




# The Manifestation of Triple Oppression Through the Weaponizing of the Triad of Visuality in the Rupaspur-Chandwa Massacre

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## Introduction

The catastrophe in the Rupaspur-Chandwa district on November 22, 1971, in the Purnia district of Bihar, exists as a significant juncture in the timeline of post-colonial, where a group of Rajput landlords killed 14 Santhal tribals, shooting and burning women and children alive, with a suspicion of the actual numbers being suppressed (Adivasi First Nation, 2021).

This massacre which remains the first major annihilation of Adivasis based on land ownership, prevails as a testament of how representation, which is the ability to see, be noticed and portray, acts as a paraphernalia for intimidation, subjugation and establishing dominance.

The notion of “visuality” portrayed by Nicholas Mirzoeff is of an imposing practice that classifies, separates and aestheticizes the actuality to protract power, rather than it being a mutual and sovereign gaze (Mirzoeff, 2011). Ruth Manorama, A Dalit women activist, explains the framework of triple oppression, which is a concept coined by Louis Thompson Patterson and popularised by Claudia Jones, who was a Black Women activist, initially originating in the US, reflecting on the persisting intersectional atrocities based on race, gender, and class. This was converted by Ruth Manorama who talked about the same phenomenon in the Indian context where women were discriminated based on caste, class and gender (Manorama, 2006).

This essay aims at highlighting how does triple oppression weaponize the triad of visuality – classification, separation and aestheticization taking the 1971 massacre of Rupaspur Chandwa as a case study. The argument reflects how the concept of triple institution acted as a facilitator where caste classified, class separated and gender aestheticized, turning the narrative against the discriminated, a phenomenon that exists even today, evident from the documented 113 miseries in 2025 ranging from murders to gangrapes of women and children (Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2025). We use Ruth Manorama’s idea of triple oppression

that she expresses in her acceptance speech in 2006, coupling it with Uma Chakravarti’s voice on the intersectional discrimination which she expresses in her book *Gendering Caste: Through a feminist lens*. We also couple Uma Chakravarti’s text with the article on Adivasi

First Nation on The First Adivasi massacre of Independent India based on land ownership to give us a base on our case study. We also use Nicholas Mirzoeff’s idea of Visuality, John Berger’s idea of ways of seeing S.L. Pigg’s idea of invented social categories.

## Caste and Classification

The commencement of this altering visuality happens with an act of classification, categorising the visible in order to propound authority (Mirzoeff, 2011). In this case, Caste facilitated the opening blow with the Rajput landlords and women blaming the Santhals, categorising the Santhal women as witches who were a threat to Rajput’s Land ownership, legitimising their action (Adivasi First Nation, 2021). These labels pronounced the Santhals as subhumans, assisting

their annihilation.

The concept of triple oppression illustrates this where the persisting caste discrimination strategically placed Santhal as hierarchical inferior naturalising the violence. Class underpinned this categorisation where the miserable bataidars questioning the tenancy were declared thieves even though they had generations dedicated to the cultivation process (Adivasi First Nation, 2021). Gender aggravated this as the women who were forced into being sexual rent, were recategorized as polluting, which is also evident from their treatment where they were coerced to run naked and then shot, their bodies acting as a symbol of humiliation for the whole community (Adivasi First Nation, 2021; Chakravarti, 2018).

This is also facilitated by the way John Berger elucidates his concept of to-be-looked-at objects where women are considered object of male gaze and complements, in this case, weaponised for humiliation (Berger, 1972). Uma Chakravarti also talks about how honour is attached to the women of a community (Chakravarti, 2018). This gendered classification based on caste takes away the individuality of women, reducing their credibility and freedom in the process.

These classification and reduction of women to symbols facilitated the brutality of the annihilation, mirroring Mirzoeff's idea of how visibility lets the visible command the narrative. The process is put in place here with naming and classification happening before the massacre, creating the environment for the separation of these classified groups in legal and social settings.

### **Separation of The Classified Groups**

The next stage of this process is separation which encompasses an intentional severance of these categorised groups to impede any danger, that the unification of these discriminated groups would cause to the authority.

In the backwash of Rupaspur-Chandwa massacre, this process of separation seems to be the most evident in the exoneration from the Patna High Court in 1987, converting the massacre into mere 'honor-defense' blaming Santhal men for making obscene gestures towards Rajput women, changing the cruel rajputs to the victims (Adivasi First Nation, 2021; Chakravarti, 2018).

Triple oppression strategically distanced Santhal women from legal redress by means of an intersectional class and caste separation, making sure that their category of a subhuman remained unopposed and exemption strenuous, maintaining the control of visibility over representation in judicial processes.

The acquittal deemed Santhal testimonies to be unreliable, while Rajput influence secured vindication, elucidating the embedded biases. Manorama highlights that hierarchies based on caste made Dalit voices legally suspect, complemented by further class barriers that denied appeals to miserable bataidars. Gender worsened the circumstances as women are generally considered emotional, reducing their personalities to mere objects significant for honor.

Manorama's triple oppression structure highlights the layered barriers as caste subjugated the Santhals from judicial empathy, class from access to procedures, gender from credibility (Manorama, 2006). Pigg's discussion of social categories through place (1992) raises clarity on how the "village" was fictionalized as backward, setting the rural Santhals apart from urban justice. Berger's surveyed female (1972) applies in the sense that women's visibility is subordinated to the dominant gaze. Separation made sure no Santhal voice ever found its place in the record, making the massacre appear as "honor defense.

### **Aestheticization beautifying the massacre**

The third and final step is aestheticization, which portrays this separated categorization as fair and pleasant. In Rupaspur, gender spearheaded this process as the term and concept "honour- defence" converted the horrors into a folklore.



The triple oppressive framework elucidated by Manorama shows how gender aestheticized atrocities by projecting women's bodies as plots of purity and pollution. The Rajput women here beautify the burning portraying it as caste duty to protect their honour through the decimation of Santhal. The sexual violence aestheticized the humiliation as a method of revenge (Adivasi first Nation, 2021).

Pigg invented villages also helps us understand this catastrophe as the rural life is always painted as a backward setting, justifying the violence naturalising the horrors (Pigg, 1992). Berger also criticises the portrayal of women as mere objects for the surveyor's pleasure which shadows the atrocities the women have to face in the process (Berger, 1972).

The scorch marks on the Banyan Trees aestheticize the scar, changing the narrative to tribal unrest rather than it being injustice and with this, as beautification forgets, the process comes to an end where the torch held by triple oppression weaponises visuality and changes the narrative completely.

## Conclusion

The massacre in Rupaspur-Chandwa was a representational catastrophe where the triad of visuality was equipped to legitimise and scrape through the decimation caused, highlighting the triple oppression present in the society. As the Caste classified the Santhal women as inferior witches, acting as threat to the lands of Rajputs, proclaiming their mere existence as grounds for the annihilation caused, class distanced the Santhals from any tenancy right or legal discourse, separating them as outsiders, despite them contributing generations worth of labour to contribute to the cultivation and Gender as the final nail to the coffin aestheticized the violence, changing the narrative, converting sexual the sexual atrocities and the burning of lives in to caste duty for honor defence. This collaboration of caste classification, class dividing, and gender aestheticization reserved the right to look as the privilege only possessed by the dominant class, pushing the discriminated in the shadows.

This essay fills intersectional gaps as it provides a caste dimension to Mirzoeff's triad of visuality, usage of the visual aspect for the concept of triple oppression, an addition of class to Uma Chakravarti's gender and caste intersectionalities. The restoration of 1971 testimonies of a diverse category of people from the digital archives, exponential changes and reforms to give representation to the Dalit voices, policies addressing the intersectional challenges to the concept of visuality in the fields of law and media are some of the strong prospects that this essay marches towards. As this torch of representation highlights the dynamics of caste, class and gender violence, through an attempt of commanding the narrative, the distortion of this structure would require more than just legal reforms.

While the Dalit women fight in various ways adapting to the trends, fighting against counter narratives, and lack of resources, creating awareness, self-help groups, taking over the internet trending hashtags like #DalitWomenFight, the struggles and the atrocities persist over the years and while progress is visible until the eyes of every subjugated woman is returned as subject, not symbol, the struggle continues. Look. Look again.

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