CHAPTER 6
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.

The comparison of the socio-cultural, economic and political realms of the Mang and Mahar women from the rural and urban area has yielded several significant points. The focus here will be to understand the differences and similarities of the rural and urban Mang and Mahar women based on what has been discussed thus far. The disparities between the rural and urban Mang and Mahar women are stark. Rural women from both the community struggle for their day to day survival. Hence, economic disparity in particular, is a major problem for these women. This disparity can be better appreciated through the examination of the structural conditions of their respective castes.

Under the Balutedari system, the occupational mobility of the Mang and Mahar and other Dalits was determined by the caste hierarchy of the Hindu social order. To the credit of the Mahars, they gave up their traditional occupations
after being converted to Buddhism following Ambedkar's example. Unfortunately, this void was filled by Mang males and females. They picked up what was discarded by the Mahars. The refusal to live within the fold of Hindu religion is apparent in their modern aspirations.

In rural Maharashtra, Mangs in general and their women in particular are extremely backward in almost every respect. Industrialization, urbanization, education, law and order in the nation-state have been instrumental in transforming caste-based occupation in the rest of the country. But, in the rural areas caste-based occupations are still rampant because the arm of the law is not long enough to reach into these areas. The following table explains to us the changes and similarities in the occupations of the two groups of women.

Table 1.1: Traditional and Modern Occupations of Mang and Mahar Women

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional and Modern Labourers/Daily Agricultur</td>
<td>Broom/Basket/Rope Making/Midwifery/Carrying corpses, Carrion/Watchman/Messenger etc.</td>
<td>Wages/Construction Workers/Rag Pickers</td>
<td>Agricultur al/Seasonal Labourers</td>
<td>Domestic Servants</td>
<td>Government Service</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Mang Women</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Mang Women</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Mahar Women</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.1 above carries the data on the traditional and modern occupations of Mang and Mahar women. It shows that the Mahar women from the rural and urban areas have discarded their traditional occupations that involved carrying corpses, carrion; village watchman; wall-menders; messengers etc. However, the Mang women still continue with their traditional occupations such as broom, basket and rope making.

The statistics shows that 25 per cent of the Mang women from the rural areas are engaged in traditional occupations. Out of the five women (25 per cent), two women were into broom making, two into basket making and one was into rope making. Therefore, 10 per cent each were engaged in broom and basket making and 5 per cent were engaged in rope making. In the case of rural Mahar women, 0% is engaged in traditional occupations. The proportion is the same in urban areas. However, among the urban Mang women, two were engaged in broom making. Broom makers in urban areas thus accounted for 10 per cent. Among the rural Mang women, 15 per cent consisted of daily wages labourers and construction workers. And among the rural Mahar women, 25 per cent were daily wages labourers and construction workers.

In the urban areas, Mang woman engaged as daily wages labourers, construction workers and rag pickers accounted for 50 per cent. Among them, 30 per cent were rag pickers and 20 per cent were daily wage workers. The urban Mahar women who performed a similar set of jobs including market-yard workers were 20 per cent. Most of them were engaged in well-digging and constructions, and interestingly none of them were rag pickers.
The rural Mang and Mahar women engaged as agricultural labourers are facing a major crisis due to the ill-effects of neo-liberal agricultural policies. About 55 per cent of the Mang and Mahar rural women are agricultural labourers. However, the seasonal nature of agricultural labour has meant that these women have to look out for other means to earn their livelihoods. Therefore, many of them end up migrating to urban areas. In fact the migration rate keeps going up. Unfortunately, not all of them find jobs in the urban areas. Many of these women, who were once agricultural labourers, became sex workers due to the miserable conditions of their lives. Several others worked as domestic servants in the urban places.

Among the urban Mang and Mahar women, 25 per cent were engaged in agricultural activities. In the rural areas, Mang women engaged in domestic service is 5 per cent. About 10 per cent of the Mahar women in rural areas are into domestic services. However, in the urban areas, 10 per cent of Mang women are into domestic work. The percentage of urban Mahar domestic workers is 35%. The percentage of government servants among rural Mang women is zero. The percentage of women working as government servants among rural Mahar women is 10%. However, among urban Mang women, 5 per cent are into government services. This figure among urban Mahar women is 20%. Thus, it can be argued that the conditions of rural Mang and Mahar women engaged in agricultural occupations have not improved.

However, in the case of Mahars, the refusal to live within the fold of Hindu religion is encoded in the modern aspirations of the Mahar Buddhists. The social forces like industrialization, urbanization and education brought about a lot of changes in the occupation of Mahars. Nevertheless, in the rural and urban areas
they are transformed into invisible paid bonded labourers. This is a direct impact of the hegemonic state that maintains the caste system, for instance, as agricultural/seasonal labourers and daily wage labourers in the rural and urban areas.

The improvement in the lot of the Mahar women was because they had followed the call of Ambedkar to convert to Buddhism. Mangs have not been as fortunate. Instead, irrational beliefs and practices have been partly responsible for the Mangs continuing to owe allegiance to Hindu religion. For example, Mangs were seen as a good omen by the caste Hindus. It is considered auspicious when one sees Mangs early in the morning. They are also entrusted the talk of spreading the news of caste Hindus, such as the birth of a child in the house of a caste Hindu. Whenever construction begins, a Mang is sacrificed at the construction site by the caste Hindus.

That the rural Mangs did not protest the terrain of caste Hindus is probably because of the lack of assertion and consciousness within the community as a whole. Another dimension of their political inertia stems from their misrecognition of the historical specificity of Ambedkar. They did not convert to Buddhism. They instead chose to remain within the confines of the Hindu religion. Thus, the stagnant location of rural and urban Mang women only got further entrenched through their adherence to the exploitative Hindu religion. It can be argued that the derogatory activities of the Mang community in the day to day life such as Potraj, begging during solar and lunar eclipse etc., are also a cause and impact of Hindu ideologies based on their caste.
In the comparison of the rural/urban Mahar women and rural/urban Mang women engaged as agricultural/seasonal labourers, it is found that rural women from both the groups face similar problems. For instance, in the rural areas at Atpadi and Jamkhed, both the women from these castes have similar experiences. Most of the agricultural/seasonal labourers were able to eat food just once in a week. Starvation is thus a salient feature of the wretched lives of these labourers.

Under the Mahatma Phule Vikas Mahamandal and Annabhau Sathe schemes, loans and livestocks are provided for Mangs, Mahars and Dalits. Chapter five and six revealed the limitations of the rural Mang and Mahar women that prevented them from taking advantage of these schemes. Moreover, under the condition laid down for both the schemes, the beneficiaries should have five acres of land in their own names. Unfortunately, the poor rural masses do not have titles to five-acre lands in their own names. Therefore, they are unable to approach the bank for the loan. Also, under the scheme, the beneficiaries will be given money by the banks to buy cows, jersey cows, buffalos, goats, sheep, ox and poultry. It was found that most of the rural masses did not avail these schemes. This was because they had no money to even feed their own children. Thus, under such the circumstances, the feeding of animals was out of the question.

Natural calamities such as famines in the rural and urban spaces force these people to become construction labourers, domestic servants, daily wage workers, rag pickers, sweepers etc. There are no productive social security schemes to improve their life chances even in the urban areas. Their situations are little better than those in rural areas; they are almost as unstable since construction
labourers and rag pickers have no guarantee about their daily jobs. Most of the Mahar women are exploited by the contractors by not being paid their wages in time. Even after working so hard, they have to dependent completely on the contractors and masons for their daily wage. They hardly earn sixty rupees a day. To make things worse, they are often sexually exploited in the work places. This is especially true for those working in sugarcane and maize fields. Poverty in the rural areas leads to the starvation deaths of women. So, on pain of starvation death, women are forced to become sex workers in the nearby urban areas. They thus accept sex work not as an expression of their sexuality but out of necessity. It is poverty that forces them to commodify their bodies.

In the context of Mahar and Mang women, the shift to sweeper’s job forces them to remain in the symbolic domain of caste-based labour and patriarchy that is re-imposed by the state agencies. It is this division of labour, exploited by the upper castes, that has also created a social space of patronage and dependency. For instance, the labour of sweepers and scavengers are perceived as a form of pollution and despised by caste Hindus. Hence, the upper castes do not get involved in such professions or occupations. The Mahar and Mang women had to silently accept and sell their labour for their livelihood. The largest number of those engage in these professions is the Mang women. One of the important arguments regarding the Mang women is that these occupations are legitimisation of the caste-based division of labour by the nation-state with proper salary and social security schemes such as provident fund, pension schemes etc. Most of the time the elderly women from the Mang community take voluntary retirement scheme to hand over the same job to her daughter-in-law. In case of Mahar women most women have discarded these jobs.
The rural and urban women who are into traditional occupations, such as broom and basket making, are also heavily affected by the advent of liberalization and privatization policies as well as the globalization wave. For instance, companies like Garware and other local companies have started producing Nylon ropes, brooms and plastic baskets; in the process, they have deprived the rural Mang women of their source of livelihood. For these rural and urban women deprived of every opportunity, the education of their children is the only hope. A comparative examination of the rural Mahar women with the rural Mang women reveals a clear division between them. Most of the Mahar women both in the rural and urban areas want to be educated. As the literacy data shows us, the rural and urban Mang girls acquire hardly any education. Even among those enrolled in school, the drop-out rate is very high.

Table 1.2: Literacy among Rural and Urban Mang and Mahar Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mang and Mahar girls in schools/Higher Education</th>
<th>Primary (I-V)</th>
<th>Middle (VI-VIII)</th>
<th>High school/Hr Secondary (IX-XII)</th>
<th>BA/BA (Hons)/BSc/B.Com</th>
<th>MA/MSc</th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Mang Girls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Mahar Girls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Mang Girls</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Mahar Girls</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore, we will find very few Mang girls who have a bachelor’s degree or are into higher education. The difference between the Mang and Mahar girls is that the drop-out rate of the latter is low. Moreover, a good number of Mahar girls are enrolled for bachelor’s degree. Most of the time, it is the male members of the family who decide the future course of the girl’s education. Girls have no say in the choice of their education.

The data shows that 10 per cent of Mang girls are enrolled in primary education. The percentage of rural Mahar girls’ education at primary class is 5 per cent. About 15 per cent of the Mang girls are in the middle level and 10 per cent are in higher secondary education in the rural areas. In the rural areas, 10 per cent of Mahar girls are in the middle class and only 45 per cent were educated in high school. In the rural areas, 35 per cent were graduates and just 5 per cent had completed masters. Not a single rural Mahar girl had a PhD in rural areas.

Urban Mang girls at primary class constitute 35 per cent and 20 per cent are in middle level. They constitute 15 per cent in secondary education and 15 per cent in the graduation level. About 5 per cent are in the post-graduate level. However, they are unrepresented in doctoral studies. Moreover, their representation in higher education is almost nil. Therefore, one can argue that the urban and rural Mang women are under-represented both in primary as well as higher education.

For the urban Mahar girls, the share of primary class is 0 per cent. The share of those in middle class is 5 per cent, at higher secondary 15 per cent, in graduation 45 per cent, and 25 per cent in post-graduation. About 10 per cent are into higher studies like PhD. Therefore, by comparing the Mang and Mahar women, we can
argue that Mangs are sceptical of spending money on the education of their daughters. This indicates the patriarchal leanings of the Mang males who deny the education of the female within their community. On the other hand, it can also be argued that more and more Mahar girls are getting educated. This is because mobilization for the needs of community, aspirations for higher education and political consciousness are high among the entire Mahar community.

The fast pace of globalization is another factor that is contributing to further uncertainty in the life of an educated Mahar girl. Education itself is a major challenge for the marginalized communities. The important question is whether it is possible for a Mahar Buddhist girl/woman to get a government job that assures social security. The process of globalization, and the consequent privatization of higher education, has come as a dampener on the aspiration of Mahar Buddhist girls. Globalization demands knowledge workers. Thus, a shift from the traditional labour to a labour that is based on knowledge will exclude and discriminate the Mahar Buddhist women, who already suffer from the dearth of cultural and social capital. Thus even the few educated Mang women are unable to fine proper employment. So they end up being forced into a world of maladies.

The rampant corruption that is there in the selection procedure of government jobs is another blow to the aspirations of the educated Mahar Buddhist girls. They are forced back into their traditional lifestyles, such as to getting married by giving up their studies. Interestingly, many girls during sampling were found to be over-qualified for the type of jobs they were engaged with. Armed with bachelors and masters degrees they were in search of jobs. However, many of
them ended up working in the private sectors with monthly salaries of just Rs 500. So, the issue of educated Mahar women challenging the state's apathy assumes significance. The community as well as civil society must remain vigilant and put pressure on the state and its institutions to sort out the problems.

The first generation Mang women are found to be getting educated these days. They, however, have a long way to go. This is because the whole community is totally ignorant and deprived of social mobility due to the lack of education in the first place. Therefore, it is the duty of the educated Mangs to struggle, create awareness and consciousness within the community and advocate education. The state has a bigger responsibility of working to educate the Mangs. However, unless and until educated Mangs take the initiative at every level—Taluka, village or block—for the cause of education, nothing concrete will materialise for the Mang community. This is because the state has remained apathetic to the community's need for education. The interventions of various policies of government along with non-government organizations implementing various programmes for Dalits such as Sarva Shiksha education programme, distribution of BPL card for the poor people etc., are doing very little in uplifting the community. Most of these exist in name. Moreover, the NGOs have co-opted the programmes of the Dalits and thus the Mangs and Mahars in the rural areas remain unaffected.

In the case of Mang women, there was little consciousness or aspiration for education because of the lack of awareness and gender bias. Also, gender disparities are found both among rural and urban Mahar and Mang women. However, the Mahar women were found to be consistently fighting against the
threats of poverty and for the right to education. It is because most of the Mahar women are politically conscious of their rights which in turn in large measure is due to the acceptance of Ambedkar’s vision. Both Phule and Ambedkar firmly believe that education is the only tool to empower Dalits and women. Ambedkar provided for constitutional privileges such as reservations; the positive impact of it is visible to some extent today. The evidence of this positive outcome can be seen in the urban spaces of educated Mahar and Mang women. The government of Maharashtra has introduced the Annabhau Sathe Yojana for the education of Mang girls. But, the Mang community have been unable to benefit from such schemes because of the lack of awareness. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the state and the educated Mangs and Mahar to work together as well as separately as a community to spread the message of the need for education. There is also a need to create consciousness and build up the aspiration among the Mangs from the rural to the urban areas.

The rural and urban Mahar women largely accepted the Buddhist values and discarded the rigid Hindu ethos in the process. On the other hand, the rural and urban Mang women continued to worship the Hindu gods, goddess and involved themselves with Hindu cults. Therefore, it is quite clear that unless the Mang community reject the Hindu gods and goddesses, the chances of any concrete socio-cultural changes taking place appear remote. To convert to Buddhism is arguably one of the best options for the Mang community. There is evidence (2005 for example) that Mangs are in fact converting to Buddhism. However, it is extremely important that this conversion be viewed from the perspective of counter culture to Hindutva forces.
Otherwise, the condition of the Mang community is unlikely to improve. No upward mobility will occur as long as the community continues to hold on to its Hindu religious inclinations. It should not be ignored that by remaining in the Hindu religious fold, they are not accorded any self-respect either as individuals or as a community. Yet paradoxically enough, they continue to offer sacrifices and observe Hindu customs despite being poor. Hence, an important task is to examine how cultural changes can be brought about within the Mangs in general and Mang women in particular. Conversion to Buddhism to challenge the orthodox Hindu values and ethos by itself is not enough. For any meaningful change to happen among Mangs the religious conversion should be combined with education.

Another important task before Mangs is to immediately stop their beliefs in superstitions within the community. In that sense, Buddhism offers the best way of discarding such superstitions. They should guard against the temptation to treat Buddha and Ambedkar as metaphysical entities like Mariaai and Laxmiaai. Otherwise it will become a dominating force among them and the political parties like Shiv Sena and BJP will able to make inroads once more, through the creation of an eclectic and reactionary form of cultural politics.

Women from Mang and Mahar caste are often victims of rape, molestation, naked parade, witch hunt, murder, excommunication etc. Mang and Mahar women face these discriminations in their day to day life because of their lower caste and gender status within the realm of graded inequality. Of the total of eighty interviews conducted, around 79 women respondents replied that they have faced discrimination directly or indirectly. The rural respondents faced discriminations in a direct manner and yet were powerless to challenge them.
For instance, most of the women said that in the Panchayat the Maratha caste males did not allow them to sit on the chair because they are Mang and Mahar caste woman. They disliked allowing Mang and Mahar women to have a say in any decision making. This was mainly due to the upasarpanch and other members in the offices from the dominate Maratha caste. In such cases Mang and Mahar women went to the district office and complained against the upasarpanch, but no action was taken. These are also reported in the newspapers, but nothing comes out of it. The Maratha leaders would cut off the electricity and water supply. They also threatened rape and molested the Mang and Mahar women. The Maratha leaders also tried to kill the family members of these women especially their husbands and sons. In such situations these women were feeling powerless, thus they try to withdraw the cases. These women realized that the Marathas could manipulate them because they had money and power. If we compare Mang and Mahar women in the context of complaining cases against Maraths, the Mahar women are more assertive. Moreover, the major Maratha's asked Mang women to contest the election from the reserved constituency and also in the general constituency, even if they are not residents of that particular ward. The women agricultural labourers are sexually exploited in their work places. The urban respondents also reported experiences of caste discrimination, although in a subtle manner.

When asked which party they voted for, the Mang women replied that they voted for the Nationalist Congress Party. All the while, the male members were discouraging the women from answering such questions. Most of Mang males cautioned their women from sharing the details of their political affiliations, because doing so would create problems for them. It was observed that the women had tremendous feeling of insecurity in revealing their political views
and describing the details of their day to day activities. The women pointed out that on the day of election the political party leaders and their supporters would come to their Vastis and take all of them away to another place. There these people would be shown the party symbols of the candidates contesting the elections. They would then be showered with money, ration, food and sometimes new cloths. The women respondents said they voted for the party that gave them the most money. In this regard, the NCP always did better as they gave them more than any other party.

To the questions dealing with the parties they voted for, most of the Mahar women said they voted for the Republican Party of India. The reason was not far to seek. The leaders of the Republican Party of India are from their respective caste. Moreover, they are also Buddhists. The situation of the Jamkhed district was quite different. There, the Mahar women said that they preferred to vote for the congress party. They, however, added that their voting pattern changed from time to time. In the urban areas, most of the Mahar women preferred to vote for RPI. It was because the leaders were from their caste. Therefore, one can argue that caste-based politics does play a very important role. In the urban areas of Sangli, the majority of the Mahar women also were inclined towards the Republican Party of India. However, they felt that a reserved constituency made no difference because their leaders were easily manipulated by the national-level Congress party. Moreover, they have not been able to bring about any development for the Dalits. The urban women opined that those who have money will win the election. They said that once the names of the candidate are declared by their respective parties, these candidates went to the Dalit ghettos and lavished money and food on the people. This went on till the elections were over. So the prospect of political space is very poor. Under the democratic
process, these people end up voting for one or the other party. But that is about it; the exercise of the right to vote has, so far, not empowered them.

The pattern of voting was found to vary from place to place among the Mang rural women. At Jamkhed, the Mang women voted for the traditional Congress party. They replied that they obeyed whatever the male members told them. In the urban areas, Mang women said they voted for the Kamal (BJP) because that is the party of Hindus. "Oh! One can see Lord Rama!" That was the common refrain. The Mang women from both the urban and rural areas had no political knowledge and were unaware of their rights.

The following table shows the voting patterns of Mang and Mahar women in the rural and urban areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Political Party</th>
<th>Rural Women Mang</th>
<th>Rural Women Mahar</th>
<th>Urban Women Mang</th>
<th>Urban Women Mahar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiv-Sena</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
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</table>

The data above shows us the voting pattern of the Mang Hindu women. The majority of the rural and urban women prefer to vote for the Shiv-Sena and BJP.
In the rural areas, 35 per cent voted for the Shiv-Sena while 30 per cent in the urban areas voted for the same party. About 40 per cent of the rural Mang women voted for the BJP while 45 per cent of the urban women voted for it. About 20 per cent of the rural women voted for the Congress I. In the urban areas, 15 per cent of them voted for the Congress I. In the rural areas, 5 per cent of them voted for the Nationalist congress party while in the urban areas this figure was 10 per cent. In the process, they totally rejected the existence of parties like RPI, BSP and CPM.

Statistics show that the 45 per cent of the rural Mahar women prefer to vote for the Republican Party of India. Of the urban Mahar women, 50 per cent prefer to vote for the RPI. About 25 per cent of the rural Mahar women voted for the Congress. In the urban areas, 20 per cent voted for the Congress. In the rural areas 20 per cent voted for the Nationalist Congress Party, and in the urban areas 15 per cent voted for it. Significantly, since the last seven to eight years, the Mahars have begun to vote for the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). About 10 per cent of the rural women voted for the BSP while 15 per cent of the urban women voted for it. The BSP is emerging as an alternative to the RPI because of the latter's failure to improve the lot of the Dalits. The Mahar women completely rejected the parties like Shiv-Sena, BJP and CPM.

To the question on the representation of Mahar women in politics, the women respondents said that it will be healthy to have women in the politics. But, it is difficult to challenge the political system, since it is dominated by males. Women are unable to take any decisions and have to face tremendous pressure in their every day lives. There is a need for every political party to have mandatory reservation apart from the reserved constituency. Explaining their position, they
said that they had been marginalised for hundreds of decades. The urban Mahar women are politically informed and are aware of the 33 per cent reservation for women. However, some of the educated women from the BAMCEF forcefully said that they opposed the 33 per cent reservation for women because women are not politically literate in our country. Therefore, they are getting manipulated thorough the patriarchal politics of this country. It is interesting to see the voting pattern of the Mahar Buddhist women and their preferences.

Conclusion

Mang women continue to remain oppressed because of their adherence to the Hindu religion. They are dragged into the abysmal pit of superstitions through the assimilation of the dominant Hindu ethos. Their identities, which are influenced by the Hindu religion, are responsible for the irrational outlook among them. Mang women are co-opted as 'vulnerable communities' within the spheres of Ngoization rather than as genuine social movements. Thus, the agencies of Mang women are depoliticized through the Ngoization and patriarchal Mang male leaders and family members. But in the case of the Mahar women it can be argued that education and conversion have brought about remarkable changes in the lives. The Mahar Buddhist women gave up their traditional stigmatised occupations but have been entrapped in new stigmatized occupations like sweeping in the urban sphere. However, they have begun to assert their rights. But, the corruptions in the institutions of state do not provide them much scope for their growth. Dalit political leaders themselves are marginal in number. Therefore, they are not able to provide answers to the problems in the lives of Mahar Buddhist women. It has thus become the responsibility of educated Mahar Buddhist women to think about their rural
sisters. The urban Mahar Buddhist women should challenge the capitalistic ethos of the urban sphere and should stand in solidarity with the rural Mahar Buddhist women. The trust that emerges through such an alliance can be instrumental in improving the life chances of both the Mang and Mahar women.

Mahar Buddhist women are caught in the labyrinth of empowerment and subjugation through their dialogical encounters with Buddhism, Christianity and Hindu religion. On the one hand, they have rejected the Hindu religion and embraced the eclectic version of Buddhism or Christianity. However, they have not been able to achieve the potentials of the Buddhist vision. The metaphysical exegesis that bounds the multiple identities of these women makes them blind towards economic development. The depoliticisation that emerged through the spiritual discourses of the Mahar Buddhist women limited their vision and prevented them from surpassing the circles of social backwardness. The political apathy of the leaders from their community also accelerated the marginalization of these women. The social space that exists between the educated Mahar Buddhist women and the poor among them signifies the proliferation of the lack of affinities between these groups. The realm of Mahar Buddhist women are determined by such constriction of social space and identity.