Chapter V

The Politics of Protective Discrimination and Postcolonial Theory

The issue of reservation of seats for disadvantaged sections has always been a bone of contention both at the level of theory and practical politics. Dalits have seen it as a vital political strategy for their liberation whereas the upper caste intellectuals have seen and depicted it from different angles. The present chapter's concern is to examine the historic importance of protective discrimination and its inevitability as a political strategy for historically exploited communities. Postcolonial theorists have never paid adequate attention to understanding its centrality to dalit movement in particular and to Indian politics in general. Their apathy towards the issue of reservations has to be dealt with in relation to their overall rejection of dalit politics and theory as legitimate ones.

Since it is the dalit woman who is the subject of the present work, it is the upper caste women's politics for reservations, which is put to examination in this chapter. It seeks to explain that upper caste women have been locating their politics within the purview of their caste, class boundaries. So, as the postcolonialists and many other cultural thinkers argue, caste is not simply a social system with specific cultural features compatible to Indian society but it is a system of oppression. Whether the people of the dominant castes agree or not, caste also continues to be a conscious tool of coercion exercised willfully by the exploiting castes. Postcolonialists rush to ambush western Reason and this brings in its wake a stampede by all the repressive arrangements of native Reason.

As this chapter tries to explore, the issue of reservations has had a long struggle and the upper caste women in India have tried to build their struggle for equal rights on the basis of this logic during the British colonial period. By 930s it had become a powerful claim of the Dalits as a liberating tool. The aim of the chapter is to unravel how differently the issue of reservations has been treated and understood by the Indian intellectuals. The point is that the Dalits' claim to reservation has been received with less respect and has often been ridiculed whereas the upper caste women's claims to the same has received greater sympathy and respect. More than this, the base on which
upper caste women make such claims reveal extremely surprising dynamics of Indian gender politics. For instance, they do not extend the same logic of reservation that they use for their own advantage to Dalit politics. Such paradoxical attitudes have unknowingly challenged the artificial cleft of the land into the colonial and postcolonial, as proposed by the postcolonialists. The postcolonialists end towards a loose usage of the term 'subaltern', unhesitantly mix up the historic political rivalries that exist among different communities in the modern political world. Such a formulation also serves to present India as empty of heterogeneties. The more a significant reason to build a chapter on these lines is the great range of prejudices which the postcolonialists demonstrated when dealing with caste and gender questions. As it has been argued in the previous chapters they have treated the "Indian" women's question with some care and respect and give it milder treatment even as they rejected a similar respectable treatment to the dalit question. It is precisely the purpose of the present chapter to reaffirm most of the findings and criticisms that have been proposed in the first three chapters.

This chapter starts with a brief portrayal of the mainstream women's movement, its struggles for political rights, and its specific, almost exclusive focus on upper caste women. It will examine how these women have constructed their politics on the lines of omission, thus disallowing, any possibility of others like Dalits, muslims and other women from putting forth their ideas of liberation based on the same political logic. In other words, the upper caste women have guarded their theory so closely and have so constantly removed all such provisions as would allow any united action or thinking along with others. This chapter titled "The Politics of Protective Discrimination and Postcolonial Theory" tries to reveal the casteist gender dynamics of this movement. It starts with the early phase of the women's movement and concludes with a critical assessment of the contemporary women's movement for reservations. As has been explained, the whole chapter is structured around a dalit feminist critique against the Postcolonial theory.
Many writers on the Indian women's movement believe that it was born out of the hindu male reformers' efforts in the 19th and early 20th centuries. H.C. Upadyaya writes, "It was a bourgeoisie feminist movement involving middle class women who campaigned for the extension of educational opportunities and acting rights and later property rights. The reformists of the last century infused in their women relatives their favourite ideologies and encouraged them to participate in public life through forming associations and holding conferences. The idea was to project a progressive image to impress Britain in order to win more political power." A great number of upper caste, educated women identified with organizations like the All India Women's Conference. Thus it is evident that the class-caste combination has everything to do with the very political nature of this movement.

A Brie/Account of Upper Caste Women's Fight for Political Rights:

Margaret Cousins of the Women's Indian Association formed a women's delegation to meet Edwin Montague, Secretary of State for India in 1917. The purpose of the delegation was to discuss the issue of enfranchisement of (elite) women. The women's delegation comprised of 18 Indian women and 4 European women. They took this initiative under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu. They went and met Montague on December 17th of 1917 when he came to India to implore popular opinion on the subject of a new Indian constitution. The delegation submitted a memorandum asking for women's franchise. The Indian men disagreed with these demands initially, but after two years they came forward to support them. The British showed were less than enthusiastic about the demands and did not even mention it in the Montague-Chelmsford report. Southborough Franchise Committee and the Indian Provincial and Central Governments also rejected the women's claim in 1918 and 1919. Southborough Committee took a tour in India to assist the Montague-Chelmsford reforms by framing a list of electoral regulations. It emphasized on the conservatism and social cleavages in Indian society and cited this as the main reasons for rejecting women's franchise. The Montague-Chelmsford report of 1918 also expressed the same views, "The immense masses are
poor, ignorant and helpless... [there] runs through India a series of cleavages... which constantly threaten solidarity. But still Montague-Chelmsford set up property qualification as a basis for enfranchisement. This had discouraged many Hindu women whose community did not allow them to own property. As a result of their agitation the Montague-Chelmsford Reform Act of 1919 gave the Hindu women the right to vote in elections to all state legislatures but not to the Council of State for electing the Governor-General. But to secure this right, Hindu women had to bargain with the British and assure them that this right need not be extended to the other women. In other words, only those women who had educational and property qualifications were able to secure this franchise and they did not make any appeal that the same right to expanded to include all other women. Such a claim would have equated 'the' women with other women at least apparently. But by this provision only those women of the land who already had the privileges of certain rights based on their caste-class status were able to earn more rights on modern lines. This phase was truly a quasi-hindutva phase for the Hindu women's movement in India. Very soon, instead of becoming more liberal or radical on democratic lines, this movement withdrew into an anti-people, Hindu-revival phase.

Upper Caste Women get the right to Vote:

The period between 1917 to 1919 was crucial for Indian upper caste men also. Upper caste educated males now came forward to support the Hindu women's demand because they understood by then that the women's demands for political rights and their own political strategies went hand in glove. It also boosted the moral-esteem of the elite Hindu men in their interaction with British imperialist men. It became an opportunity to show the British that they were more progressive than the latter, who had given franchise to their women only recently, and that too after an agitation of fifty years. Though the Indian elite rejected the issue of women's suffrage when it was initially proposed by a delegation of women in 1917, by 1919, all the crucial political groups sent their representatives to the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill in 1919 to testify support. After the Joint Select Committee hearings, the Government of India Act 1919 left the issue to the Indian provincial legislatures to decide. Due to the endorsement they had secured from the elite Indian male, the Joint Select Committee was
able to favour women's suffrage and thus appeared more democratic than the Southborough Committee. Elite women's groups had also become more organized by 1919 and had set up protests against the Southborough Committee and had even sent four women representatives to London. They clarified that special arrangements need not be made for women's polling. This was the response they offered to the British objection that women's polling involved extra expenses. Thus they were seen as stepping out of the thresholds of their homes without any extra arrangements or protection; this was seen as a legitimate act in the new politics of liberation. The elite Indian women displayed their disappointment when the decision was finally left to the Indian legislatures. They lobbied with the members of the legislative councils and insisted that they pass resolutions in favor of women's suffrage. Since the elite men evinced a positive attitude to the issue, the women did not face many skirmishes in pursuing their aim. By the 1920s many Indian state legislatures had given the right to franchise to women. Stri Dharma, readily attributed the reason for the speedy resolution of the elite women's suffrage by Indian men (this was in the context of the U.P Legislative Council) to Hindu religion: "The high tone of the debate and the democratic attitude toward women are the natural result of the freedom for women seen in the pilgrim centers of this religious province." P.S. Sivaswami Aiyer's critical comment discloses another hidden dimension in the easy resolution of the issue of women's suffrage. He argues (as mentioned somewhere in the chapter that the desire to appear progressive before the British was the driving force behind the elite male of India passing the pro-women resolution sanctioning suffrage." The nucleus of the ideological base of the movement is thus carefully knitted around hindutva interests.

The arguments of the women involved in the politics for enfranchisement of Indian women reveal the dominant ideology underwriting the Hindu women's movement. Since it was the time of the Khalifat movement, Sarojini Naidu made skillful appeals to Hindu Muslim unity. She declared that women's franchise would assure Hindu Muslim unity because "of the solidarity of the women in India." It is clearly Gandhi's support of the Khalifat movement and his interpretation of it, which supplied the conceptual jargon of unity between hindus and muslims. Annie Besant, in her turn, applied Hindu
revivalist ideas and stated that sex-based discrimination emerged from the West and that those who opposed women’s franchise in fact "objected to the revival of the old Hindoo custom of recognizing women’s place in public life."\(^{13}\)

**Congress under Gandhi and the turn in the women’s movement:**

Congress withdrew from legislative politics after officially supporting women’s suffrage in 1918. Gandhi’s entrance into Congress resulted in a shift of the naming in Congress politics. The *upper caste* people who believed in legislative politics left the left the Congress. Those who remained in the Congress were named as "no-changers". Gandhi disapproved of women’s suffrage from the beginning and put the Congress’s national politics through great changes. A new version of nationalism, which can be called the *native* or hindutva stream, became more legitimate. What was more dangerous, this version of nationalism acquired moral and spiritual tones. Nationalism emerged as a moral force and any resistance to it by any individual or community was open to easy misunderstanding and also to their subsequent ostracization. It took almost a decade for the Dalits and the muslims to realize its real strategic political intentions. Though many *upper caste* women who had been in the women’s movement were easily lured by the Gandhian version of nationalism and resisted separate political activities for women’s liberation, there always remained a group of women who stubbornly adhered to the earlier idea of women’s liberation and political rights. A great common feature uniting both these sets of women was that both groups vehemently rejected extending the principle of reservation or protective discrimination to Muslims and Dalits.

**Simon Commision:**

Women’s rights issue came to the forefront again in the late 1920s. The India Statutory Commission (also called Simon Commission) was set up in 1928 to suggest when a responsible government could be set up in India. The Congress opposed the Commission since it was constituted entirely by British men. The Congress also declared complete independence to be its aim. An All-Parties Conference met and produced the "Nehru Report" in August 1928. Under its Declaration of Fundamental Rights the Report granted equal rights to women as citizens.\(^{14}\) The Statutory
Commission suggested an increase in the proportion of women voters by 33.5 percent of the total electorate. The mainstream women's movement of today has also put forth the same demand of 33.5 percent reservation in the political bodies. Why 33.5%? Why cannot it be fifty percent? Or to make it more sensible why cannot it be proportional to the female population in the country? These questions demand serious enquiry. The Commission also declared wifehood as a qualification (whereby both widows and wives above the age of twenty five would be allowed to vote). It also set up educational qualifications by which women over the age of twenty one years could vote.

The Civil Disobedience Movement:

In 1930 Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience movement in response to all-white Simon Commission. This was to protest the then Viceroy's refusal to conduct a Round Table Conference (RTC from here after), in order to work out a plan to grant Dominion Status to India. Women under the leadership of elite hindu women, participated in this movement in a massive scale. Though Gandhi opposed women's participation in the salt Satyagraha, many women had taken a very active part in the Disobedience Movement. While the Gandhi-Irwin talks were taking place in 1931, the Congress organized its Karachi session in April. Here it formally adopted the final principles of the new constitution. When the 2nd Round Table Conference failed, the Congress recommenced Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932. Ambedkar shifted his demand from adult franchise to separate electorates for the Dalits for a period of ten years during the time of 2nd RTC.

Some of the upper caste women participated in the RTC:

The elite Hindu women did not see the joint electorates proposed by the Nehru Report as deterring the pursuit of their political aims. Muslims and later Dalits (by the time of the Second Round Table Conference) opposed the idea of joint electorates. The upper caste women, however, did not show any interest collaborating with these other marginalized communities to make the base of their politics broader and more inclusive. This also meant that they rejected learning anything from these movements. If they had
shown even a little inclination to understand the political importance of separate electorates they would have comprehended the importance of asking for separate electorates on the basis of gender as well. Their political methods, however, were not likely to tread such a radical trajectory since their aim was not the enfranchisement of all women of the land, much less their elevation to the legislatures. In this they resented the incorporation of the political interests of the others. The early phase of 1930s was a period of political turmoil for many communities.

Participating in the first RTC was understood to be an anti-national activity since the whole nation was interpreted as participating in the nationalist fight of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Any step that deviated or opposed this line of action was an anti-patriotic one. But not all Hindu women were against the Commission. Women like Rani of Mandi, Mrs. Ahmed and Mrs.Chitamber met the Commission and asked for the extension of franchise for women and for reservation of seats. The Women’s Indian Association refused to send its delegates to the RTC. Interestingly, Nawaz Begum and Mrs.Subbarayan came forward to represent women in the RTC. They claimed that reservation of seats should be allotted to women so that they would be able to lobby and fight for special representation for the other depressed social groups like lower castes.

They wrote that “a fair field and no favour” at the present time as an illusory one for even with a franchise which produced equal voting power with men, we doubt very much whether, at first set off, it would produce a real quality of opportunity in the political arena. Muthulakshmi Reddy resigned her seat in the Madras Legislative Council and joined the Congress. The Rastriya Stree Sabha and the women in Congress arranged protest meetings against these two women. They called these two women traitors of the nation’s cause and declared that they were not the real representatives of Indian women because they were not elected by them.

*Upper caste Women’s Attitude towards Dalits’ rights:*

One group of the women’s movement under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu came forward to support the claim of political representation on the basis of adult suffrage and not on reserved seats. Rani of Mandi, Mrs.Chitamber and Mrs. Ahmad went
and met the Simon Commission to present their views for the increased participation of women in the legislatures. This group of the women's movement, mainly under the leadership of Radhabai Subbarayan, insisted on special franchise qualifications and reservation of seats for women. Radhabai Subbrayan and Begum Shah Nawaz attended the 1st RTC and supported the idea of wifehood becoming a qualification for franchise and argued for the reservation of seats for women in the legislatures. But they rejected the idea of reserving seats on a community basis. Their support was only for reservation on the basis of gender. The only difference that existed between these two groups of women was on the issue of whether Indian women should work for 'national emancipation' or whether they should try for gender emancipation first. The Sarojini Naidu faction opted to prioritize national politics and the Radhabai's faction gender politics.

But surprisingly both these groups of women showed a similar attitude towards the question of allocating political privileges on the basis of community. The former (who prioritized the nation's emancipation) became increasingly busy with Hindu male nationalist politics and ignored the fact that the caste question had to be dealt with autonomously. They extended the same argument of reservation as a threat to national unity when it came to the gender question also, since it was not possible for them to argue one way in the case of dalit politics and its contrary when it came to gender politics. They thus failed to understand that aligning with political groups of other historically oppressed communities like Dalits opened up greater possibilities for gaining political privileges than their collusion with dominant upper caste men. The Sarojini faction failed to secure any significant democratic space for the women of the land after independence since it aligned with nationalist politics where the interests of the Hindu male community were given first priority. The second faction of Rahadabai failed to secure any long-lasting rights for the women due to their failure to align with the dalit politics. Both these groups failed to develop an integrated theory and position about women's politics. It is wrong therefore to call these instances of women’s political participation as liberal feminism since they failed to develop any consistent ideology about Indian women, and also because their ideas never encompassed all the women.
communities of this land. Their politics was spurred by a desire to broaden the space for Hindu women and at the same time to stabilize the status of their male community vis-à-vis the British colonizers and all the others who were involved in various political fights against upper caste men.

They insisted on preserving essential Hindu womanhood and retaining Hindu rule because they did not want their community’s age-old political power to be destabilized. They wanted the newly emerging dalit political power to be destroyed. Since this movement exhibited more hindutva facets it would be more apt to call it a kind of hindutva women’s movement than a liberal one.

Congress Re-entering into Negotiations with the British and ‘Others’:

When the issue of dominion status seemed impossible and when the others like Dalits and Muslims seemed intent on pursuing separatist political paths, the Congress became alarmed enough to compromise on its demand for dominion status and become more realistic. This re-entery into negotiations with the British and also the other contesting communities, marked the failure of the Civil Disobedience Movement. By this time many had got disillusioned by Gandhi’s tactics of civil disobedience. A more practical strategy was urgently required. More than the realization of the meaninglessness of such tactics, what was more alarming to the Congress was the swiftness with which the other communities were moving. At this juncture Congress under the guidance of Gandhi again entered into the field of negotiations both with the British and the others. This also meant compromise of the Congress from dominion status for limited rights within the colonial frame. When the Congress was caught between its demand for dominion status and the more compelling contemporary realities (mainly posed by the growing politicization of the Dalits and Muslims), the upper caste women were trying to make their own inroads. It also looked as if it meant little for the upper caste women (who were asking for women’s rights) whether the dream of the Congress for dominion status got realized or the British idea of limited power came into effect. This showed their lack of any integrated idea of liberation. Their occasional but timely collaborations with mainstream nationalist politics on the one hand and their total
aloofness from the dalit and Muslim politics on the other, expressed their limited perception and also opportunism. But it is also clear that the same amount of wrath that the Dalits and Muslims received due to their separatist bargains with the British was not received by the upper caste women who mobilized for political rights irrespective of mainstream nationalist political moods.

Hindu women of both the groups, under these circumstances became actively receptive to Hindu nationalist politics. As part of the Congress session in April 1931, leaders of WIA, AI WC and NCWI met to frame suffrage demands in order to support the Congress principles of adult suffrage and joint electorates. Under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu, they came out with a joint Memorandum 1. Sarojini Naidu attended the 2nd RTC and presented this Memorandum. Radhabai presented her views that women definitely needed reservation. She asserted that it was far from reality to presume that women can enter into the legislatures by competing on equal terms with the men. Many vocal Hindu women appeared before the Lothian Committee time and again and argued against the principle of preferential treatment. They even vehemently combated the idea of reservation of seats for women (which was a favorite demand for most of the elite women in the initial phase of the women's movement) in order to hinder the Dalits' demands. They argued that such reservations of the basis of community would "create a spirit of communalism amongst women." 

Hindu women under the leadership of Congress declared, "To seek any form of preferential treatment would be to violate the integrity of the universal demand of Indian women, for absolute equality of political statue." This shift of the Hindu women's movement to the Congress can be understood as Hindu women's collaboration with Hindu nationalism and as a statement against the dalit movement which was strongly fighting for such rights. Naidu, Begum and Subbarayan prepared to attend second RTC. Subbarayan and Begum repeated their demand of Dominion Status for India. Sarojini Naidu and Muthulakshmi Reddy put forward the majoritarian argument saying that a few safeguards given to a minority section of people will not open the doors of freedom for the nation. Reddy stated, "...the only way to bring the Brahmans, the women and the
Pariahs together on a common platform is by enfranchising the women and the depressed classes on equal terms with others. If the women and the depressed classes have freedom, power and responsibility, I am sure that they would very soon learn how to rectify the present social evils.” Understandably, Congress withdrew any cooperation for the Committee. The 2nd RTC could not come to a conclusion about the issue of political representation of the Dalits. Therefore, British appointed the Indian Franchise Committee (Lothian Committee) to survey and study the issues related to electoral politics. The Lothian Committee published its report in May 1932. It declared that women should be treated “as one of the main sections of the community” and should be represented in a method identical to the depressed classes, Muslims and Sikhs. The Communal Award recommended communally classified electorates for the women.

This context again opened the space for Hindu women to express their views in terms of equality vs. justice, larger interest vs. sectarian interests, nation vs. community and so on. Begum and Mrs. Subbarayan who had been arguing for the reservation of seats for women also differed on the issue of communal representation. Begum issued a paradoxical statement that sacrifices would have to be made for the common good.” The Madras Brahman, Subbarayan regarded taking the benefits of the Communal Award as a criminal offence. She stated, “It is inconceivable how woman can play her part as an educated and influential citizen if she is to enter political life by the communal door and with a communal outlook.” The myth of the “national” interest was so prevailing that even the Muslim women yielded to it. In the 1932 National Conference at Lucknow, the All India Women’s Conference including its Muslim members condemned the Communal Award. But this confusion existed for the Muslim women only for a short while. Muslim minorities reasonably argued that the qualifications of wifehood and literacy would enfranchise more Hindu women than Muslim women. The Communal Award had finally seen light in August 1932. Women led by Sarojini Naidu, showed great outrage to both the Lothian Committee and the Communal Award. Gandhi’s fast invoked a wave of sympathy among the Hindu women. The Dalits finally had to compromise due to this heavy moral blackmailing and had to make do with the small provisions they got through the Yeravad or Poona Pact.
Reasonably, the only woman who attended the 3\textsuperscript{rd} RTC was Begum Shah Nawaz. It was held in the winter of 1932. Since the political atmosphere had become very sensitive, the British became apprehensive about expanding women's franchise. Prominent women from AIWC, WIA, NCWI gathered to draw a second common memorandum-Memorandum II. But they failed to come to a single agreement about joint electorates. Begum Shah Nawaz by this time had learnt to represent the Muslim League's view and supported separate electorates.\textsuperscript{32} In 1935, the Hindu women issued a joint statement and declared that they had sacrificed "all special privileges for ourselves for the sake of the common good."\textsuperscript{33} Though the demand for reservation on the basis of gender was not incorporated in the Government of India Act 1935, they decided to participate in elections on a non-reservation basis. But the Standing Committee of AIWC realized that it lacked both organizational and monetary expediency to withstand elections. Therefore, they decided not to let its members stand for elections.\textsuperscript{34} Various parties had anyway nominated women to stand in the 1937 elections. Thus on the whole the women's movement could not play a powerful role in electoral mobilizations due to lack of structural support though the women's turnout increased over time in 1930s.

What does this imply?

Congruence Between the Social background and the Ideology of the Women in Politics:

The numerical strength of the first phase of the women's movement was very low but it nevertheless enjoyed great access to the native elite and British authorities due to the social status of its members. Due to the same reason, that is, due to their upper status in society as upper caste, urban and English educated, they failed to mobilize women from rural areas, and also the women of the other communities. It must be noted that
they made little effort to reach the un-enfranchised women of the lower castes. They opted for limited, elite politics to the politics of mass mobilization.

Women under Sarojini Naidu insisted on urban adult franchise. They claimed that the urban elite educated were entitled to represent the illiterate, rural and poor women. Amrit Kaur for instance said, "I hold that [it is] the women in the urban areas who are voicing the sentiments... of women as a whole." The first point to be noted here is that the upper caste women of this period effectively applied the concept 'Indian woman' in a generic sense. Equating Hindu womanhood with Indian womanhood has been a strategy evolved by the Hindu women to hijack the privileges that modernity offered to all women of India. For instance, Sarojini Naidu delivered a lecture when she was made Congress President in 1925 where she sees her presidency as "a generous tribute to Indian womanhood and a token of your loyal recognition of its legitimate place in the secular and spiritual counsels of the nation."

Both Sarojini Naidu and Begum held many similar views about the role of woman and her place as a wife, mother etc. But interestingly they took opposing stances regarding the issue of reservation for women. Begum stood for the demand of reservation of seats and special constituencies, put up by the Muslim League. Being a Congress candidate, Sarojini Naidu opposed both of these demands as the Congress had opposed them. It is thus clear that they have prioritized their communities' interests first to the women's cause. It is curious to note how they from time to time constructed these particular political motivations. For instance, the period of 1930s was a period where all the political groups and social movements stood on their toes to fight for their rights and futures in the forthcoming independent nation. The Congress under the leadership of Gandhi introduced the "equality" argument to justify its anti-preferential treatment stand. It was Sarojini Naidu who carried this Congress view into women's politics. She vehemently argued that there was no need for preferential treatment of women. She gave mainly two reasons for this, one was that "Indian" women were always treated as equals with their men, and second was that they even participated in politics and battles. She 

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argued therefore that the acceptance of preferential treatment for women would be an acknowledgement of their inherent weakness as women.\textsuperscript{37} Naidu's argument carried three elements which have been reinforced as strong concepts in making the anti-reservation discourse of the present day. One is that the myth of equal treatment was once again reiterated. It made use of the twisting rhetoric of the equality vs. justice. This assumption expresses that any preferential treatment would amount to injustice to the “majority” people. This argument was powerfully used throughout the nationalist period.

Begum on the other hand personified the insecurity of a minority Muslim community. Begum's demand for reservation for women should not be understood as her real fight against gender inequality that exists in the Muslim community. The over-romanticized version of the Hindu woman's status by Naidu also should not be understood in its literal sense. These two women ideologues who emerged during the nationalist period were in fact operating as the embodiments of the messages that the Muslim and Hindu communities were sending to both the British government and the masses of Indian people at that time. It does not mean that these women ideologues were mere passive agents in the hands of their communities. It is to say that these women prioritized their community interests over gender interests and it was a deliberate and conscious act. These two women shared the same conservative notions while defining the roles and status of women. But when it came to their community these two women unhesitatingly operated as the mouth-pieces to their community politics.

The only commonality these women shared was their elite, ruling class status. Due to this commonality they shared the same kind of views about the position of women in this piece of land. Preservation of race through the right seed has always been the area of both fear and also the agenda for almost all ruling classes in human history. Glorification of the woman as mother, and as docile wife had been formulated to see that no other castes would be mingled in the ruling castes. That is why womanhood is always equated to the sexual purity, correct race, motherhood and so on. Most of these women also lacked an integrated point of view of women's liberation. Begum Shaw Nawaz of
Lahore and Sarojini Naidu in Bombay for instance often expressed views, which contrasted with the principles of feminism. They argued vehemently that the right place of the Indian woman was her home. Both of them valorized the status of Indian woman in glorious terms. Begum Shaw depicted the woman as occupying a powerful role, like being in charge of finance at home. In her own words "In that little kingdom she is not only in charge of finance and of home and foreign affairs, but she is also the custodian of the future generations". Sarojini Naidu expressed that "woman" is the highest priestess of home. Both of these women perceived the woman primarily in terms of motherhood. Sarojini Naidu repeatedly argued that franchise would educate and inspire a woman to inculcate the spirit of nationalism in her children. Thus it is clear that the women's movement in British colonial period was not structured or based on any liberating gender-oriented perceptions or notions.

Absence of ‘other’ Women:

The whole phenomenon of the women's movement in India demands enquiry because of the conspicuous absence of the other women in this movement. A few epistemological questions can be justifiably framed relating to the differential participation of women in the womens' movement in India. The primary question would be to ask what it is that can be named as the women's movement? If elitist women like Begum and Sarojini Naidu prioritized their respective community interests to their gender interests and still called their politics women's politics (or, are named so by the modern scholars) why cannot the Dalit and various tribal movements also be called as women's movement, especially where innumerable Dalit and tribal women participated throughout the British colonial period and even after that? The overwhelming presence of the dalit and the adivasi women in their movements tempts a dalit feminist to name them also as women's movements. If one consents to an argument that the women's movement of elite women was both a women's and a nationalist movement, by the same logic one should accept that the adivasi and dalit movements were equally engaging in women's movements. Like these Hindu and elite Muslim women the Dalit and the
Adivasi women knew that their future depended on the success of their community movements.

**Conclusion:**

The moral basis of the women's movement, which was predicated on the principle of reservation/protective discrimination, had been dismantled due to *upper caste* women's sudden subversion of the whole women's political agenda when they suddenly jumped into the Congress led nationalist politics. The political future of women's politics became quite unpredictable and their political vision became severely mutilated. Gender sensitive theories, which probably sprouted for the first time on this soil were rendered futile in such a reactionary state of affairs. It was for certain that the women's politics in India completely collapsed into the Gandhi led nationalist politics and its fate fell into the hands of Hindu male ideologues of the Congress. Thus the women's movement in India lost whatever semi-autonomous status it might have enjoyed in its initial phase (the dalit feminist calls it semi-autonomous because the establishment of women's politics became possible due to their status as wives and daughters of elite Hindu, western educated men). Worse, it became prey to the extremely ambiguous Gandhian conceptual circus.

This further compromised the conceptual luggage of women ideologues, who had already flooded the political domain of women's politics with backward hindutva jargon. In other words, the spiritualisation of women's status in politics and the investment of mythical powers to her became a common symptom of all streams of hindutva politics. Sarojini Naidu feels, "The true standard of a country's greatness lies...in the undying spiritual ideals of love and sacrifice that inspired and sustained the mothers of the race." The other characteristic that they attributed to the Hindu women was that of being "sakthi." Such statements reveal only the overconfidence that the hindutva revivalists already injected in the nationalist atmosphere to camouflage the Hindu women's real and, brutal subjugation. What they wanted the Hindu women to do was to remain as mother-citizens and wife-citizens. It meant that these women were valued and valorized as "real" women only when they lived out the roles of sacrificial mother and docile wife, imposed on them by Hindu religious texts. The national identity
of a woman in India had acquired dangerous overtones like the above and this outcasted every other woman who could not fulfill these requirements. Since the dalit women's married and maternal status were never respected and counted, they failed to become national subjects either during the anti-British colonial times or in the present.

These Hindu women, like their male counterparts did not forget to link the freedom of India with the revival of Hinduism. The Rani of Baroda in her presidential address claimed, "Here with the rising tide of revival of Indian culture, here at the beginning of what may rightly be regarded as an Indian renaissance, we are assembled to discuss those things which are essential for the education and general well being of the future of mothers of the race." Sarojini Naidu writes, "We must realize with thrilling pride how farreaching was the influence of women in bringing political and spiritual unity in ancient India." Besant also feels, "Indian greatness will not return until Indian womanhood obtains a larger, freer, fuller life, for largely in the hands of the Indian women must be the redemption of India."

Thus since Hindu women did not want to rectify any of their sanctioned ignorances, deconstruct the ideological inputs that flowed from the caste minded hindu nationalist men (it does not mean that were acting as sponges to absorb whatever flowed from the mouths of their men. It only indicates the general male domination of their circumstances and also the readiness with which these women yielded to) or introspect their own status as hindu women, they had to face a very bitter experience from the same "male nationalists" who encouraged these women to fight for their rights along with men and convinced them that once independence was achieved everything would be set right. When the Hindu men finally resolved the women's question, the issue retained all the pre-modern characteristics. All these hindu women intellectuals who showed a complete blindness in case of the womanhood, motherhood and so on did not demonstrate the same level of ignorance when it came to the question of property rights or domestic violence. This is evident in the well-known controversies that occurred through the debates over the Hindu Code Bill.
Lobbying and appealing were the main strategies employed by the Hindu women. Since the majority of the "other" women were mobilized under various social movements like the peasant, tribal, anti-caste movements etc., the interests of the Hindu women were not rendered sufficiently appealing for these sections of women. The upper caste women could have made use of other women's groupings within their respective community politics. This would have stretched out into political alliances with them. But the Hindu women openly rejected to initiate any such steps themselves.

The Hindu women's failure in the politics of mass mobilization is the main cause for these women's recession from electoral politics after independence. Only those social groups which could command a good amount of mass and social base and an autonomous identity during the British colonial period, and those who could stay aloof from upper caste politics succeeded in participating in the constitution making process and in reaping whatever small constitutional benefits that were possible at that historical juncture. The women's movement due to its lack of adequate mass base and its moral inability to question Hindu society's anti-social order failed terribly in all the constitutional negotiations. Because it accompanied the Hindu patriarchs in propagating and nurturing the ideas about women in accordance with the essentially anti-women hindutva worldview, they failed to extract any pro-women democratic stand by the same men after independence.

Although the Dalits' contribution to the civil rights campaign is rarely acknowledged and written about, the Dalits, including Dalit women, had shown a more progressive attitude toward civil rights and political rights than Hindu women. Dalits throughout the British colonial period maintained a consistent political philosophy of political rights, while the Hindu nationalists, including Hindu nationalist women, propagated a narrow suffrage and limited civil and political rights. Dalits also hardly demonstrated any resistance towards women's voting and to their entrance into legislatures, thereby questioned their traditional role.
Moreover dalit men as a community supported and laboured for more political powers for women. From Phule to Ambedkar they took every possible step to advocate equal political rights for women. The issue of women's rights was brought forward by Ambedkar after independence during the making of the constitution. This is proof that the Dalit movement was very keen about the liberation of women and that it exhibited a great maturity towards the upper caste women's movement, thought it never cooperated with the former throughout the British colonial period. Another important point that is to be noted here is Ambedkar's sudden and increased interest in the women's rights. It is clear that most of the proposals that he and the two women present in the Constituent Assembly (namely Amrita and Hansa Mehta) put forward were not very much in the interest of Dalit women. This is not due to some political strategy of Ambedkar whereby he decided to dedicate his energy and time, at this historic juncture, to the issue of the rights of upper caste women. It cannot be denied that his marriage with an upper caste woman would have led him to give such an excessive importance to the exclusive rights of upper caste women, going so far as to even resign his post as Law Minister. This was definitely at the cost of Dalit movement.

What is more surprising is the constant refusal of the upper caste women of today to accept this historical support that the dalit movement offered the women's movement. Upper caste women took a very powerful part in the anti-Madal agitation. The issue of women's reservation in political bodies also is replete with the same old arguments that it would divide the women, that it would allow less meritorious women to enter political bodies and lead to its lumpenisation, etc. As Hindu women feel and believe, the Dalit woman also believes that equal political opportunities will be an answer to most of the oppressions that they face. For instance Rekha Thakur writes, "The serious issue of violence against women would be successfully dealt with if women came to power... Bhanwari Devi was raped because being a dalit woman she has dared to challenge the Savarna (caste hindu) men. Oppressed caste women have been exploited in similar fashion by the men of oppressor castes. If these women come to power: the status of women who come from the lower strata would rise... the culprits to a certain extent remain under check...[lower caste women] will play a role in the machinery that is
responsible for punishing the criminals.” Since the Dalit women are more oppressed, it is obvious that they need more political rights to participate in the decision making of the nation than anybody else. As most of them are daily wage earners their labour and economy needs the protection of the legislature.

As the Dalits have long been realised, it is not just caste politicians who pose obstacles to the reservation within reservation. Hindu women, including intellectuals who should have been their natural allies, frequently turn out to be their most formidable foes. Now all the hindu male politicians take advantage of this anti-dalit sentiment which is theoretically reproduced by the descendents of Naidus and Rajkumaris of the nationalist times. Brinda Karat (CPM), is one of the opponents of the caste-based women’s reservation. She argues that gender discrimination has nothing to do with caste. The opponents of caste based reservation mainly use the below listed reasons to oppose caste-based reservation:

1. It (caste based reservation) divides the women
2. Such a demand for caste based reservation shows the lack of trust in the capabilities of other women.
3. Men who are asking for it are actually male chauvinists. They don’t want any women’s reservation. They put forward the caste based reservation only an excuse to hinder women’s political empowerment.

On the other hand MPs like Bhagwathi Devi, Phoolan Devi, Kanti Singh, Uma Bharathi (though she is in the Right wing which opposes any kind of reservation) have demanded it. A close observation of the debate will reveal that Hindu women like Brinda Karat are following on the footprints of their foremothers who fought for political rights in British colonial period. In fact her argument resembles that of Mrs.Subbarayan, when she argued for women’s reservation but rejected the same preferential treatment for others. Those hindu women who rejected any preferential treatment for women were better than women like Mrs.Subbarayan and Brinda Karat, who will not feel embarassed to argue for more rights for themselves but do not support the rights of other and more
exploited sections. This phenomenon also raises serious questions about the kind of Marxist politics that is operating in India. Gail Omvedt also, instead of questioning the prejudices of the upper caste women, portrays this issue as having become one of the Women versus OBCs. She argues, "The issue has taken on the colour of women versus OBCs- because the mainly rural "backward caste" politicians who have been gaining representation in the Lok Sabha in the last couple of decades fear that they will lose their seats to sophisticated, urbanized upper-caste women. The lack of education among Dalit-Bahujan women makes this a genuine danger." Thus, she greatly fails to locate the problem within the historic frame of the caste prejudices of upper caste women and of the Dalits' resistance to it. Measuring political competence in terms of education is too simplistic an interpretation of the issue. What she endorses as an acceptable solution for this is to make political parties reserve one-third of their tickets to women, an idea originally proposed by Mulayam Singh Yadav. But here too the question of caste based reservation is not resolved. For it is still not clear which women will benefit by such measure. Omvedt, anyway, does not attempt to address the issue of caste based reservation even after she inserted such a blunt conclusion on the dalit-bahujan claims for the same. More frustratingly, her views subscribe to the mainstream myth of merit Vs. Protective Discrimination.

The Dalit feminist theme is that it is identity that should be the criterion for the vote. Leaders who are against caste based women's reservation are putting forward two generalization: one is that gender is the sole identity for women and the other is the rule of meritocracy. The rule of meritocracy is especially argued from the liberal feminist terrain where women's backwardness is viewed in terms of lack of opportunities rather than as a result of structural malady. The Hindu community has noticed the strategic value of Hindu women's reservation as a counterbalance to the dalit and other political forces, and as a strong means of structurally preserving Hindu supremacy in India. More powers to Hindu women will give more supremacy to the Hindu community. Thus Hindu political leaders, Left and Right, have found common cause for an alliance in this regard. The commonality of arguments for non-caste based women's reservation between Hindu fundamentalist parties and the Left parties is because of the same reason.
Since it is a gender question, their apparent support to the issue of women's liberation would fetch them a liberal profile. The most ironic feature of the Indian politics of reservation is that when it is claimed as precious by the Dalits it is ridiculed as a claim that comes out of inefficiency and lack of merit. And yet, when it is lifted as a major political banner of the upper caste women it is treated with respect and attention. This is one of the major areas where the Indian upper caste intellectuals classes have to introspect.

Oppression against Dalit women works in a more rampant way through Hindu women rather than through the Hindu men since the former moves in more intimate circles with Dalit women than the latter. The intimate enemy of the other women is thus the Hindu woman. The dalits could not secure greater political rights due to the inclination of Hindu women towards their men, due to their apathy towards the dalit cause and their parochialism. In this way the dalits have suffered more betrayals from Hindu women than from any other sources. The Hindu identity has added more impetus to Hindu women's reservation. They don't bother to pause and introspect that dalit women are debarred from nearly all places of respectable employment. They don't count that Dalit women are brutally victimized by the hindu male community, they don't re-think that it is Dalit women who are in need of political power more than anybody else in this land. The Dalit women's political empowerment is a question of national concern, a question of the completion of the process of nation-making, it is more importantly, a question of allowing her to acquire total peoplehood.

Postcolonial theories failed to locate the politics of reservation in a serious historical frame. It has denied a respectable space for this sream of dalit movement in their theory. More dangerously they have interpreted this movement as a cheap pursuit for artha. This is a major limitation which makes it incapable of matching up its theory with contemporary realities.
Notes:

1 See, Gail Omvedt, "Women in Rural India", Social Scientist, Vol. 6, Nos. 1 and 2, Aug-Sep. 1977.
4 Margaret E. Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1941, pp. 32-33; and James H. Cousins and Margaret E. Cousins, We Two Together, Madras, Ganesh& Co, 1950, pp. 308-314.

8 P.P., 1919 (203) IV, 1, p. 7.
10 Quoted in Modern Review, March 1923, p. 384.
12 P.P., 1919 (203) IV, ii. P. 75.
13 P.P., 1919 (203) IV, ii. P. 75.
15 Indian Statutory Commission 1927-30, vol 2, pp. 91, 92 and 94.
18 Mrs Subbarayan and Begum Shaw Nawaz, "Memorandum of the Political Status of Women Under a New Indian Constitution, (proceedings of sub-committees, part 2) 1st Indian Round Table Conference 12 November 1930-19 January 31, cmd. 3772.
19 Bombay Cronicle 23 Sep. 1930, p. 1; SA 1930, para 1797; BC 4 Oct. 1930, p. 1
20 The dalit movement could not be termed as opportunistic for its separatist politics the same way as the ucw's movement because it always tried to address and cooperate with the politics of marginalized communities like women and muslims.
22 See ibid, p. 98.

Memorandum representing the view of a number of Indian Women's organizations presented by Naidu and Begum, Indian Round Table Conference Second Session, 7th Sep-1st Dec 1931, cmd. 3997, Appendix 4, p.100; Report of the All India Women's Conference, Madras, Dec 1931; Origin of All India Women's Conference, Indian Annual Register, 1935, Vol. 1, pp.378-379.


Bombay Chronicle, 20 Aug, 1932,p.16


Hans Mehta at the 7th session of the AIWC, Lucknow, 28-31 Dec 1932, Indian Annual Register, 1932, p.358.


PP., 1932-33 (112) VIII. P. 2304.

Indian Quarterly Register, 1925, II, p. 316.

Sarojini Naidu, Presidential Address, AIWC, 20 Jan 1930, Indian Annual Register, 1930, p.363.

Begum Nawaz Shaw Proceedings of Sub-Committees Part 2, Franchise Sub-Committee Meeting, 30 Dec, 1930, Indian Round Table Conference 12 November, cmd.3772.

Sarojini Naidu's speech in 1918 in Speeches and Writings, Madras, G.A. Natesan, p. 199.

S&W, Saro, p.196.

S&W, Besan, p.79.


Rekha Thakur, the dalit, March-April 2002, p.49.

