CHAPTER – 6

THE PAN INDIAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENT AND THE DALIT WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

In this chapter I would like to outline the Dalit women’s movement vis-à-vis the broader pan-Indian women’s movement which had its origins in the 1970’s. Literature on the Indian Women’s Movement is immense and the quantity of information that exists is huge. My sole intention of analyzing the role played by the Indian Women’s movement is to examine its relationship to and place accorded to the Dalit women. This chapter is divided into three sections:-

SECTION A

BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVE & COURSE OF THE MOVEMENT

India achieved her independence in the year 1947; eventually the contemporary feminist movement in the post-independence period began by founding itself firmly on the principles of equality. However, by the 50’s and 60’s, there was a lull in the feminist movement; this was mainly because with the national movement coming to an end, the obvious reasons for mobilizing women disappeared. Over time, the state was confronted with many questions that the women’s movements were facing – i) the gender-blinded nature of development, ii) laws pertaining to dowry, iii) rape, iv) divorce and so on. The period of the 70’s constituted a watershed in the history of the women’s movement in India – the struggle for women’s liberation crystallized into what came to be known as the Autonomous
Women’s Movements. The decade of the 70’s brought women into mass movements in large numbers- during the mid-70’s, many educated women took to radical, active politics.\textsuperscript{295}

The Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) movement in Ahmedabad led by Ela Bhatt, which was a sort of pioneering women’s trade union movement that began in 1972, was another such landmark in the history of the contemporary women’s movement. The Nav-Nirman Movement of 1974, which began as a student movement in Gujarat, chiefly against corruption, was another such turning point in the history of agitations for ‘rights’ and ‘loknoti’ (people’s rule of law). Women also actively took part and led the Chipko movement (an environmental movement in the Garhwal Himalayas) from the front. The POW (Progressive Organization of Women) that developed in Hyderabad in the year 1974, worked towards organizing women against gender oppressive structures in the society, namely the sexual division of labour and the culture that rationalized this discrimination.

Two events were very significant in this background – the State did not play a passive role – with the publication of Towards Equality, the Report of the Committee on The Status of Women in 1974 and the declaration of the decade 1975-85 as the international decade for women, things began to change. One thing was very clear; the findings revealed that the constitutional guarantee of equality between men and women had not been translated into reality. Over the years, the feminist tactics and methods of agitation witnessed a change; they felt that earlier methods such as public campaigns, demonstrations, street theatre, and so on had limited meaning unless they were accompanied by attempts to develop their own structures to aid and support individual women. Many feminists turned towards history to re-appropriate traditionally accepted women’s spaces. The women’s movement was not restricted to mere campaigns and agitations; focus was laid on running shelters for battered wives and women, who were victims of violence, provide counseling and legal aid, help in forming self-help groups to make women economically self-reliant.\textsuperscript{296}

\textsuperscript{295} Raashida Gull and Aneesa Shafi (May, 2014) Indian Women’s Movement after Independence, in International Research Journal of Social Sciences Vol. 3(5), p. 46; Available online at; \url{www.isca.in www.isca.me}; Accessed on 27/12/2015

\textsuperscript{296} Supriya Akerkar (29, April 1995) Theory and Practice of Women’s Movement in India – A Discourse Analysis in Economic and Political Weekly Review of Women’s Studies Vol. 30, Issue No: 17
From the early 80’s, feminism had branched into a series of activities, from the production of literature to slum-improvement work, employment generation schemes, health education and trade unions. The latter part of the 70’s and the 80’s saw a spurt in feminist writing because the feminist literary critics came to believe that women need to create a literature of their own in which the peculiarly feminine issues and experiences could be confronted and considered by the female sensibility. However, over the 70’s and 80’s, a sense of alienation began to overshadow the women who were involved in Leftist movements in Bombay. This served as the impetus for separatist feminist activism resulting in emergence of numerous autonomous feminist groups.

‘Autonomy’ was not a new concept in India’s political scenario in the 1970’s, as India had already experienced the influence of liberalism on the reform and nationalist movements. Post-1975 saw the growth of ‘autonomous’ women’s organizations with expanding base in both urban and rural India.

The distinguishing features of the new women’s movement were as follows:-

- Many of them opted for autonomy
- They were in favour of women-only groups
- They rejected any political party affiliation or conventional organizational structure; they did not have any party affiliations, even if individual members did have party connections.
- They rejected a formal hierarchical structure and traditional leadership styles despite having no prototype to follow
- They experimented with leaderless collectives with decision making by consensus, a volunteering of tasks and rotation of responsibility
- The first of these autonomous women’s groups were in Delhi and Bombay.

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298 Gull and Shafi, Op cit, p. 48
299 Smita M. Patil (4, May 2013) *Revitalising Dalit Feminism* in Economic and Political Weekly Review of Women’s Studies Vol.48, Issue 18
In Delhi, where feminism and party-affiliation were mutually opposed, two major feminist groups developed out of university based feminist discussion groups in Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University – Samta and Stri Sangharsh respectively. In contrast, the first feminist groups in Bombay were neither university-based, nor composed mainly of students. Most of their members had some experience of organizing, campaigning and negotiating, both as members of political groups and in non-party fronts.

Women’s Studies took off in the 80’s – initially under the support of independent research institutes such as the Centre for Women’s Development Studies, and the SNDT University in Bombay. The first National Conference on Women’s Studies was held in 1981 and it stressed the need for establishment of Women’s Studies at Universities. The University Grants Commission (UGC), under the chairpersonship of Dr. Madhuri Shah, introduced Women’s Studies in the universities with a mandate which included: research, teaching, extension, documentation, dissemination and advocacy. Through Women’s Studies we saw the crystallization of the educational philosophy that higher education had hoped to achieve since Independence. There emerged a whole host of writings from these Women’s Studies centers from across the country which is evident from the papers at the National Conferences held almost every three years by the Indian Association for Women’s Studies (IAWS). The 1990’s saw a spate of Women’s Studies publications with the establishment of a number of feminist publication houses and the establishment of a separate section on gender by mainstream publishing houses. For example, journals like the Economic and Political Weekly, (EPW), had published Reviews of Women’s Studies in its April and October issues in the year 1985. It followed this trend continuously since then. Unfortunately for many of the Women’s Studies Centres, their activities consisted of setting up of documentation centres, publishing newsletters or journals and doing some gender training which replaced real grass-root mobilization and ‘extension’.

However, from the mid-80’s onwards, there was an increasingly sophisticated critique of feminism; feminism it was alleged, was westernized, upper-class and urban; therefore unsympathetic to traditional Indian society. Both subaltern (Dalit) women and minority (Muslim) women have expressed fears claiming that they have felt isolated and alienated within the movement. In fact, Indian feminism is continuously witnessing challenges from
these quarters of caste, communalism etc. Also, the movement has been lacking in overall “co-ordination” or “direction” because it does not provide ongoing ways for suppressed classes to come forward and assert themselves. Moreover, in the initial years of the growth of the autonomous women’s movement, the proliferation of organizations was noticed in urban India. This was coupled with the fact that campaign material, posters and handouts were in the English language which also resulted in the accusations that the women’s movement was not reaching out to the masses in India. It further strengthened the case of those people who had always believed feminism to be a western concept.

In the 1990’s, the women’s movement saw new challenges with the socio-economic and political realities, the free market economy and growing religious conservatism. The concept of welfare state had been eroded. Overwhelming poverty of local communities, particularly the feminization of poverty was a prime concern of the women’s movement. However, in recent years, the movement has become fearful of the co-option of members of the women’s movement within the folds of the State and of the language of the movement which has meant a loss of bargaining power. Most importantly, the women’s movement’s experience with the law over the past seventy years, its ineffective and often ambivalent nature, has lowered the expectations of expeditious and adequate justice.

For obvious reasons, we will take up the case of the autonomous women’s movement (the FAOW) as it began in the state of Maharashtra, and examine the emergence, objectives and functioning of two major organizations that are a part of the FAOW (Forum Against Oppression of Women) namely, AKSHARA and MAJLIS.

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300 Op.cit, Gull and Shafi, pp. 52, 53
301 J.Devika, Kalpana Kannabiran, Mary E. John, Padmini Swaminathan, Samita Sen, Sharmila Rege (4, May 2013) Intersections on Gender and Caste in Economic and Political Weekly Review of Women’s Studies Vol.48, Issue 18
SECTION B

THE FORUM AGAINST OPPRESSION OF WOMEN (FAOW)

The FAOW is a part of what is recognized in India as the Autonomous Women’s groups which has played a crucial role in the post 70’s phase of the women’s movement. Its nature and functioning needs some elaboration, however, there does not seems to be any interaction between the Dalit women’s organizations and these organizations.

I went to the offices of MAJLIS and AKSHARA in May 2009 (they are a part of the FAOW – FORUM AGAINST OPPRESSION OF WOMEN) while in Mumbai; spoke to their members and came to know about the diverse areas they work in. I also attended the IAWS (Indian Association of Women’s Studies) Conference held at Wardha, Nagpur in the year 2010. My experiences there too have substantiated my view about the larger women’s movement and the place accorded to Dalit women.

Forum Against oppression of Women (FAOW)

The FAOW was formed in the year 1979 to respond to an extremely unjust argument on a rape case. Soon after, functioning under its earlier name (Forum Against Rape), it underwent significant changes in its outlook, focusing as it currently does on varied forms of women’s oppression. During this period the issue of custodial rape in a police station became the flashpoint for a nationwide campaign; it was understood that the centrality of rape in feminist understanding of the working of patriarchies worldwide was, as also in India, deeply rooted in local contexts. In Maharashtra as in other areas the police station and the landlord’s field were considered as centres of patriarchal power wielded by state personnel and the ruling classes. The victim of this rape in custody on the 26th of March, 1972 was Mathura a Dalit girl; mobilization on this issue displayed great creativity and brought women onto the streets, right up to the august portals of the Supreme Court. What is strikingly strange is that the women’s movement, which had started out with the custodial rape of a Dalit girl failed to work consistently towards the daily issues of the Dalit women in Maharashtra itself.

MAJLIS –

➤ Majlis located at A2/4 Golden Valley, Kalina Market, Mumbai, was established in the year 1991. Headed by Flavia Agnes, it offers legal services, conducts legal awareness
trainings, engages in policy level interventions, public campaigns and public interest litigation. Registered as a Society and Public Trust; it has two wings - the Legal Centre and the Cultural Centre. The Legal Centre is based in Mumbai and is headed by Flavia Agnes. At the micro level Majlis tries to help individual women access their rights through legal interventions and by creating awareness through legal literacy programs and at the macro level they work towards bringing about change through policy level interventions, public campaigns and public interest litigation.

Majlis is also involved in

- providing legal counselling to women in distress and undertaking cases on behalf of women in matrimonial matters, domestic violence and rape
- creating awareness about women's rights
- undertaking training programmes for women from all sections of society.
- providing gender sensitization courses to educational institutions, community based organisations, corporates, college students, social workers, judges, family court counsellors, etc.
- periodically publishing books and articles on the latest developments in law
- initiating campaigns to bring about social reforms and policy level intervention.\(^{302}\)

Besides all these, there are two other programmes undertaken by Majlis that specifically seek to aid the women in distress.

RAHAT – It is a scheme for socio-legal support for victim-survivors of sexual violence by means of collaboration between the Department of Women and Child Development and the Majlis Legal Centre. Faced with multiple vulnerabilities and challenges, victim-survivors of sexual violence find it difficult to approach institutions which they consider to be formidable like the police, the hospitals and courts. They need support, reassurance, empathy and guidance at every step. Through a convergence model involving the Judiciary, Police,
Medical, Shelter, Homes, Legal Aid, NGOs and civil society, utmost efforts are made so that the survivor is not re-victimised. In a nutshell, the programme has a four-step policy:-

- Help the survivor to access services she is entitled to like medical, trauma counselling, shelter, educational assistance and any other support she may need from time to time.
- Help the survivor negotiate the criminal justice system by providing legal assistance during investigation and trial.
- Create awareness in the community and among state agencies about rights, procedures and best practices to be followed.
- Evolve protocols, guidelines and document best practices, to place these before state agencies so as to build consensus and ensure its implementation.

MOHIM – Mohim was inaugurated on the 2nd of May, 2012. A collaboration between the Women and Child Development and Majlis Legal Center, MOHIM is the monitoring of HINSA (PWDV) Act in Maharashtra. PWDV refers to the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and MOHIM is an attempt to ensure its effective implementation. 303

AKSHARA-

Akshara, also a part of the FAOW has been founded by Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah and is located at Neelambari, near the Portuguese Church at Dadar in Mumbai. It is a Mumbai-based, non-profit women’s rights organisation and resource centre working towards a gender just society. Its mission is to establish a Gender Just and Violence Free Society. Akshara believes in changing unequal gender relations by bringing in individual as well as structural societal change. Their slogan is Women and Youth for Change and they would like to realize it by: - supporting youth to become social change agents so that they become catalysts for a gender just society; empowering girls from socially deprived backgrounds by supporting their education financially and training them to be confident; lobbying with different stakeholders including State authorities to ensure gender justice.

303 Details are available at : www.majlislaw.com Accessed on 15th December, 2015
Some of the main goals on which Akshara had been founded in the year 1995 are:

- To raise women's and public consciousness on gender inequality
- To work towards empowerment of women and youth.
- To prevent violence on women.
- To build partnerships with different social movements for gender equality, laws and policies.  

I questioned the members of both Majlis and Akshara as to whether they had any specific programmes for Dalit women. Both of them replied in the negative; which was surprising indeed. They weren’t actively involved with any programme for the Dalits as such.

Both Majlis and Akshara, in fact the Indian women’s movement as a whole is under the false notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. In fact, the notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. This is all the more because what is most often forgotten is that Dalit women and their experiences are altogether different; the focus should be more on Dalit feminism – a feminism that re-works the terms of female life experiences, which, in Dalit women’s consciousness, is not marked so much by the tedium of homemaking and child bearing, as it is by labour, servitude and caste status; even pregnancy and motherhood are marked by an acute and painful sense of want, deprivation and social helplessness. For Dalit women, their status as labourers is doubly stigmatized; labour often includes forced sexual labour; this labour constitutes stigma, since to be female and untouchable is to be sexually available. Moreover, for a Dalit woman, struggles over sexual justice could never be only about freedom from a hidebound and oppressive, heterosexual domesticity, which is sexually limiting and unfair to women. Neither is the sexual servitude that she endures graspable in terms of feminist theorizations of sex work. What should be kept in mind at all times is that Dalit women are ‘distinct social

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304 Details are available at aksharacenter.org Accessed on 10th December, 2015
305 Interview with the members of Majlis and Akshara on 04/05/2009 at the Office of Majlis at Kalina Valley, Mumbai; and at the Office of Akshara at Dadar, Mumbai
subjects’; the substantive content of Dalit feminism has to do with its recasting of the relationship between sexuality and politics on the one hand, and politics and religious culture on the other. None of the organizations mentioned above seemed conscious of this particular need of the Dalit women or even the method of reaching out to them. It is the organizations developed from within the Dalit context itself that display consciousness of the Dalit women’s existence, their desires and aspirations and also find the seed beds of their empowerment.

My findings substantiate some other voices on the marginalization of Dalit women, notably those of Vimal Thorat, Ritu Menon, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Urvashi Butalia and Cynthia Stephen.

It is the Dalit woman, Vimal Thorat\textsuperscript{306} says who is on the frontline, suffering hunger, deprivation, indignity, sexual violence. But most significantly, even in the women’s movement, she admits, there is a reluctance to tackle head on either Dalit women’s issues or for that matter Muslim women’s issues. This failure to reflect Dalit women’s issues stems from a reluctance to grapple with caste. Both the Dalit movement and the women’s movement are cynically quiet when it comes to the question of Dalit women facing brutal humiliation, violation and violence. Thus Thorat raises some very pertinent questions about the future of the Dalit woman. According to her, both the Dalit movement and the women’s movement have consciously ignored the Dalit women’s issue.

From the mid-1970’s to the 1990’s, the second wave of the women’s movement in India was buoyant, energetic and hugely innovative, drawing from and contributing to other social movements of the time; and occasionally, a part of other struggles for civil liberties and democratic rights. As Ritu Menon\textsuperscript{307} points out, to anyone who was in it, its transformative potential, both political and personal was immense. Most importantly, the movement was autonomous, like the International Women’s Movement, it had no formal structures, no hierarchies, no party line, and no high priestesses. Moreover, it was polyphonic, speaking in many voices, using many tongues. It was both urban and rural, and

\textsuperscript{306} Vimal Thorat (2001) “Dalit women have been left behind by the Dalit movement and the women’s movement” Sabrang Communications and Publishing Pvt. Limited; (as told to Teesta Setalvad) Available at :- www.sabrang.com

\textsuperscript{307} Ritu Menon Op. cit, pp. xii-xiii
though ‘political’ in the fundamental sense of the word, it has not so far, been part of party politics. Yet, one thing strikes us as strange that it had very few connections with, or programmes for, or writings on those women who need them most – the underdogs, the Dalits. Verily enough, of women’s movements anywhere in the world, the autonomous women’s movement in India is probably unique in the range and diversity of its alliances, including, on specific programmes, with the Government.

However, my question remains, what about the Dalit women? Why have the ‘stalwarts’ of the women’s movement who claim to have come a long way in fighting for justice, been blind to the Dalit cause? Why don’t we see any significant action-plan for the Dalits, the devadasis, the ‘kalavanteen i.e singing-dancing’ women? Why are none of the alliances seemingly beneficent to the Mahar and the Mangs?

Chandra Talpade Mohanty further asserts that few studies address questions of the social agency of women, in other words, few studies have focused on women workers as subjects; as agents who make choices, have a critical perspective on their own situations, and think and organize collectively against their oppressors. In fact, most studies of Third World women in multinationals locate them as victims of multinational capital as well as of their own “traditional” sexist cultures. Moreover, questions pertaining to the social agency of Third World women workers may well be some of the most challenging questions facing feminist organizing today. My work does not construct Third World (Dalit) women as mere victims, but as active agents. Feminist practice, Mohanty further observes, operates at the level of daily life through the everyday acts that constitute our identities and relational communities; at the level of collective action in groups, networks and movements constituted around feminist visions of social transformation.

My work has examined the activities of the Dalit women at the level of their daily life through their everyday acts. In fact, it was these actions, their performances over time that constituted their identities and that became a part of their relational communities. In fact,

309 Mohanty, Ibid, p. 5
Mohanty claims that the term ‘feminism’ itself is questioned by many Third World women. Feminist movements have been challenged on the grounds of cultural imperialism and of shortsightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class, white experiences, internal racism, classism and homophobia. In fact, many Third World feminists have argued for the rewriting of history based on the specific locations and histories of struggle of people of color and postcolonial peoples and on the day-to-day strategies of survival utilized by such peoples.

Urvashi Butalia has highlighted a different aspect – she feels that the production of knowledge has been a central part of political movements around the world and the women’s movement is no exception to this. Just as different cultural forms, such as the jatha, the katha, the pandavani and others, have formed the bedrock on which movements have mobilized and spread their messages, so also women’s words and thoughts, as contained in print media and particularly in books, have played and continue to play their role. Much of this thought and debate found its voice, in the initial stages, through feminist publishing, an enterprise that with its ideological roots and political engagements straddles the world of commerce and ideology, with its feet firmly planted in the latter. Feminist publishing is qualitatively and politically different from mainstream publishing and that as much as theatre and song, or perhaps even to a greater degree, it forms the cultural backbone of women’s movements the world over, and particularly in India. As far as Dalit women are concerned, there is a big need for a knowledge-base comprising solely of Dalit women; an indigenous knowledge-base, created and produced by Dalit women; this is all the more because the process of generating knowledge about oneself was the one that best should be addressed by a community by itself. The moment Dalit women start producing knowledge about themselves, they will begin the important exercise of reversing the flow of information and knowledge, of speaking about themselves to themselves and to the world at large, but what is most significant, doing it from within their own geographical and political locations.

310 Ibid. pp. 49-52

My experiences at the **IAWS (INDIAN ASSOCIATION of WOMEN’S STUDIES)** Conference in Wardha, at the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, has reiterated the above views. It seemed to me that though Dalit women’s issues were being discussed, Dalit women’s literature was being sold; Dalit women’s lives were being presented in the form of papers and power point presentations – the reality was very different. Dalit women themselves did not belong to these sophisticated platforms; they need to be brought to the forefront of activism more often. They need to decide what to write, what needs to get published and what areas should be highlighted.

Writing by Dalit women has a double impact; it is both a subversive activity and an act of resistance in the face of patriarchal constructions of knowledge. Most importantly, it is an affirmation that the ‘different’ knowledge being generated by women was in no way inferior to that which then occupied the space of books and thinking. We have come across writings by Dalit women; they are increasing by the day; mention of some significant writings have already been made in an earlier chapter. However, the need of the day is small and independent presses by Dalit women themselves where ‘alternative’ knowledge can be produced and disseminated.

As Urvashi Butalia continues, documentation was not the only task. By publishing against the grain, so to speak, and by therefore legitimizing writing that questioned the ways in which canons were made, feminist writers began the important process of expanding and stretching the boundaries of what is considered ‘serious’ writing. Publishing books by the downtrodden is also something that would be going against the grain, and therefore Dalit women should start taking up this challenge of expanding and stretching the boundaries of what is called ‘serious’ writing.

Writings by Dalit women deal with everyday life-worlds and their ups and downs as their thought processes can represent important contributions to the debate on any particular issue. By focusing on such research work, Dalit women can add another significant layer to

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the building up of knowledge and information. And this will directly challenge not only the Dalit movement but also the Indian women’s movement.

**SECTION C**

**DALIT WOMEN’S ACTIVISM**

Cynthia Stephen\(^{313}\) has raised some very pertinent questions on Dalit women’s activism:-

- Firstly she raises the question of **leadership**. She alleges that the mainstream Indian women’s movement continues to be led by privileged, dominant caste, upper-class, urban feminists. The participation of women factory workers, dalit women and urban poor are co-opted to make up the numbers.

- Secondly, comes another very significant area that of **violence**. She asserts that there is plenty of money and media coverage for campaigns for redress to urban educated girls who face violence at the workplace, but nothing almost, for justice to victims of caste-based atrocities faced by Dalit women, when they are raped when working in the fields.

- Thirdly, she claims that the Dalit women is the perpetual **Other** – This is the distilled impact of centuries-long alienation generated by ingrained, patriarchal and Brahminical values at all levels in the society. This in turn causes the high level of exclusion, invisibility and structural and domestic violence. Furthermore, she is at the receiving end of a long, socially engineered pecking order, which asserts the ‘relative’ superiority of one category of human being over another. This is most clearly evident in the struggle for basic needs such as food or water, and in the submission to sexual violence for the sake of employment.

- Fourthly, she discusses the place accorded to the Dalit women in the pan-Indian **movement** - Dalit women are increasingly left behind in all spheres by the movements led (and dominated) by the upper-caste women. In her

\(^{313}\) Cynthia Stephen (16 November, 2009) “Feminism and Dalit Women in India” Countercurrents.org

Accessed on 24/12/2015
opinion, there has to be an honest self-examination by the women's movements about whether they can accept the equal partnership, if not the leadership of women from grassroots Dalit (or adivasi or tribal) backgrounds. Have these so-called organizations that claim to represent Indian women really tried to groom capable younger women from the underprivileged, working class and Dalit and adivasis sections for leadership? If not, are they justified in their claim to speak for all Indian women everywhere? If there is no real soul-searching or an attempt to address the issue, there is every chance of the women's movement becoming irrelevant; this is more so as it is clear that they are also not fully in tune with the larger issues of the marginalized women who form, with their children, the largest, most diverse and underprivileged group in this country.

Finally, she concludes that it is inconceivable to the mainstream that a Dalit woman should have power or decision-making authority, and be free to exercise it. On this crucial juncture, she mentions the case for a Dalit Womanism. What Feminism and feminists in India engaged with was far removed from the lived experiences of Dalit women. The agenda of feminism had little, if anything at all, to do with the lives of Dalit and other subaltern women. Therefore, what was clearly needed in its place is an articulation based on the consciousness of the Dalit women themselves, their experiences of suffering, exclusion and thrice-removedness. Dalit women’s voices have been muted and their issues obscured. Therefore the best way out is to use a more appropriate term – Dalit Womanism.

It will have certain significant features :-

- The Dalit Womanist paradigm will be invested with its own meanings from its own political and geographical location.

- Dalit womanism will be broad enough to include the experience not only of the Dalit women in general, but also sensitive enough to provide space for the expression of the diversity of the experiences of religious minorities, tribal and ethnic identities who are presently termed subaltern.
Dalit Womanism will not only build and shape its own theory; it will also learn to mediate the spaces as well as build solidarity between itself and the existing Feminist and Womanist thought and theory.

Fourthly, it will also negotiate its differences with and build solidarity with men from Dalit and other subaltern and marginalized groups.

In fact, keeping the concerns of Dalit Womanism in mind, the Women’s Studies Department of the United Theological College, Bangalore have decided to come together as a Collective named DAWNS (Dalit Women’s Network for Solidarity). It will work to strengthen the voices of Dalit women through building knowledge, working towards ideological clarity, and highlighting the values, visions and aspirations of Dalit Women.

All this point to three significant aspects:-

Firstly, Dalit women are slowly attempting to come to grips with their invisibility in the mainstream discourse

Secondly, they are beginning to earn their place, hitherto denied, under the sun yet, it must be said the new found efforts are largely being marshaled by educated Dalit women, how far they are able to include the downtrodden such as in Kolhapur in Maharashtra only time can tell.

As I wind up my discussion, I will trace the agency of Dalit women that have emerged from the work – in the concluding chapter.