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Feminism is related to the fundamental restructuring of society with a woman-centered approach, something that challenges the basic structures of oppressions and inequality. However, organizations, including women's organizations have not yet conceptualized or defined for themselves the specificities of alternate processes/socio-political system or what they should be doing in order to bring about such a change. Women engaged in the struggle for liberation are also struggling for more conceptualization and for a better knowledge of the problems of the movement, of history, as well as of investigative research. This articulation has been leading them to interact with each other to build up strength through solidarity action, i.e. advocacy of their rights and providing support to each other in the women's groups. Women's solidarity action has to be extended to all progressive groups of women and men who question patriarchy and/or are connected with the class organizations or other popular organizations. All these organizations and individuals are against all oppressive projects and value systems, which breed inequality and make room for exploitation. Hence in this sense women's struggle and feminism are part of broader democratic and socialist struggles.\(^1\) Being a democratic struggle the recognition of sectarianism and insularity by the feminists and the continuation of the dialogue on differences, which may exist, are very crucial to women's movement.\(^2\) This process is highly significant because on the one hand it prevents feminism and women's movement from becoming parochial and also helps to strengthen by making it broad based.

Hence the greatest need of the women's movement at this juncture is the self-criticism and self-introspection. In this context undoubtedly feminism like post modernism places its finger on the differences
prevalent among women and questions the mega-narratives. But, unlike postmodernism its very purpose is not to maintain and deepen the divisiveness and rule out the possibility of building a movement. Its purpose is not only to sensitize the movement but also to strengthen the movement. Both the processes can begin only when the women's movement is understood thoroughly. Understanding means taking stock of the issues taken up by the movement and also to know - Who lead the movement? What criticisms are voiced against the movement both from within and outside? Which are the issues, left out in the movement and how these have affected the movement? Which perspectives run as an under current in the movement?

In these discourses most noticeable common trend is that, they frequently conflate or ignore intra-group differences. In the Indian context the latter is quite conspicuous in women's as well as the Dalit movement. In these movements the intra-group differences are ignored and the whole group is often treated as a category. The experience of the black women is also akin to this. In the West, feminism has often ignored the racist elements affecting women and especially black women. The Black movement doesn't address the question of sexism, patriarchy and exploitation of women within the community. These observations made with regard to the discourses of Feminism and anti racism in the West hold good to discourses of feminism and Dalit movement in India. In addition to this there is also the danger of conflating the difference within both the Dalit and the different strands of women Movements. Conflating the differences into unhealthy proportions also has the dangerous dimension of endangering the movement itself. They have the possibility of conflating the difference to such an extent that identifying with a movement itself may become impossible. This in turn might rule out the possibility of building a movement itself.
Generally, both the feminist and the other discourses consider women as a homogenous group. The factors like class, race, nationality and caste (in the Indian context) divide women as they do men. But normally this fact is overlooked and women are looked upon as a homogenous category. Very often the problems of one group of women are different from the other group. Sometimes the interest of one group is detrimental to the interests of the other group. For example the concept of Reservations to the backward classes and castes provides an opportunity to the most marginalized dalit woman to enter into the field of education, services and politics. But a number of upper and middle caste women treat this affirmative action as something, which deprives them of their rightful claim. They have a strong feeling that the concept of merit is overlooked. This is just one example, which brings out the role of various factors, which have the potential to divide women. This in fact prevents treating women as a category. Hence the problems of various groups of women are to be seriously taken note of. Otherwise, the discussion of different projects of emancipation of which women's question is also a part becomes meaningless and also problematic. The women's movement will have to grasp the pulse of the Indian reality in order to become broad based. The differences of the religion, literacy, class and caste are very important in the analysis of women's question. If these issues are not considered as crucial, finding a common ground is almost impossible and no dialogue between the two can possibly emerge. Therefore one such means of understanding the movement is a Dalit woman standpoint. In other words it is looking at the movement and trying to reconstruct it from the perspective of the women who are at the lowest rung of the social ladder. This facilitates one to understand where the problems of different groups of women converge and where they
diverge and leads one to think of the various possibilities of bridging the gaps.

This very much sounds like post-modernist argument. But the feminist postmodernism is different in the sense that "Feminist postmodernism rejects the very possibility of a truth about reality. Feminist postmodernists use the situatedness of each finite observer in a particular socio-political, historical context to challenge the plausibility of claims that any perspective on the world could escape partiality...... Feminist postmodernists advocate a profound skepticism regarding universal (or universalizing) claims about the existence, nature and powers of reasons....they urge instead the development of a commitment to plurality and the play of difference." It is essential to see if this theoretical acumen went into the practice of feminism that is into the building the women's movement.

In India the women's question (not exactly women's movement in today's sense) can be traced back to the pre independent days of colonial rule. Even in those days there seems to be two distinct strands of thoughts. They looked at the question of issues of emancipation differently. The way they comprehended the women's question is also very distinct. One of the strands consisted of the Indian reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, who launched reforms related to women in collaboration with the colonial government. These reforms were essentially Victorian in nature. They did not intend to change the existing model of women. The reform of 19th century did not have a transformatory vision. "They were perpetuating the traditional image of the silent, unobtrusive yet dutiful woman. The aim of education for girls was to create good wives and mothers, who would be better equipped to take care of their families. It was not to teach them to question the sexual division of labour, nor expose them to what was regarded as excessive
mental work or the tensions and machinations of world outside. Learning was to farther and strengthen the traditional familial obligations. Any hint of an individuality, which might threaten the status quo, was to be contained; it was hoped by an underlying moral commitment to the importance of the woman's essential role. In fact Keshab Chandrasen at times quoted Alfred Tennyson's "The Princess" which epitomized the Victorian man's notion of a woman's proper place and rightful duties. (Quote the poem) Rajaram Mohan Roy was full of praise for the long-suffering endurance of women in relation to their husbands' often appalling behaviour. He noted approvingly that all this pain and affliction their virtue alone enables them to support. The reforms of 19th century tried to address the women's question without trying to change the structures of patriarchy and other forms of oppression. Rather its major aim was to keep up with changing times. During the same period other emancipatory struggles were also there. For instance, there was the movement launched by Mahatma Phule. It questioned the basic structures of society like religion, caste, and patriarchy, which are the sources of women's oppression. Phule's was not simply a focus on ideology and culture; he stressed equally the factors of violence and conquest in history. Violence and oppression were overriding realities in all historical processes. His writings assimilated women into his general theories of conquest and violence, seeing them as the primary victims of force and violence, emphasizing the miserable life of peasant women. In the later years he took a stronger position describing male patriarchal power as a specific form of exploitation. The "double standard" which oppressed women was prevalent, he argued, not only as seen in the pitiable conditions of Brahman widows, but also in the patriarchy of Shudra households. During the same period there were women like Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde who are closer to Phule. They perhaps
represent the general attitude of lower class and peasant women in looking at Hinduism. They tried to look at Puranas as stories and not scriptures, and saw them as representing the many facets of male oppression rather than as divinely-ordained ideals of human relationships.8

Phule tried to draw from an alternate source of tradition, which is comparatively more egalitarian and raised basic questions about nature, and source of exploitation. There was one more tradition, which tried to work within the accepted tradition. Their demands foreground the needs of the rural peasant women who constituted a greater part of Indian women folk. These peasant women seem to have had their own forms of action that reinterpreted tradition more actively but very often also remained within the framework of the Hindu discourse while building an organizational space for women. Kapil Kumar describes the role of women led by Jaggi (a Koormi) in the Oudh Kisan Sabha, supported by Baba Ramchandra (a Maharastrian Brahamin). This led to the founding of a woman's front, the Kishanin Sabha, which focussed both on giving women land rights and attacking male polygamy and reforming family relations.9

Elite reformers of that period did not question the fundamental assumptions that went into the social units like family, work, marriage, etc. They worked within the already existing framework which was basically patriarchal. They did not question the assumption of man as the head of the family and woman as the home maker. They tried to reform and refine these roles rather than change them. They did not question these even at the ideological level. But the other discourse questioned the fundamental assumptions behind all these accepted relationships and social units.

A cursory look at the path trod by the women's movement in India shows that the women's movement in India has closer links with the social
reform movement sponsored by the colonial rulers and their Indian counterparts jointly. This movement had focused on urban, educated upper caste women. The women's movement did not establish links with the alternate movement, which is not just reformist but more transformatory. Later on during 70's and 80's though the movement ceased to be reformist in the earlier sense. It is important to note that the elite feature of the continued and hence the internal contradiction of elite v/s rural, upper caste v/s lower caste continued to exist in the movement.

As the women's movement started growing as a strong voice during 70's it took up issues like domestic violence, sexual atrocities, dowry, amendment of law, etc. The nature of these issues reveals that their protagonists were upper caste and middle class women. This is not to deny the crucial importance of these issues, but to note that these issues do not focus on changing social structures. But in this discourse of women's movement complexities arising out of caste and religion was almost absent. It was yet to take stock of the fact that these cultural complexities were to make a qualitative difference in their lives and change the way they perceived their condition and identity. In addition to that the problems of rural women were conspicuous by their absence. The preoccupation of the rural women will be finding employment, fuel, water, fodder, grazing ground, etc. But being born to a particular caste deprived specific groups of women of various sources of their livelihood and exposed them to unforeseen cruelty and atrocity. It deprived them of various opportunities of life. How has women's movement looked at these issues? Even a casual look at the movement brings home the fact that the constituency of the movement mainly consisted of urban, elite, educated, upper caste and upper and middle class women. Similarly the issues taken up were also of immediate relevance to these groups. The movement did make a mention of the issues, which affected rural, uneducated and
marginalized women. But it mainly focussed on patriarchy. It had not perhaps grasped how various cultural aspects, which were of course disguised expressions of patriarchy and changed the lives of these marginalized. And these made their life so miserable that they were prepared to ignore the explicit patriarchy discussed by the women's movement. Women's movement perhaps did not analyze how two patriarchies overlapped one another in such a subtle way that the cultural expressions of patriarchy went totally unaddressed. Consequently women's movement did not emerge as broad based movement.

Hence, Women's movement has to make it a point to restructure the movement from the point of view of the most deprived i.e. the Dalit women who are oppressed socially, politically, economically and culturally. Unless this kind of introspection and self-criticism sets into the Women's movement, the movement remains not only lopsided but also a greater part of Indian women will not be a part of Women's movement.

What ought to have happened inevitably has not happened. The question of the 'Dalit woman'-the most marginalized of the marginalized-is not at all addressed. Sometimes it is addressed when the marginalized women have raised a very powerful voice against their predicament and certainly not because the people in the movement have understood their plight. Always it is thought that what holds good for a miniscule group of women also holds good for the women as a category. But this is not always true. In the West, for instance both gender and racial factors characterize many of the experiences of Black women. The problems of Black women cannot be placed or understood in the right perspective unless one explores the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping their lives.\textsuperscript{10} Though there are various other factors of difference between the Black and Dalit woman, to some extent the dalit woman also lives under similar circumstances. In the case of Dalit women mainly
both caste and gender intersect. Dalit woman's problem cannot be understood properly unless the question of caste is addressed. Women's groups, political parties and various pressure groups somehow do not take into consideration the caste factors while addressing the women's question. On the whole women are treated as a category. Various factors seem to be responsible for this. Sometimes it is vested interests: while some other times it is the problem of the ideology, because of which caste is subsumed under class. Very often even within the Dalit movement the 'Dalit woman question is either ignored or brushed aside in view of the "larger interests" or "larger projects". Historically there are even occasions where their interests have been deliberately ignored. During freedom struggle caste question was not addressed because it was thought to be divisive. And hence even serious discussions related to caste question were not given any publicity and did not find place in the mainstream narration of Indian history. Historiographical elision has been most powerful of all in respect of caste."

In this background, this work intends to understand the deletions in the movement and the way they have affected the building of the movement itself. In addition to that this work intends to look into the different ways of constructing the identity of the dalit women. This work also tries to present the self-image of the dalit women, which emerges from their narratives. This is specifically done in the context of Karnataka. Three villages have been taken up for field survey.

In this context what is significant is a discussion of how the definition of ways of knowing has constantly been interlaced with who is doing the defining and about how the patterning of all this has followed certain fundamental divisions existing in the wider culture. One of the implications of this argument is that some ways of knowing have traditionally occupied spaces at the edge of the dominant vision. They
are the spaces, which are filled by the lives and experiences of the socially marginalized including women. Thus, neither methods nor methodology can be understood except in the context of gendered social relations. Therefore it is true that anything cannot be completely understood without a knowledge of how it arose. Therefore somebody telling about somebody else gives only a partial view while somebody telling about himself or herself perhaps completes that view. Therefore the present work tries to understand the self-construction of Dalit women as expressed in their narratives. An effort is made to place them side by side the image of the Dalit women which is already there – an image constructed by dalit men, other upper caste and class women, men from upper caste and those in the movement. The Dalit men too are listened to, so that a total picture of the rural dalit domestic life is available. Secondly, this narrative of the dalit men also acts as the touchstone to understand the claims of the Dalit leaders that the dalit way of life is more egalitarian and women have more freedom in their life world. Without listening to dalit men this cannot be understood.

One of the methods widely used in this work is the method of qualitative research – interviews, observations, focus groups, and life histories. They are notable for the closeness they require between researcher and the researched. The two sides of the research process exist in the same plane, face to face. In-depth interviews are the face-to-face method par excellence and so have been chosen. Interviews imitate conversations and they hold out the promise of mutual listening. Many of the reasons for preferring a qualitative approach, centered on in-depth interviews are the advantages of "connected" as distinct from separated knowing, dissolution of the artificial boundaries between knower and the known, the opportunity to ground knowledge in concrete social contexts and experiences.
The interviews in the study were largely unstructured, allowing the women to talk about and around a range of topics. (Though the interviews were mostly unstructured, the questions were actually structured and even questionnaires had been prepared. Therefore the ideas in recorded interviews could be classified and come to a conclusion.) Interviews ranged from two to four hours. It ran to many audiocassettes. The process of recopying the women's words, reading and typing them in person and remembering the sounds of the voices when the words were first spoken helped to hear meanings in the words that had previously gone unattended. This process of immersing in the data has been greatly helpful and also very important.

Nearly 100 women were chosen. The choice was not random but intentional. It included women who are agricultural labourers and also headed the family exclusively and women who are agricultural labourers but whose families are headed by men. Then the chosen group also consisted of women who did not go out as labourers but stayed at home and finally women who are non-agricultural labourers who have lost their livelihood because of the closure of a factory. The researcher had chosen to listen to Dalit men too. This study had chosen women from these different groups because of various reasons. Firstly to see the way in which patriarchy and the patriarchal values worked in their lives and decided their choices. Secondly to understand how this patriarchy also decided the way in which they constructed their identity. In addition to that, the study of these groups helps to understand the various ways in which the changes in economic policies of this country have severely affected the lives of the people in the lowest strata of the society. Over and above this, it purports to understand the ways in which the perception of "culture" affects the identity of these Dalit women.
Various primary sources like Census Report, Human Development Report, and other such reports are referred.

As this happens to be a micro survey, some of the results may fit into the general pattern while others may be different due to the local and regional factors. All these conclusions are open-ended, but here they are rounded off because of the limitations one has to put up with while concluding a thesis.

This type of study becomes significant for various reasons. These micro studies try to grasp the subtleties, in the life world of the Dalit women, which are not too very obvious. Very often these go unnoticed both by theoreticians and activists. But, in reality, these are the crucial and deciding factors for theorizing and building the movement strongly and meaningfully. The ignorance and omission of these subtle issues handicap serious academicians because they may fail to understand the complexity of the women's question and without these details one may not understand why movement failed to be transformatory and democratic. Consequently it fails to bring about the fundamental restructuring of the society, which is the goal of all movements.

The thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is designed as a prologue to this thesis. It is given a title "The Unknown citizen". It tries to place the Dalit question within the context of Indian historiography, beginning especially from the colonial period. This general framework is inevitable to place the Dalit women's question in proper perspective. The question of dalit woman's identity can be discussed only as part of larger social, political and economic question. Hence in this context the two most important discourses happen to be the nationalist discourse voiced powerfully by people like Tilak, Gokhle and others at the earlier stage and Gandhi at the later stage and the alternative discourse developed by people like Phule and Ambedkar. Repeated references to these discourses
national movement and also the information given in the books discussed in general in the national movement. In the subsequent chapters this question is discussed more specifically and related to rural dairy women with special reference to Karnataka. The chapter tries to state some of the major theoretical positions relevant to the women's question before actually what we call women's movement started in India. The close relationship between caste and gender in India is in relation to women and also the way of the women living in various hierarchies groups but yet subjects them to some extent to the presence of the fact to which caste may belong any one, whether men or women.

The second chapter, partly in the

women's milk movement

Women and Milk. The first chapter which was here more an analytical one of these consequences. The analysis of these movements brings out for her absence in all these discussions. In the women's movement of the question of caste is either totally ignored or treated as a trivial and insignificant matter. In the dairy movement gender is also ignored or becomes highly insignificant. The present chapter attempts to reintroduce gender blindness. Certain other movements have taken the gender question but have left out the caste question. In relation to that the projects devised by the government and activities of the NIRD have also emphasized to some extent the chapter tries to comprehend the nature in which these have proceeded on the dairy women's question and the way it has affected the identity of the dairy woman. These decisions certainly have an impact on the dairy women. These movements and their agencies are discussed in detail in order to understand this. In this context the Dairy and Financial discourses are discussed elaborately because they affect the question.
An analysis of the Dalit movement of the post Ambedkarite period shows that their attitude towards women operated within the larger patriarchal framework. In the context of the movement they have perceived women as seductive and ensnaring, which fits into the general framework prevalent in all other movements. They too subscribe to the gender division of labour and are of the opinion that if women come out there will be nobody to look after the domestic cores. Their approach to various issues like land distribution operates within the broad framework of man as the head of the family. In addition to it the dalit movement doesn't perceive that dalit women too have an identity of their own. Very often they are seen as "our women," which ignores the larger patriarchal oppression within. This perhaps makes the need to articulate the Dalit feminism. In this context the arguments of two important thinkers Prof Gopal Guru and Sharmila Rege are also discussed. What constitutes the identity of the Dalit woman is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter III discusses the economic policies, which in fact become an expression of the various biases, socio-cultural prejudices and mind set, which in turn affect the identity of the Dalit woman in different ways. "The Economy Is Doing Great but People In It Are Not." All castes do not suffer equally from the iniquitous functioning of the caste system. Among them the caste system has produced the worst possible consequences for the deprived castes – low-caste untouchables, as they are divested of all possible sources of economic mobility. In the case of dalit women gender too becomes another subjugating factor. Under the prevailing form of caste system the occupations and economic activities are hereditary, compulsory and endogamous. (It is more so in rural areas) These socio-cultural biases sometimes nullify the very purpose of a policy. Very often, because of these biases, the economic reforms aggravate the problem of a Dalit woman instead of alleviating them.
These economic policies are discussed with special reference to their impact on agriculture, education and food security. The changes in these fields do have impact on other sections of the society including women. A comment frequently made during these debates is "the condition of the dalit woman is not different from other poor people, and many upper caste and also OBC women come within this category 'poor people'." This claim is true to some extent. But there are other truths too. Because of the way Dalit women are positioned in this society the effect of these changes are more intense and severe on the Dalit women. An effort is made here to show how in practice caste makes a difference in the lives of dalit women. Through field survey an effort is made to bring about the reality that this severity is intensified because of caste. In this chapter the thrust is more on the changes related to agriculture with special reference to rural dalit women. This is for several reasons. Majority of the dalit women are concentrated in rural areas and most of them are landless agricultural labourers. Within the framework of a thesis it is difficult to accommodate all the changes, which might certainly turn out to be very sketchy. But there are just passing references to the changes which have taken place in other sectors like industry and service, which have a very serious bearing on the identity of the dalit woman. Two more areas, which matter a lot especially for the dalit woman, are health and education. They are also discussed but briefly. The changes in the economic policies are again placed in the broader discussion of Globalization and consequently the communalization, which have very serious bearing on the identity of the Dalit women.

The IV chapter comes as a conclusion. It discusses the multiple identities of a dalit woman. 'Who Am I? I Am What I Choose To Be.' It takes up the discussion of the points of convergence and divergence between the dalit men and dalit women and similarly between dalit women
and other women. This foregrounds the distinctive qualities and uniqueness of dalit women, which tells them apart from other women. At the same time they do share many things both with Dalit men and other women. Within this socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political structure the difference itself becomes a tool of exploitation and marginalization and very often effaces the identity itself, which is the sign of an unhealthy society. Therefore the conclusion looks, on the one hand at the possibility of building a transformatory movement, which retains the differences, which consistently keep conscientizing and sensitizing the movement of what it should take stock of; and on the other hand towards avoiding the danger of turning these differences into identity politics which is agenda based, and non-transformatory and moreover highly patriarchal. Finally it contemplates the possibility of placing the women's movement in relation to other movements, which are also struggles for liberation, transformation and democratic values.

ENDNOTES

1 Oakley Ann, Experimenting in Knowing, Page 92. This trend in women's thinking can be traced back to the days of Margaret Cavendish (1623-73) who took issues with people like Hobbes and Descartes who in a way paved the way for the man – male centered methodology. As a contrast to their notions and their language, she used plain language, as a reaction against the obscurantism of male philosophers, and defined her philosophy as real and distinct from the philosophy of discourse and disputation (Cavendish 1666, Preface and P 16). Her view was that, all corporeal matter is both subject and agent, and that the natural and social worlds and mind and body are joined in a fundamental unity. She took issues with Descartes' notion of matter being moved by god and disputed the idea of male acquiring power over nature since he was part of it (and a prejudiced part, moreover, since he ignored the views of other animals).


3 Crenshaw Kimberle, "Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence Against Women of Color", P178-9, in Reconstructing Political Theory- Feminist
Perspectives. (ED) Mary Lyndan Shanly Narayan Um, Polity Press, 1997. "The experiences of women of colour are frequently the products of intersecting pattern of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or anti-racism has become a matter of concern. The discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, leave women of colour marginalized within both.


^ Karlekar, Malavika Voices from Within- Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women, OUP, 1993, Page 87.

^ Karlekar, Malavika, Voices from Within, Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women, Page 88-89, OUP, 1993


^ Karlekar, Malavika, Voices from Within, Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women, Page 88-89, OUP, 1993


^ Kimberle Crenshaw. Ibid. P179.

^ Sarkar Sumit, Writing Social History, OUP P. 360.


^ Oakley Ann. Experiments in Knowing, . Polity Press, 2000. Page 47. Ann Oakley makes a very interesting and pertinent observation with regard to qualitative research method. "Gender need not refer only to men and women as social groups: it can also function as a more general metaphor of the powerful and the powerless. This is why qualitative methods are advocated for research on/with many less powerful groups: women, children, the disabled, ethnic minorities, travelers, patients, homosexuals – all who are excluded from the mainstream of white, male, able bodied culture."