INTRODUCTION
Introduction

This study, located in current debates on Dalit feminism in Maharashtra, is an attempt to address the question of Dalit feminism within caste. For the last decade, debates have outlined the ways in which mainstream feminism has been partial, situated and Brahmanical.1 Dalit feminist standpoint as a project, open to interrogation, requires that the differences of caste within Dalit women be brought to the fore for the development of Dalit feminism.2 This thesis investigates the socio-cultural, economic and political differences between Mahar and Mang women to map the ways in which these differences have influenced their historical struggles and political perspectives in Western Maharashtra. The thrust of this study is to compare the politics of women of two castes among Dalits to try and understand historically constructed ‘differences’ and make them inform Dalit feminism to strength it.3 Such a study also enhances our understanding of the caste system within as much as against Dalits, bringing to the fore the system as experienced by women who are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The sociological discourse on caste has highlighted the ‘ideology of the caste’. For instance, scholars like Louis Dumont and Michal Moffat argue that the caste system is a set of values acknowledged by both the dominant and the

subjugated. Ambedkar's analysis of caste as "a division of labourers that is different from division of labour, a hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one above the other" establishes caste as political and suggests that it should be further examined within the realm of political discourses. It explains to us how castes systematically obfuscate 'graded inequality as an ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt'. This assumes further significance in light of the relationship between the structures of gender and caste that Ambedkar outlined succinctly, stating that women are the gateways to the caste system. If we emphasise this model of Ambedkar in the present context, the prevailing models of caste appear as viewing the system in a top-down manner; and it may be argued here that a gendered understanding of the graded system of hierarchy requires us to begin from the experiences of Dalit women.

Further, the graded hierarchy of the caste system operates among Dalits too; community members exercise their power/autonomy over the others (within and without) instead of building their collective consciousness for the common cause of fighting against the situated hierarchies. This can be seen in Maharashtra (among Mahars and Mangs), Andhra Pradesh (Malas and Madigas) and elsewhere in India. Sociologically this has been explained by Srinivas as the adoptability of similar values and cultures borrowed from the immediate higher

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caste groups. However, such explanations, which portray Dalits as capable of emulating upper caste only, further deny Dalits their intellectual and political histories.

Responses by mainstream feminism to assertions by Dalit feminists have often resulted in the displacement of one difference with another, thus highlighting the dominance of neo-Buddhist women over Mang and Chambar women. As has been argued by Rege, displacing one difference with another can only lead to a basketful of differences and leaves the assumptions of dominant frameworks unquestioned. It was in 1956 that Dr. Ambedkar gave alternatives to the entire Dalit community by embracing Buddhism. It gave a new identity and meaning because historically it was the only religion which provided space to women based upon the values of equality, liberty and fraternity. Hence, Dalit feminists of Maharashtra who, in the 1990s, talked about the 'internal' and 'external' exclusion of Dalit women now call themselves Buddhist women.

These Buddhist women belong to Mahar caste. The question then is: can all the other Dalit caste women accept themselves as daughters of Ambedkar, as Buddhist women? Certain Dalit women still claim that they are willing to follow Hinduism or Christianity; this is especially true of the Mang, Dhor, Chamar and

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11 See Mukanayika Bolu Lagalya (2005). It is an annual magazine which brought out a special issue on Dhammakrianti Suvarna Jayanti Mahila Sammelan - 2005. On 10 October 2005, Dhamma Diksha Suvarna Jayati Buddha Mahila Sammelan was organized at Nagpur in which this discourses was debated.
some Mahar women in certain areas of Maharashtra. However, a comparative study of the Mahar Buddhist and Mang Hindu women has been chosen because one can observe occupational-based migration of Dalit women to urban areas following the adoption of liberalisation policies, and see how these two communities mediate their identities keeping the above debate in mind, and in a rapidly changing context.\textsuperscript{12} As Eleanor Zelliot suggests, the Mangs were always on the verge of modernity by making ropes and baskets, compared to Mahars when the fifty-two rights were given to them.\textsuperscript{13} Even today, they are treated with some amount of respect by high caste Hindus during certain ceremonies.

The economic, socio-cultural and political conditions of women in general and Dalit women in particular are at a critical moment. The government of India’s report ‘Towards equality’ brought out in 1970, provides vivid descriptions of the multiple dimensions of gender disparity working mainly against women. As a result, various organisations and institutions of women and Dalit women suggested certain orientations of policies reflecting upon gender. Nevertheless, one needs to critical about how many Dalit women are benefiting from these policies. This study attempts to forge a new vision of Dalit feminist agenda by engaging within categories. It will further help us understand the dynamics of gendered schism among the Dalits (both male and female) as well as break out of historically constructed stereotypes. It aims to strengthen the platform for a new dialogue among the two groups. It, therefore, is a part of the struggle to give rise to a new political understanding of Dalits from the perspective of emerging Dalit women’s leadership in the Mahar and Mang communities.

\textsuperscript{12} See the special issue of Sugava Publication titled, Problems of Dalit Women, 1998.

Nature and Significance of the Study

For 2500 years, Dalits have been victimised through the structural hierarchy of caste that perpetuates the ethos of caste and maintains the segregation of power. Dalits are oppressed, exploited, discriminated and methodically erased through graded inequality at every level. So, there is hardly any space for Dalit women either in public or private sphere. Dalit women are the most subjugated lot precisely because of the factors of caste, class and gender working to subordinate them. By taking these factors into account, this study will explore and try to understand the present socio-cultural, economic and political scenario of Mahar Buddhist and Mang Hindu women. This exercise will also help us understand the present situation of Indian society in general and marginal sections of Dalit communities in particular. Viewing the entire discourse of caste and gender from the sociological perspective, we have to raise certain questions.

Has social change occurred among Dalits? For delineating this social change among the Dalits, we look at the trends of social transformation within the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. These transformative trends involve governmental schemes and policies. However, this gives rise to a further of set of questions. Can the government of India or Maharashtra implement schemes for Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular? Are the present policies on Dalits result-oriented? Are these policies are being seriously implemented by the concerned government agencies? Are the implementations of these policies ‘successful’? Are the existing policies for Dalits divorced from ground realities? In the social transformation process, mobilisations in institutions, organisations, and concerned political parties, leaders, civil society, non-governmental
organizations etc., play vital roles. Thus, this study will also look at the roles played by both state and non-state actors.

Apart from policy decisions and their implementations, the study will also examine the awareness level among Mahar and Mang women of their own lives and identities. Thus, this research will argue for the restructuring of the policy-making processes of the government by functioning in the political critique of Dalit feminism. Moreover, the empowerment of Mang and Mahar women is the basic objective of this study. The present research attempts to think and re-think the idea of socio-cultural and political differences around which hinge the dominant formation of Mahars and Mangs as well as men and women in Maharashtra. In doing so, it attempts to understand the formulation of the Dalit community from within. Very often, the notion of larger community collectives denies the existence of differences. The present research will focus on the problems in the establishment of Mahar and Mangs in Maharashtra using gender as a primary analytical variable. However, it will not engage with any traditional conflict as communities. So far, very little research work has been done on the Mang movement among Dalits. On the other hand, a lot of studies have attempted to explore the life worlds of the Mahars. Currently, both the Mahars and Mangs of Maharashtra are in a critical condition.

Since the 1990s, liberalisation policies and the wave of globalisation has had far-reaching consequences on the two communities—Mahar and Mang. This is especially so for the women from the two communities; the entire question of their day-to-day existence has been jeopardised due to rapid urbanisation, migration and unemployment. Therefore, it is imperative to question the current cultural and political discourses among the two castes by duly recognising the
differences within. The analysis of the debates in Dalit feminist discourse require that we explore the complex construction of identities of women of different Dalit groups in historical struggles and processes of cultural production.

Objectives of the Study

i) It will explore the differences of patriarchy within Dalits with special focus on Mahar Buddhist and Mang Hindu communities

ii) It will study the inter-group relationship and interaction between these two communities, and the impact of their articulation in the economic, socio-cultural and political aspects by locating historical and contemporary differences.

iii) It will delineate the nature of consciousness or assertion among Mahar and Mang women for their cultural, economic and political rights.

iv) It will also examine the current interaction among the Mahar and Mang communities with special attention to the interaction among women.

Maharashtra: Region and People

Maharashtra has 30 districts. The districts are bifurcated into 4 regions—Western Maharashtra, Konkan, Vidharbha and Marathwada. The cultural fabric of the population can be drawn in the following way. The region is inhabited by people who are distinguished through their allegiance to a social group, a particular religion or the type of profession. A large section of the population, recognized as Maharashtrians, speak Marathi which is the language of the region and the mother tongue of the majority of the population. The non-Marathi speaking population is confined to industrial towns and medium-sized service centres. It includes the Muslims who speak ‘Urdu’ and the petty traders, of often the
Marwaris and the Gujaratis who are not yet assimilated into the Maharashtrian society and follow their own traditions and customs. The transitional zone on the northern and eastern margins of the state has a fair percentage of Hindi speaking people who are not of Maharashtrian origin, but nevertheless are natives like the Marathi speaking people.

The Maharashtrians are divided into groups and sub-groups based on caste, professions and place of origin. Ethnically speaking, there are hardly any traces of Negroid and Mongoloid elements; the region abounds with people of Australoid Europoid origin. Apart from the economic stratification which is universal, caste is an important criterion that determines the social group and the social location of individuals. The Marathas and the Kunbis are the most numerous, making up over half the region's population; both groups claim themselves to be 'Kshatriyas'. The Marathas today are largely the owners and cultivators of land. They are noted for their martial skills. The Marathas still possess control over land and the politics of the region. The Brahmins with their own numerous stratifications are largely represented by the two regional groups, the 'Deshasthas', the natives of the plateau region, and 'Konkanasthas', the immigrants from Konkan. Another group, although numerically not very significant, is the 'Kayasthas' or CKPs. They are largely confined to big cities, particularly Poona and Bombay; some, however, can be found in the Maval region where they hold 'Inam' lands. A progressive community, they are traditional writers who excelled as revenue officers during the Maratha regime.

Thus, the Marathas and the Brahmins form the two top strata of society; other castes still remain underprivileged. Between the Brahmins and Marathas on the one hand, and the Mahars, and Matangs/Mangs on the other, is the most
inclusive group of artisans the *Balutedars*. This group represents a transition on the scale of caste hierarchy. An advanced transport system, which established a more effective contact between the upland and the coast, ushered in a new phase of urbanization. Changes included the transformation of rail side settlements into towns and the rise of many market centres, following the cultivation of cotton over much of Khandesh and Vidarbha. The region's economy assumed a more dynamic shape, responding to market fluctuations in far-off places.

**Mahars and Mangs in Maharashtra**

According to the 1991 census, Maharashtra had a scheduled caste population of 8,757,842, accounting for 11.09 per cent of the state's total population. The 2001 census pegged the state's population at 96,878,627. The scheduled caste population was 9,881,656, constituting 10.2 per cent of the total population. However, district-wise data for the same is unavailable. According to the 1991 census, the highest percentage of the total scheduled caste population is found in Latur (19.6%) followed by Nagpur (18.84%) and Naded (18.15%). Under the 1991 census, there were 59 scheduled castes in the state. The latest caste-wise data is available only for the 1981 census. Of the total 59 scheduled castes enumerated by the census, Mahar, Mang and Chamar are three major castes comprising 83.16 per cent of the total scheduled caste population of the state. The other five castes, namely, Bhangi, Dhor, Lingader, Khatik and Holar constitute 8.42 per cent of the total scheduled castes population.

To understand the two castes better, a detailed discussion of the Mahars and Matangs, based on my field observations, will be made in chapter four and five. However, all these castes within the broad category of Dalits are known as
Scheduled caste. The president of India by Gazette notification, under article 341(1) of the Indian constitution, has declared some caste, races or parts of or groups within caste, races or Scheduled caste as there is no standard definition of Scheduled caste. A slight change was made to the definition of Scheduled caste in 1991. Up to 1981, scheduled caste could belong to Hindu or Sikh religion only; but in the 1991 census, in addition to Hindu and Sikh religion, Scheduled caste could belong to Buddhist and Neo-Buddhist religion also. For Maharashtra too there have been some minor changes in the list which was published in 1981 census; accordingly, in the 1991 census, 59 castes are recognized as Scheduled caste.

Research Universe

In the context of the economic growth of state, Western Maharashtra has played a vital role. Western Maharashtra is home to a major share of the populations of these communities and also a historical background of these respective communities. It is densely populated with several industries. The first co-operative sugar industry of India emerged in Western Maharashtra. This study covers the period from 1962 till 2005, because Maharashtra as a state came into being in 1960. Following the formation of the state, the reins of 'political balance' of entire Maharashtra came under the control of Western Maharashtrian political leaders. Hence, Western Maharashtra is significant in the political discourses. Political balances affect economic balances. Two districts, Ahmadnagar and Sangli, were chosen for collection of data. Ahmadnagar, which falls under the urban category, has witnessed a major impact of urbanisation and globalisation. Sangli, on the other hand, remains under the category of backward/rural districts; it has been witnessing the migration of Dalits away from the district in
large numbers. Conversions, education etc, are the factors that have been taken into consideration from the urban and rural spaces of these two districts. The sampling of a total of eighty women from among the Mahar and Mang groups had representatives from Atpadi and Jamkhad Talukas, and Ahmadnagar and Sangli.

Ahmadnagar

Ahmadnagar district is situated partly in the upper Godavari basin and partly in the Bhima basin occupying a central position in the state. It is situated between 18°2' and 19°9' north latitudes and 73°9' longitudes and 75°5' east longitudes. The district is irregular in shape and resembles a slanting cross with a length of 200 km and a breadth of 210 km. It is surrounded by Nasik district in the North, Aurangabad district in the North-East, Bid district in the East, Osmanabad and Solapur districts in the South, Pune district in the west and Thane district in the North-West. The district is spread over an area of 1,70,800 km and has a population of 33,72,935 as per the 1991 census accounting for 4.27% and 5.54% of the state figures respectively. It ranks first in terms of area and fifth in the terms of population among the 30 districts in the state. The Scheduled caste population according to the 1991 census in Ahmadnagar district was 4,18,479 comprising of 2,17,989 males and 2,00,490 females. They constitute 12.41% of the total population of the district as against 10.62% in the 1981 census. The sex ratio among Scheduled caste population is 920 in 1991. Rural sex ratio is 911 while urban sex ratio is 961. There is a difference between urban and rural sex ratio. The highest sex ratio is in the Akola tahsil (989) and the lowest is in Pathardi tahsil (696). Sex ratio in Shrirampur and Pathardi tahsils are below the district average and sex ratio in the remaining 11 tahsils are above the district average.
Urban sex ratio is the highest in Sangmaner tahsil (995), while it is lowest in Pathardi tahsil (874). Sex ratios in three tahsils are above the district average, while in three tahsils they are below the district average. Among the thirteen towns, the highest sex ratio is in Ahmadnagar cantonment (1024) while the lowest is in Pathardi town (874). Sex ratios in seven towns are above the district average and in six towns they are below the district average.

The literacy rate of males is much higher than that of females. As much as 75.30 per cent of the males are literate while females account for only 45.99 per cent. The tahsil-wise break-up shows that Nagar tahsil with 73.74 per cent literates tops the list, and Akola tahsil with only 49.66 per cent stands at bottom in the district. Out of thirteen tahsils, only 5 are above the district average (61.03%). In most of the cases, the tahsils with urban components have literacy rates higher than the district average, thus confirming the fact that urban centres and surrounding areas have better infrastructure as far as educational facilities are concerned. The tahsils without any urban centres have literacy rates below the district average. Nagar tahsil has the highest literacy rates for both males and females i.e., 85.16 % and 61.13% respectively; Akola tahsil has the lowest rates i.e., 65.35 % and 33.94% for males and females respectively. It is seen that 51.86 per cent of the scheduled caste in Ahmadnagar district are literate, which is below the general literacy rate of the district (61.03). Among males, it accounts for 66.50 per cent while among females it is comparatively lower i.e., 35.84 per cent.
Sangli

Sangli district is one of the southern districts of Maharashtra and is a part of the Deccan plateau. It lies between 16°45' and 17°33' North latitude, and between 73°42' and 75° East longitude. It is surrounded by Satara and Solapur districts in the North, Karnataka state in the East and South Kolhapur district in the South-West; it also has a small boundary with Ratnagiri district in the West. The district has an area of 8,572 sq. km and a population of 2,209,488 as per the 1991 census. It has population density of 258 persons per square km which is slightly than the 257 persons per square km for the state as a whole. It ranks 21st in terms of area and 15th in terms of population among the 30 districts of the state. The 1981 census had recorded a scheduled caste population of 204,352 consisting of 104,141 males and 100,211 females. These accounted for 11.16 per cent of the total population of the district. Among them 37.52 per cent were found to be literate, which is much lower than the district level literacy rate of 46.87 per cent. In all, 40 scheduled castes were recorded in the district. The major scheduled castes in the district included Bedar, Bhambi, Asadaru Holar, Valhar, Mahar, Mehra, Taral, Dhegu, Megu, Mang, Matang, Minimadig etc. Among the major castes, only Bhambi has recorded more cultivators than agricultural labourers. Among the females in the age group 15-19, 61.53 per cent were reported to be married. About 48.04 per cent of males and 77.49 per cent of females have been recorded as illiterate in the district.

The Scheduled caste population according to the 1991 census in Sangli district was 277,458, comprising of 141,100 males and 136,358 females. 72 villages in the district (9.96% of the total number of villages) have no Scheduled caste population at all. Among the remaining 651 villages, the share of scheduled caste
population is 5.00 per cent or less in 111 villages, 5.01 to 10.00 per cent in 15 villages, 10.01 to 15.00 per cent in 190 villages, 15.01 to 20.00 per cent in 132 villages, 20.01 to 30.00 per cent in 55 villages, and 30.01 per cent and above in 9 villages in the district. The decadal growth rate of Scheduled caste population is 35.56 per cent against a mere 20.45 per cent of the district as a whole; thus, Scheduled caste growth rate is nearly two times more than the general growth rate of the district. Out of the total scheduled caste population of the district, 210,429 (75.84%) live in rural areas and the remaining 67,029 (24.16%) live in urban areas. The Scheduled caste population has increased in all tahsils of the district during the last decade. It may be noted that the district level sex ratio of scheduled caste is slightly higher than the general sex ratio of the district. The sex ratio is higher in rural areas and lower in urban areas in the whole district as well as the tahsils. The only exception is Miraj tahsil; here the sex ratio is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Within the district, sex ratio varies between 1,008 in Khanapur and Shirala tahsil and 949 in Atpadi tahsil. It is seen that 54.09 per cent of the scheduled castes in Sangli district are found to be literate, a figure which is slightly less than that of the general literacy rate of the district (62.61%). Among males, it accounts for 68.60 per cent, while for females the rate is comparatively lower.

Methodology

The present research work is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Various methods and techniques were used in collecting qualitative and quantitative data related to the study. It is based on both primary and secondary sources. The emphasis is on primary sources. Since not a single work in this area has been done, I had to build the framework and classify the sources. The study also
makes use of all available literature, accounts of these communities in general and of women in particular in the context of cultural and political debates. Primary data is directly collected from the field mainly with the help of questionnaires but also through pamphlets, documents, manifestos and other data.

In the sampling methods, the stratified sampling technique was used. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to capture different ideas and information about a particular culture from the various socio-economic and educational backgrounds of the people rather the relevant information from the respondents. Focussed interview methods were used to gather information from the local people and political leaders. Observation of the day-to-day activities such as cultural festivals also made manifest the culture of individual as well as groups, and helped the researcher capture the various meaning associated with them. This way, the researcher was able to capture the non-verbal reports as well as verbal report to help cross-examine verbal information. Finally, both primary and secondary sources have been classified and analyzed using suitable methods both of qualitative and quantitative analysis. I have collected the data from two districts namely Ahmadnagar and Sangli to study the variations among the two Dalit groups in the rural and urban context. I have also observed the impacts of such factors as conversion, urbanisation, migration and education in both urban and rural spaces of the two districts, to show how identities have transformed and are continually being transformed for these communities.
Chapterisation

Introduction
This chapter deals with the basic premise of the study and methodology of this research. It is focused on the available literature related to the area of study and shows how it departs from that body of work.

Chapter I - Interrogating Caste, Gender and Patriarchy: Tracing Histories of the Anti-Caste Movement in Maharashtra
This chapter underlines the revolutionary struggle of the anti-caste movement in Maharashtra drawing out its phases and mapping the ways in which the counter-cultural practices of these movements interrogated patriarchy. This is an effort to outline the ways in which the counter cultures of the political struggles of Phule, Shahu and Ambedkar fashioned a path for anti-caste feminism—which in retrospect may be called Phule, Ambedkarite feminism.

Chapter II - Overview of Feminist Scholarship on Casté and Gender
This chapter deals with feminist discourses on the domain of caste and gender in which the focus is on Maharashtra as well as India. However, no specific study on socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of Mahar and Mang women is available. In general, a few studies have been done on the life of Dalit women. The chapter will carry out a review of the available literature relevant for our research.

Chapter III - Dalit Assertions: Tracing a Dalit Feminist Critique
In this chapter, we will map the politics of Dalit feminism since the 1960s to the present, and outline Dalit feminist assertions of the period. The main focus will
be on three fundamental political movements, in which we will try to examine the role of RPI and further see how Mahar and Mang politics followed different paths. It will then delineate how Mahar-Mang tensions in politics are reflected in Dalit feminist politics.


This chapter deals with the ethnographic sketches of the life worlds of Mang women. It explores the everyday politics from their social, political, economic perspectives, and narrates their struggles for existence and resistances. It describes the rituals, customs, and practices and attempt to re-read the existing stratification of women from this caste. However, it also looks at the nuances of economic and occupational changes among the Mang women from rural and urban areas, and tries to understand the nature of work such as bonded labour, agricultural labour etc. Therefore, it creates a dialogue in an attempt to see the modes of patriarchy and political consciousness within them.

Chapter V - Mahar Women: Multitudes of Embeddedness

This chapter is a narration of Mahar Buddhist women’s everyday experiences in the arena of social, economic and political positions. It will examine the existing customs and practices of them. Further it will focus on rural and urban variation in the public and private sphere and try to understand the political consciousness and multiple patriarchies.

Chapter VI- Patterns of Difference.: A Comparative Analysis of Mang and Mahar women.

This chapter is a comparative study of the Mang and Mahar women through the ethnographic sketches of their life worlds. It explores their every day life from a
social, political and economic perspective, and narrates their struggles for existence. It describes their rituals, customs and practices, and attempts to re-read the existing stratification of the women of two castes. It also looks at the nuances of economic and occupational changes among the two groups of women from the rural and urban areas, and tries to understand the nature of work such as bonded labour, agricultural labour etc. Therefore, it enters into a dialogue in an attempt to understand the modes of patriarchy and political consciousness within these two groups.

Conclusion

This chapter deals with the critical implications of this research study for the future of Dalit feminism in Maharashtra.