K. A. Geetha's "Casteing Gender: Intersectional Oppression of Dalit Women" (2021) explores the shortcomings of feminist frameworks that view gender as a distinct identity. Their intersectional approach shows how gender and caste work together to create social exclusion. Ramaswamy's descriptions of Madiga ladies are clarified by this viewpoint. Poverty, untouchability, labour control, and sexual exploitation by landlords from dominant castes are all part of a complex system of power. As a result, Sharma and Geetha offer a crucial theoretical framework for differentiating the experience of Dalit women from the narrator's own feminist uprising in Savarna.

In "Resistance and Resilience: The New Woman in Dalit Feminist Narratives" (2026) by Kranti Lodhi and Nisha Indraguru move the focus from oppression to selfhood, resistance, transformation, and resilience. By analysing the stories of Dalit women, the authors contend that women recover their identity and voice while challenging gender and caste inequalities. Their methodology is pertinent to the current investigation since *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman* encompasses a variety of actions, ranging from social constraint to organised action and from quiet to voice. Rural women involved in labour and land disputes develop as political agents whose resistance transforms community life rather than as helpless figures.

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Objectives

To analyse how gender inequality and patriarchy are portrayed in *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman* by Gita Ramaswamy.

To examine how the memoir's Brahminical traditions govern women's bodies, sexuality, education, mobility, marriage, and individual liberty.

To look into how Ramaswamy's feminist consciousness evolved from individual revolt to organised political engagement.

To investigate how Madiga women and agricultural labourers in Ibrahimpatnam experience the intersections of caste, class, labour, and gender.

To investigate women's political agency, collective organization, and resistance in student, feminist, revolutionary, and agricultural movements.

To assess the memoir as a self-reflexive feminist narrative that separates the historical oppression of Dalit women from the Savarna female experience.

Methodology

Based on a close reading of Gita Ramaswamy's *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman*, this study employs a qualitative and interpretive methodology. It analyses bodily regulation, family patriarchy, education, domestic violence, sexual harassment, political engagement, caste-based sexual exploitation, labour, and women's agency using feminist, Dalit feminist, and intersectional perspectives. In order to contextualise the analysis while preserving the contrast between the social locations of Savarna and Dalit women, secondary works on Dalit feminism, caste-gender intersectionality, resistance, and Ramaswamy's memoir are employed.

Discussion

Brahminical Patriarchy and the Normalisation of Gender

The fact that patriarchy need not necessarily manifest as dramatic violence is one of the memoir's most significant feminist ideas. It can function through commonplace behaviours that families get accustomed to to the point that they no longer identify them as instances of inequality. Ramaswamy refuses to paint her parents as merely harsh people while reflecting on her early years. Rather, she pinpoints the social structure that gave their actions legitimacy.

"Patriarchy and caste diktats are normalised everywhere, made to appear as natural and permanent as sunrise," she notes (Ramaswamy 21).

This claim lays forth the main feminist approach of the memoir. The normalisation of unfair laws is another way that gender oppression is understood, in addition to particular acts of cruelty. Caste purity and female dignity are reinforced in the Brahmin household. Inherited rules regulate food, clothing, physical conduct, religious observance, marriage, education, and sexuality. Some of these codes are passed down by women, but the overall system is still patriarchal.

This complexity is exemplified by Ramaswamy's relationship with her mother. Her mother teaches her daughters the value of financial freedom while yet upholding traditional expectations. As a result, the girl learns conflicting lessons: while obedience is required, education is also offered as a way out. According to Ramaswamy, her mother maintained that "education was the only way to escape the worst of it" (Ramaswamy 29). Academic success is no longer the only aspect of education. It offers a way out of forced domesticity and economic reliance.

Because women in patriarchal society are more than just agents or victims, this conflict is crucial. They may teach their daughters survival techniques in addition to reproducing limitations. Instead of making simple moral judgements, the book demonstrates how women navigate systems that they did not design.

Menstruation, Pollution, and the Gendered Body

One of Ramaswamy's first experiences with the politics of the feminine body comes from the control of menstruation. A biological process becomes a system of temporary exclusion due to Brahminical ideas of purity. Menstruating women are viewed as sources of contamination, eat and sleep apart, and stay away from certain areas and objects. "We were six women at home and menstrual periods were three days of seclusion each," Ramaswamy remembers (Ramaswamy 32).

This practice's importance goes beyond ritual. It educates females that as they reach puberty, the female body becomes socially harmful. Contamination, sexuality, marriageability,

and surveillance are all linked to menstruation. But Ramaswamy has a different framework for interpretation because of her scientific training. She learns from biology that menstruation is a normal physiological phenomenon. To test the alleged repercussions of breaking ceremonial rules, she purposefully touches objects and goes into the puja area.

Her defiance highlights how crucial information is in opposing gender ideology. She is able to differentiate between socially manufactured pollution and biological reality through scientific reasoning. An early feminist epistemological shift is marked by her conclusion, "I learned to question everything" (Ramaswamy 33). Throughout the memoir, questioning appears frequently as a political tactic.

Additionally, this episode illustrates how gender and caste overlap. Menstrual limitations are ingrained in Brahminical purity rules and are not just shown as generic patriarchy. Ramaswamy's subsequent experiences with caste oppression enable her to see that hierarchical notions of caste pollution are produced by the same intellectual environment that deems menstruation women filthy.

Clothing, Sexuality, and Respectable Femininity

Clothing is another area of control over the female body. Ramaswamy's wish to wear a brassiere turns into a struggle about modesty, sexuality, and what constitutes a "good" girl. "Girls from good families do not flaunt themselves like that," her mother advises her, equating modern knickers with sexual display (Ramaswamy 35).

The phrase "good family" illustrates how female respectability turns into a kind of societal control. A girl's attire is viewed as a reflection of her family's morals rather than as an autonomous choice. The body must exhibit caste-appropriate femininity and is symbolically a part of the household.

Ramaswamy's reply has important economic implications. In order to buy her own bras, she starts earning money through tuition, walking rather than taking the bus, and sewing garments. Even on a modest basis, financial freedom transforms into physical autonomy.

The experience foreshadows a broader theme in the memoir: female freedom and economic independence are intimately related. A woman who has no control over wealth is

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nevertheless more susceptible to authority inside her family. Ramaswamy may put his preferences into action by making money.

Education and the Unequal Freedom of Daughters

Another area where gender conflict arises is in education. Ramaswamy does well academically and is eligible to attend an IIT for further education, but her father declines. Gender is just as important as money: he does not want a daughter to live away from home.

Her story highlights the distinction between giving girls educational liberty and just letting them study. Families may respect female education while retaining the authority to set its boundaries. As a result, patriarchal supervision continues to take precedence over the daughter's intellectual potential.

"We only had a tenuous right to education" (Ramaswamy 49) is how Ramaswamy later characterises the wider uncertainty surrounding women's education. Her usage of the word "tenuous" is important. When marriage, family honour, financial priorities, or parental anxiety arise, permission to pursue education may be revoked.

Her early feminist consciousness incorporates this realisation. She witnesses females being pulled out of college because their parents don't think they need to continue their education. The personal annoyance of being turned down for IIT eventually develops into a systemic comprehension of women's unequal citizenship.

Domestic Violence and the Fragility of Female Achievement

Ramaswamy's observation of the effects of domestic abuse in her sister's marriage is a turning point. Her sister works professionally, has a good level of education, and is financially successful. However, when she wants to keep her profits in another account, her husband attacks her.

The episode challenges the notion that women's freedom is ensured by work and education alone. When it comes to marriage and the workplace, patriarchy can follow women. Economic productivity does not always result in economic control, as the husband's claim over his wife's income shows.

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The local community's response exacerbates the issue. Community elders are more concerned about the effects of marital separation on other women than they are about the violence as an injustice against the woman. Ramaswamy acknowledges that the system has "the power to turn around and reduce you to nothing" (Ramaswamy 40).

As a result, domestic violence is seen as a kind of punishment. It teaches both the victimised woman and other women about the potential consequences of wives claiming financial autonomy.

Ramaswamy is profoundly affected by the occurrence. She takes a second pledge to reach her own potential and decides "never to subject myself to the hateful things that men were capable of" (Ramaswamy 40). Feminist consciousness arises from personal witnessing.

From Personal Rebellion to Feminist Consciousness

Ramaswamy's move to college broadens her perspective on gender from political studies to family strife. Friendships with politically engaged women, exposure to feminist literature, varied social environments, and radical student politics all contribute to the development of a language that allows for the reinterpretation of past experiences.

She and other young women start to see themselves as citizens with rights rather than just disobedient daughters. They "metamorphosed from helpless angry young women to being persons with entitlements," according to Ramaswamy (Ramaswamy 49).

The shift from rage to entitlement has important political ramifications. Injustice is recognised by anger, and institutional recognition of rights is necessary for citizenship. The young women start to see dowries, sexual harassment, lack of safe public spaces, forced or unwanted marriage, educational constraints, and the commercial objectification of women as interconnected examples of gender injustice.

Organised action results from this awareness. Campaigns against sexual harassment and derogatory depictions of women are undertaken by Ramaswamy and her allies. Feminism shifts from individual resistance to group political action.

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Sexual Harassment and Women's Right to Public Space

The memoir frequently highlights women's uneasy attitudes toward public areas. Young women were "sexually harassed on the roads, in classrooms, and in hotels," according to Ramaswamy (Ramaswamy 49). It concerns how wide these locations are. Harassment follows women in public, recreational, and educational settings; it is not limited to a specific hazardous area.

Citizenship is restricted when safe public space is denied. Formal equality is still lacking if women are unable to travel, study, congregate, engage in discussion, or participate without facing sexual intimidation.

Thus, Ramaswamy's campaign against sexual harassment is about more than just safety. It calls for women to be allowed to live in public areas as complete social and political beings.

This aspect of the memoir further clarifies the recurring importance of mobility. Gender stereotypes regarding where respectable women belong are challenged by attending meetings, enrolling in coeducational institutions, taking part in protests, staying out late, and speaking in public.

Women Organising Women

Another phase of Ramaswamy's feminist evolution is the creation of the Progressive Organization of Women. In an effort to mobilise female students on sexual harassment, dowries, growing costs, and similar issues, female activists travel to colleges.

The success of patriarchal socialisation is demonstrated by the difficulties of organising women. Gender issues are taught to many young women as personal rather than political issues. Therefore, the first step in feminist organization is to create consciousness.

Ramaswamy recalls talking about "sexual harassment," "the burden of dowry," and other matters impacting the lives of groups of girls (Ramaswamy 55). The exercise transforms commonplace events into topics for group discussion.

Silence isolates women, which is why this procedure is crucial. When a girl is harassed on an individual basis, she could see it as an embarrassment. The issue becomes structural once women talk about these experiences as a group.

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As a result, the book demonstrates how feminist consciousness is developed by dialogue, reading, friendship, organization, and political action.

Gender within Revolutionary Politics

At first, Ramaswamy's foray into Naxalite politics seems to provide an escape from traditional family life. New friendships, academic opportunities, travel, organisational responsibilities, and an alternative community are all made possible by radical politics. However, the memoir does not romanticise revolutionary movements as inherently feminist.

Tensions between conceptual equality and real gender interactions are revealed by her retroactive account. While opposing class exploitation, revolutionary organisations may hold onto gender stereotypes. For instance, Ramaswamy observes that many male leaders' wives are absent from their political life. "So few of the ones we had heard of had wives who were their partners in the revolutionary movement," she notes (Ramaswamy 75).

An important contradiction is revealed by the observation. Because someone else, usually a woman, is still in charge of the home and family, a guy may decide to become a full-time revolutionary. Therefore, gendered employment that goes unnoticed may be necessary for political radicalism.

Here, Ramaswamy's subsequent introspection becomes crucial. Just as class politics does not instantly eradicate caste, revolutionary thought does not automatically eradicate sexism.

Family Authority and the Punishment of Female Political Independence

As Ramaswamy becomes more involved in politics, the tension between her and her family increases. In an effort to keep her away from Hyderabad and its political networks, her father tries to move the family. Ramaswamy first hides her plan to stay behind before declaring she won't be leaving.

Political ideology is only one aspect of the conflict. It has to do with who is in charge of an adult woman's housing, education, associations, and future.

When her family entices her home and confines her, the quarrel finally takes a drastic turn. "I was twenty-one years old, locked in by my parents, and needed to be freed," Ramaswamy remembers yelling to people outside (Ramaswamy 76).

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Her age statement is important because it challenges familial ownership by invoking adulthood and legal personhood. However, after learning that she is connected to Naxalite politics, her neighbours decline to step in. Her claim to autonomy is undermined by her political identification.

The episode illustrates how coercion can be used as a kind of protection by patriarchal authority. A family may deny their daughter adult agency while thinking they are saving her.

From Savarna Feminism to Caste Consciousness

Ramaswamy's experiences as a student, political activist, and Brahmin daughter largely shape her early feminism. Her subsequent involvement with Dalit communities compels feminism to take a more direct stance against caste.

This change is crucial. Ramaswamy cannot presume that she comprehends the lives of all women because she has defied patriarchal constraints. Her personal access to social networks, schooling, English, books, and urban institutions is an example of privilege that many Dalit women in rural areas do not have.

This asymmetry is explicitly acknowledged in her memoir. "I know that I belong to the savarna side of the fence," she writes (Ramaswamy 23). For feminist reading, the admission becomes methodologically significant.

Erasing differences is not necessary for solidarity. Conversely, acknowledging unequal social locations is the first step toward ethical unity.

In a similar vein, Chenamallu highlights that Ramaswamy's narrative makes a distinction "between identity and solidarity" (627). She does not have to claim her own Dalit historical experience in order to take part in Dalit fights.

When discussing gender, this distinction becomes very crucial. A Dalit woman's experience of caste-patriarchal exploitation and a Savarna woman's experience of patriarchal confinement are similar yet distinct.

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Madiga Women and Caste-Based Sexual Domination

A significantly more violent link between caste, gender, work, and landowner power is revealed as the story moves to Ibrahimpatnam. Madigas are bonded labourers under powerful Reddy landlords, according to Ramaswamy. Caste authority is displayed on women's bodies.

The description of recently married Dalit women is among the most unsettling. According to Ramaswamy, "newly-wed Madiga brides were first brought to the dora'sgadi" in certain villages for what was called their "breaking in" (Ramaswamy 18).

The phrase reveals caste dominance's sexual politics. The landlord has power over Dalit women's bodies in addition to labour and land. Therefore, sexual exploitation is not just general aggression against women or specific male wrongdoing. It operates on a caste-feudal system.

The intersectional approach of Sharma and Geetha is very pertinent in this situation. It is impossible to comprehend the subjugation of Dalit women by separating gender from caste and class. The landlord from the dominant caste has caste power over Dalits, economic power over labourers, and patriarchal dominance over women. Sexual susceptibility is where these structures converge.

The episode also shows why Guru's emphasis on the uniqueness of Dalit women's experiences is still important. Such brutality cannot be sufficiently explained by a broad category of "Indian woman."

Motherhood, Labour, and the Policing of Women's Bodies

Lactating farm labourers is another unsettling behaviour that Ramaswamy describes. According to reports, landlords massaged women's breasts to test the veracity of their assertions that they had to feed infants. According to Ramaswamy, "the breasts of lactating women labourers were pressed to check if they really needed to feed their infants" (Ramaswamy 18).

In this instance, the female body is both a mother's body and a labouring body. The woman's authority over her own biological condition is not acknowledged by the landlord. A socially dominating male must physically validate her claim to parenthood.

The event exemplifies the caste-class patriarchy's dehumanising ideology. Body privacy is violated by labour discipline. When a mother is a Dalit labourer without land, motherhood, which is often idealised in society, provides little protection.

In this regard, Sabharwal and Sonalkar's study of Dalit women at the nexus of caste, gender, and economic hardship is particularly insightful. Caste stratification and economic dependence exacerbate gender violence. The woman's livelihood is at risk, thus she cannot just quit the labour arrangement.

Land, Labour, and Gendered Emancipation

Thus, the fight for land is a gender issue as well. Dependency on landlords results from landlessness, and this makes women more vulnerable. The material circumstances in which patriarchal dominance functions can be changed by having access to land, income, cattle, housing, education, and legal rights.

Therefore, it is necessary to interpret the Sangam's battles not just as caste or class movements but also as struggles that open doors for women's agency.

Women are involved in the movement as demonstrators, organisers, agricultural workers, and land claimants. Representations of rural Dalit women as helpless victims are complicated by their political presence.

Here, Lodhi and Indraguru's idea of the "New Woman" as a symbol of both change and rebellion becomes pertinent. Resistance entails more than just avoiding violence; it also entails gaining the self-assurance to organise, speak up, demand rights, and take part in group decisions.

When Ramaswamy maintains that the memoir is "more importantly, the story of the Sangam's struggles and achievements," her story itself decentralises heroic individualism (Ramaswamy 23). For feminist interpretation, this sentence is particularly useful. Instead of being the gift of a privileged activist, emancipation is a common effort.

Women as Political Agents rather than Victims

The memoir's reluctance to reduce disadvantaged people to misery is one of its strongest points. Although there is evidence of violence, resistance is still crucial.

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The movement's rural women take part in battles against debt, landlessness, bonded labour, police, and landlords. The meaning of gendered identity is altered by their involvement. Political players are women who are socially positioned as dependents and labourers.

Because it challenges narratives that only acknowledge Dalit women when they are in pain, Dalit feminist analysis is crucial. Making decisions, organising, protesting, negotiating, and creating communal knowledge are all examples of political agency.

Particularly relevant is Patil's focus on information based on social location. Rural women are aware of local exploitation mechanisms because they are a part of them, not because they have learned abstract political theory. Thus, their experience is a type of political wisdom.

Ramaswamy gradually comes to appreciate this information. When she realises the limitations of external frames, her memoir becomes self-critical.

Self-Reflexivity and the Ethics of Feminist Solidarity

Ramaswamy's hesitation to portray herself as the straightforward liberator of oppressed women contributes to the ethical power of *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman*. She admits her caste privilege, errors, ideological constraints, and narrative authority.

She acknowledges that she still has the power to frame, choose, and omit, and that privileged people continue to be the dominant storytellers. When a Savarna woman tells the story of Dalit lives, this insight is crucial.

Her answer is self-reflection rather than quiet. With the hope that "there is always space for realisation, for change," she writes (Ramaswamy 24).

Feminist solidarity can also be defined by this principle. Declaring that all women suffer in the same way does not lead to solidarity. It necessitates acknowledging diversity, paying attention to women who live in different places, facing privilege, and supporting challenges without taking their voices.

As a result, Guru's claim that Dalit women "talk differently" takes of particular significance in the memoir. The reader who is an ethical feminist must let those distinctions continue to be apparent.

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From the Controlled Body to the Political Woman

Gender consciousness follows an amazing path throughout the memoir. Ramaswamy starts off as a young girl whose body is controlled by her menstruation, appearance, clothing, marriage expectations, and familial authority. She turns into a student who engages in political organization, studies feminist literature, questions norms, and goes into public. Later on, she turns into an activist and comes across more extreme instances of caste and class exploitation than she had previously encountered.

The definition of feminism is altered by this movement. Gender liberation can no longer be limited to a woman's freedom to work, travel, study, dress, and get married. These liberties are still necessary, but they are insufficient while other women continue to be economically dependent, landless, chained, and sexually vulnerable.

As a result, the memoir shifts from individual autonomy to structural justice.

In the end, the word "Woman" in the title takes on several meanings. It speaks of the Brahmin girl who must deal with ritual constraints, the educated woman who must deal with family control, the student who must deal with sexual harassment, the female revolutionary navigating radical politics, the sister who must deal with domestic abuse, the Madiga bride who must deal with the sexual power of the landlord, the lactating labourer whose body is examined, and the rural woman who joins collective struggle.

Although these women may not share the same social position, their experiences reveal various patriarchal power structures.

However, the memoir maintains that oppression does not exhaust gender identity. Women ask questions, learn, work, organise, travel, protest, love, refuse, bargain, organise, and fight.

Over time, the subjugated female body turns into the political female subject.

One of the most significant feminist accomplishments of *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman* is this change.

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Conclusion

Land, Guns, Caste, Woman by Gita Ramaswamy shows how interrelated systems of family, caste, class, sexuality, labour, education, religion, and political authority all contribute to gender oppression. Menstrual taboos, dress codes, marriage expectations, mobility limitations, and unequal educational freedom are just a few of the ways that Ramaswamy's early years reveal the normalisation of Brahminical patriarchy. While university activism converts personal rage into feminist consciousness and social organization, her sister's experience of domestic abuse highlights the vulnerability of female economic independence.

This gender perspective is significantly expanded by the memoir's journey into Ibrahimpatnam. In addition to patriarchy, Madiga women face caste discrimination, landlessness, labour exploitation, and sexual dominance by wealthy landowners. The need for an intersectional Dalit feminist perspective that does not see all women as socially identical is confirmed by their experiences.

However, Ramaswamy refuses to use victimisation as a means of representing women. Women participate in the fight for material justice and dignity as workers, organisers, activists, demonstrators, and students. Solidarity is further kept from turning into appropriation by her own Savarna self-criticism. In the conclusion, *Land, Guns, Caste, Woman* portrays gender emancipation as a shift away from controlled bodies and forced quiet and toward political agency, knowledge, autonomy, and collective resistance. When individual emancipation is combined with broader battles against caste, class, and societal dominance, its feminism becomes most potent.

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