CHAPTER ONE

The Unknown Citizen –
The Invisibility of Dalit Women in Feminist Discourse.
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This chapter tries to bring out three things.

1. What considerations are gone into the nationalist historiography in relation to women and Dalit question? What issues are left out in the dominant colonial and nationalist discourse both with regard to women as well as Dalits?

2. The colonial rulers in collaboration with the nationalists designed a number of reforms related to women. For which women, these reforms were designed? How have these affected the lives of majority of Indian women?

3. What alternative discourses existed side by side the nationalist discourse? What was the point of difference between the two as far as women's question is concerned? Why are these alternative discourses very crucial for the feminist discourse and also in the process of building the women's movement?

The issues mentioned above seem to be unconnected but in reality it is not so. The correlation between the two is deeper and also quite decisive. These seemingly unconnected things go a long way in influencing the formation of the identity of the Dalit woman. It has also affected her identity through all these years.

Women's question came to be a subject of discussion during the colonial rule and continued during the second quarter of freedom struggle. It also continued to be in the constitutional discussions of post independence period. An analysis of why and how these discussions came up during that period and what attitudes went into its discussion and who discussed it
becomes very important. Moreover who were the women who figured in these discussions also becomes very important. In addition to this it is also essential to know what other discourses concerned with women's question were there along with the so-called dominant discourses during this period. Without this knowledge our understanding of women's movement and its priorities in the years to come remains incomplete.

During the colonial period the fever of the freedom movement was at its height. History of colonial India has always prioritized Indian nationalism, such that it comes to be assumed that the world of political action and discourse can be comprehended only through the categories of nationalism, imperialism and communalism. “Caste along with gender oppression became relegated as issues of social reform, less immediately relevant than basic questions of political independence or class struggle. They could be postponed or less automatically resolved with changes in political and economic structures and might be divisive from the point of view of anti-colonial struggle.”

Nationalist discourse refused to make women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state. The changes in the women's lives were outside the arena of political agitation and the home became the principal site of struggle through which nationalist patriarchy came to be normalized. Bala Gangadhara Tilak in the beginning of 20th century wrote "it was the husband and the traditional Hindu Community who were to decide how to manage the sexuality of the wife; neither the state, nor the liberal reformers nor the women themselves had the right to do so." In 1918 - He opposed, a Bill by Vithalbhai Patel, to legalize the inter-caste marriages. He described such marriages as "Hindu-Hindu che sankar karak vivah". He declared the Bill to be against Hindu religion and said that the progeny of such marriages may inherit the property of father only and not of
others. A Brahmin looses his brahmin-hood, if he marries a shudra woman, he opined. 4

The new patriarchy, which the nationalist discourse set up as a hegemonic construct, culturally distinguished itself not only from the west also from the mass of its own people. It generalized itself among the new middle class. But it was irrelevant to the large mass of subordinate classes. It stressed the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity etc. The new nationalist patriarchy distinguished sharply between the new woman who was quite reverse of the 'common woman' who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, and sexually promiscuous. The nationalist construct of femininity was highly elitist. The formation of a hegemonic national culture was necessarily built upon a system of exclusions. As a result in the new life of the nation, the vast masses of people came to be lead and represented by the dominant elite. These vast masses could never be culturally integrated with their leaders. Hence naturally in the discussions related to women's question, Dalit and working class women came to be precluded.5

In addition to this the introduction of English education excluded and marginalized the dalit women further. The English education among the elite and middle classes strengthened the already prevalent notions of womanhood. Emphasis on a relevant curriculum, which characterizes the writings on women's education during the pre-independence days, is directly linked to the conception of women's domestic role as housewives and mothers. Since the girls were not expected to work outside homes any education that did not train them for the above said roles was viewed as futile. The all India women's conference propagated the view that education for home making was crucial and this led to the founding of Lady Irwin College in November 1932. The curriculum should be designed such that the girls will not only be trained to become efficient housewives but
also become acquainted with their culture. This was the argument put forward by Indian social reformers and political leaders and even some western scholars and social reformers too shared this opinion.\(^6\)

The nationalist construction of womanhood and the strengthening of the traditional role of women by the English education were launched for entirely different purposes. Ironically their impact on the relationship between the women of upper caste/class and lower caste was very different. It widened the gap between the two enormously and divided them vertically. The nationalist construction cast them into a spiritual role in contrast to the profane roles these low caste women lived and resulted in their falling apart. The English education created such a sophisticated etiquette and manners among the upper caste/class women that it became impossible for these two groups of women to interact with each other though many of their joys and sorrows were similar.

These views on education and also the reforms, which were brought into the field of education, do not seem to have articulated two things. Firstly, this view of education which was modeled after the traditional and domestic role of woman was not compatible with the life styles of millions of Indian women especially those from the lower castes. It was inevitable for these women to go out and fend for their family. Secondly the question of women's education or any education without a reference to caste would be incomplete. A vast majority of Indians had no access to education solely because of their caste. The socio-cultural positioning of Dalit woman is such that unless caste, class and gender are consciously taken up as important issues in the discourse of women's education; these women are bound to remain outside these changes. Economic questions should also go into this discourse because patriarchal considerations and money matters very often go hand in hand. In any poor family usually a male member gets prioritized when the question of education comes. Hence in the Nationalist
discourse on education, nowhere do the low caste and low class women figure. It was a discourse meant totally for the elite women.

The English education, which was imparted to the Indian women, was based on the Victorian concept of womanhood. The Victorian England gave more importance to beauty, appearance, motherhood, good housekeeping, childcare, culinary arts and crotchet and thought them as the most essential components of womanhood. They in fact reinforced the traditional role of women. The very purpose of education was to refine and polish these roles and make them more sophisticated. The same thing happened in India with regard to women's education. This was a willing choice on the part of the reformers because these ideas suited the conception of women, which was already there in India as a mother and a homemaker. Importing this scheme they wanted to produce better mothers and homemakers. Hence a similar curriculum was devised by men (this is very significant) so as to suit the local needs. This new education instead of giving a new insight to women, which could change their perception of themselves and their roles, just put the same old wine in a new bottle. Hence women who were imparted this education internalized their traditional role with greater intensity. For instance Kailashbashini Devi in Hindu Mahilagner Heenabastha, says: "from the particular nature and capacities, with which God had endowed women, it is quite clear that the subservience of women is God’s Will. By becoming strong therefore, women can never become independent."

The construction of the 'New woman' characterized by self-sacrifice and gentleness and living like a Gruhalaxmi and kulalaxmi and the introduction of English education and the concomitant values of womanhood introduced with it affected the identity of a Dalit woman very seriously. The construction of the new woman put the dalit women into the category of bad and coarse women whose company had to be shunned.
They could never fit into the image of the new woman because of the way they had been positioned in this society. Their economic status could never allow them to be Gruhalaxmis. The English education also created a mindset, which looked down upon the culture, dialect and ways of being of the lower caste women as vulgar and inferior. The so called dominant and main stream discourse excluded and defamed the marginalized women by constructing an image of ideal woman which even today constitutes the image of a good and decent woman. In mid nineteenth Century, educated Bengali male attempted to rouse public opinion through articles in newspapers and through books about the popular art forms and their performers. They succeeded to a very great extent in driving these people away from the precincts of respectable urban society.

This sophisticated expression of the patriarchy pushed a section of women to the margin because of the way they had been positioned within their culture and caste. There was another factor working from within their caste (lower caste) and culture, which in fact is another expression of the male superiority. These marginalized women had to face the male chauvinism and the challenges of patriarchy from within their communities. In Bengali villages the women among these folk artistes had to fight the same sort of discrimination that they had suffered in cities like Calcutta. We hear about one Kusumkumari at the turn of the present century who during a Kavi song performance in a village in the east Bengal district of Barisal, was abused by her male contender. The latter's aspersions, curiously enough echo the same attitude which a hundred years ago Bhola Maira betrayed while attacking Jogyeshwari: "How dare you sing with us being a woman. You are only good for cooking!" In Karnataka there is the Nilagara Tradition. This tradition is dedicated to the god Manteswamy. It is one tradition, which has a number of dalit followers. Nilagaras are the people who are ritually initiated to sing in praise of Lord Manteswamy.
This is a very prestigious and a sacred profession. They usually sing folk poems composed in praise of Manteswamy. Those who are initiated are always the eldest sons in certain chosen dalit families. No woman, even when she is the eldest in the family is eligible for initiation. Even in the tradition of Carnatic Music upper caste women were not supposed to sing or play in public. The women from lower castes who were usually Devadasis or at least belonged to that tradition alone were eligible to sing. Even these women were not permitted to sing a genre of music called Ragam Tanam and Pallavi. It was a very prestigious and scholarly form, which only male singers should sing. These art forms were in fact the spaces through which one could express themselves and also invert their assigned roles within the community. But, in spite of it, patriarchy existed very much within the community. These cultural forms provided them nevertheless an opportunity to retaliate at least through songs and folk cultural forms.

This construction of ideal woman who is characterized by self-sacrifice, utter femininity and subservience, and the supremacy of patriarchy as the decisive force in the life of a woman went into the nationalist discourse and even into the dalit movement in the years to come. This cultural politics had a very serious telling on the women's movement in the days to come. It also affected the identity of dalit women very seriously. During this period neither the liberal reformers nor revivalists nor the colonial state articulated the notion of a female selfhood based on an absolute possession of rights. Yet their arguments in public created a space for at least a qualified acceptance for the notion of the woman's assent to her prescribed condition."

Both the colonial history and the nationalist historiography have overlooked the histories of the non-Brahmin democratic movements ever so crucial to the emancipatory discourse on caste and gender. In spite of being marginalized, these movements had made quite a powerful impact. Some
of the questions and issues raised by these movements posed a powerful challenge to the nationalists. Dalit question became a burning issue and a matter of hot debate between the nationalists led by Gandhi, Nehru, and others and the factions led by Dr B.R.Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders of various hues and colors both at the national and regional levels. Rising non-Brahmin movements in western and southern India and scattered Dalit movements throughout the country put forward a challenge to Hinduism itself with new low-caste, peasant and regional community identities. These movements also questioned certain very important claims made by the ‘national movement.’

"Gandhi represented in cultural terms a reformist Hinduism. The Reformist (incorporative,' norm-oriented) trends were embodied in Gandhi’s Harijan movement, which stood in the tradition of the broad upper caste social reform tradition that sought to cleanse Hinduism of its impurities to "lop off the excrescencies" in the words of M.G.Ranade, i.e., to chop off the diseased branches of the tree with the intention of fostering its growth. In contrast to this approach the anti-caste movement aimed at felling the tree."

Gandhi always claimed that Congress represented the Depressed Classes better than any person or party did. "I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their vote, that I would top the poll." But in Harijan movement too like other Gandhian mass movements, extension was combined with control, for Gandhi deliberately confined the Harijan campaign to limited social reform (opening of wells, roads, and particularly temples, plus humanitarian work). He did delink it from economic demands (though very many Harijans were agricultural labourers) and also refused to attack caste as a whole. With the result that Ambedkar refused a message to the Harijan weekly on the
ground that nothing 'can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system.' Sumith Sarkar rightly points out that "as with peasant movements, Gandhian Harijan work seems to have been in part a bid to establish hegemony over potentially more radical pressures from below." Ambedkar never considered Gandhi as the true leader of the Dalits. Hence he told: "To that claim I can only say that it is one of the many false claims which irresponsible people keep on making, although the persons concerned with regard to these claims have invariably been denying them... the Depressed Classes are not in the Congress." There was a vast difference in their points of view, with Ambedkar stressing the need for political power for the Dalits and with Gandhi arguing for reform. Gandhi said: 'What these people need more than election to the legislatures is protection from social and religious persecution.' Regarding Ambedkar's demand for separate electorates Gandhi always felt: "It will create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism............Those who speak of the political rights of Untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed...........I would resist it with my life." It sounds very ironical that Gandhi, while he feared the political division somehow did not take into consideration the division that already existed among Hindus. He warns against the spread of violence in case of separate electorates, but fails to recognize the violence to which Dalits were incessantly subjected. "During the freedom struggle Gandhi had taken the line that Harijans should be integrated into Hindu society, and therefore no separate identification, socially or politically, should be made. Gandhi felt that if special reservation of seats or positions were made for them as "handicaps" to help overcome their historical deprivation, they would always remain
stigmatized. He believed in an appeal to the caste Hindus to open their minds and hearts to embrace all colours, castes and creeds and to shed the discriminatory perception of the Harijans.”

Till about the Second Round Table Conference and Macdonald’s communal award in 1932 Gandhi doesn’t seem to be seriously worried about the question of caste and the plight of Dalits, even though there were many anti–caste movements since 1920s itself. But after 1932 Gandhi took Harijan question quite seriously. It became an important part of Gandhi’s political program. This shift in Gandhi’s attitude may be, because of the emergence of Ambedkar as a powerful dalit leader posing a challenge to the claims of national movement.

When Gandhi started his League against Untouchability, which, later came to be known as Harijan Sevak Sangh, Ambedkar raised two very important issues – whether the Sangh would be controlled by caste Hindus or whether the Dalits would have at least a share in control. Secondly, whether it would only seek to 'abolish Untouchability' or aim at the abolition of Chaturvamya itself. These two questions are very crucial with regard to the issue of Dalit women identity. These are the two basic questions, which Feminists have to ask themselves before they assert the solidarity of women and deny the need for a distinct dalit women voice. Anyway Gandhi finally held out for caste Hindu control on the grounds that since Untouchability was an evil of Hinduism that had to be purged, Hindus themselves must do this. Gandhi also stressed that he was not against Chaturvamya as a system.

Gandhi’s anti-Untouchability programs included temple entry, opening up of wells, long term "Harijan campaign, etc. Ambedkar was totally convinced that such superficial programs would not change Hinduism, which is basically exploitative, by nature. Therefore, he felt the need to destroy the system itself. Both the historical evidence as well as
practical field experiences prove beyond doubt the exploitative nature of Hinduism. (There were other streams of Hinduism, which were more egalitarian and humane, but they were more exception than the rule.) The experience of Kudmal Ranga Rao from South Canara is worth a reference here. In fact Kudmal Ranga Rao of Karnataka had understood the plight of the dalits. Upliftment of the dalit community had become the mission of his life. He was involved in the untouchability eradication program when Gandhiji was still a non-entity in the Indian social and political scene. In 1892 he establishes the first school for dalit children near Urva Chilimbi near Mangalore without any financial assistance from anybody. He opened a job-oriented training school for the Koragas of South Canara who are extremely backward. Because of his efforts Dalits got representation in District board and Mangalore Municipality. He establishes Courtlll Adi Dravida Sahakara Sangha and establishes Ashrams for the orphan women and child widows. Actually Gandhi remembers him as a source of inspiration for him to take up his League against Untouchability when he visited Mangalore in 1934. Ranga Rao suffers a great deal only because he tries to protest against the atrocities inflicted against the dalits. Unable to put up with the severe protest from the caste Hindus he had to close down the school at Urva. Then he establishes primary schools at Kankanad and Bolur. No Hindu teacher comes forward to teach in those schools. Finally he appoints Christian teachers in those schools. Because of his activities he had to suffer a severe social ostracism. He was forbidden from entering the temples, barbers refused to shave him and washermen refused to clean his clothes, his daughters were openly insulted and humiliated in public.22 This is just one stray example. This reference sounds timely because Gandhi refers to Ranga Rao as a source inspiration, but Ranga Rao's bitter experience with the 'Hindus' is not an eye opener to Gandhi. The Indian history is replete with such incidents. During the fieldwork in the Hosahalli
Village in Malavalli Taluq, an elderly man aged around 92 or so recounted his experience way back in 1924. There was a school in the village where students could study up to third standard. The Scheduled castes were denied admission into that school. When some of the enterprising dalit young men including the narrator brought it to the notice of Sir Mirza Ismail the then Diwan of the royal state of Mysore. Their intention was to educate at least their children even though they themselves were deprived of education. The Diwan ordered the authorities to allow the Scheduled Castes to the school. But the Lingayats (one of the leading upper castes in Karnataka) protested by closing the school. Finally through the interference of the Government the Dalits of the village got admission to the school. Even after the turn of this century, incidents like excommunicating the dalit youths who refused to beat the drums in a village in Karnataka for the upper caste men, and many similar incidents have been occurring repeatedly. This makes Gandhi’s claim that 'Untouchability was an evil of Hinduism that had to be purged and Hindus themselves must do this is highly questionable. Ambedkar even felt the need for autonomy. He firmly believed 'the emancipation of Dalits had to be the act of Dalits themselves.' He knew from history that injustice is not removed till the suffer himself does it away with it by his own exertions and actions. He used to tell "tell the slave he is a slave and he will revolt."

The most important question to be asked is why did Ambedkar organize the dalits quite separately from the Indian national movement that was led by the Congress? Why did he refuse to be subordinated to the nationalist version of the freedom struggle as floated by the Congress? Ambedkar's notion of nationalism results primarily from the dichotomy between the political and the social. As it is well known, the nationalist leaders and more particularly the Hindu nationalists laid excessive emphasis on the political almost ignoring the social aspect of the nationalism.
Ambedkar's argument was that in the absence of any comprehensive critique of the caste system and Hinduism the political is bound to suggest that the local/indigenous tyrants are preferable on 'patriotic grounds'. Phule and Ambedkar were forced to adopt alternative narrative resources and dalit-bahujan vocabularies, which were attuned to collective struggle for both the deconstruction of the official nationalist discourse and also to root dalit-bajujan nationalist discourse within the indigenous but egalitarian and emancipatory traditions. The anti-colonial Hindu nationalism did try to privilege the Hindu cultural categories for establishing sovereignty in the spiritual–cultural spheres thus juxtaposing it with western culture. However, in the process it tried to attempt a cultural homogenization of other culturally distinct groups in the country. Ambedkar was critical of this Hindutva homogenization and therefore he added a secular cultural component to his notion of nationalism through re-invoking the egalitarian cultural tradition of Buddha, Kabir and Phule and even at times the Bhakti tradition.24

Ambedkar was skeptical about the narrative of nationalism, which has been till today re-invoking the tradition of freedom, sacrifice, dedication and glory of the freedom fighters particularly of extremist variety. But, at the same time the narrative of nationalism is very vague and abstract about the concrete problems and also about the contestable question of unequal distribution of power and prestige of the dalits and other toiling masses. Ambedkar was engaged with his political adversaries particularly of Hindu Maha-sabhaite, the Congress and Gandhi on the question of distribution of political power on the terms decided by the dalits. But the nationalists have always fulminated against the distribution of power among the deprived sections of the society and therefore have seldom if ever, had occasion to deplore the absence of power among the dalits. On the contrary they have opposed such distribution of course on not such a convincing rational ground.
but on patriotic grounds, which made convenient sense only to some selective sections during the freedom struggle. The so-called nationalists refused to speak in the language of reciprocal recognition of an autonomous political identity of the dalits. These nationalists chose to speak in rather vague and abstract and at times arrogant terms which naturally made a person from the margins indifferent and often skeptical about the nationalist narrative.\textsuperscript{25}

Partition of India is a point of intersection of the withdrawal of colonial power and the formation of the Indian government. This is a crucial period because it was the time when the thoughts and perspectives of the Indian Government were being implemented through its policies. Hence the discussion of Dalit question at this crucial hour becomes very important because Partition of India is a very horrifying experience and also a testing time, which brings out attitudes hidden deep down the psyche of a nation state. The 'Dalit experience' at Partition is all the more touching and speaks of the utter marginalization and the indifference that the Dalit men and Dalit women have suffered. It is not just the individuals who are responsible for that, but the Indian Government itself, which declared itself to be the guardian of the Indian citizens, conveniently ignored the interests of the Dalits in general and the dalit women in particular. In spite of declaring the Dalits as an integral part of the Hindu population during the whole of freedom movement, they were just treated as non-entities during the rehabilitation of the refugees. They were not wanted anywhere. It was difficult to find an easy fit between the democratic agenda and social vision that the new nation had set itself and the way rehabilitation policies were being played out on the ground. Spatial outcastes, Harijans remained second-class citizens even as they were rehabilitated. There was little space for them in the new nation's agenda. The experiences and the plight of the dalits during and after Partition is recorded. The Indian Government's
treatment of the Dalits at that time gives rise to the question whether the Indian Government is really secular, democratic and egalitarian?  

In 1946 the Cabinet Mission put forward an interim plan. It suggested setting up of a Constituent Assembly, consisting of Indian representatives in order to enable Indians to devise a Constitution for themselves. But who would be represented on the Constituent Assembly? The Cabinet mission in its wisdom decided that it was sufficient to recognize only three main communities in India, General, Muslims and Sikh. Anyone other than Muslim or Sikh then was subsumed under the term General (Hindu). Whether the British did it out of ignorance of the Indian social situation or deliberately as a part of their political strategy is not very clear. In reality the Harijans were never a part of the Hindu community because they did not figure in the varna order. They were the outcastes. They were for all practical purpose the 'Panchamas.' These social realities seem non-existent when everything is normal or at least seem to be normal. But what is there deep down a national psyche is foreground only during a severe crisis. One such situation is partition of India. This becomes crystal clear in one of the narratives of Anis Kidwai and Sushila Nayyar. They were also serving as volunteers in the rehabilitation work. They notice that in Tihar all the Harijans are evacuated to prepare the place for the Hindus. So if the village was prepared for the Hindus then who were Harijans? In December 1947 Ambedkar wrote to Nehru, complaining that scheduled caste evacuees who had come into East Punjab were not able to take shelter in refugee camps established by Indian government. The reason, he said was that officers in charge of the camps discriminated between caste Hindus and scheduled caste refugees. Government had passed a rule that only those who stay in the rehabilitation camps should get the ration. As the scheduled castes were not allowed to stay in the rehabilitation camps, they did not even get the ration and had to starve. P.N.Rajbhoj, then the general
secretary of the All India scheduled Caste Federation mentions another interesting fact that, during the Rawalpindi riots in March 1947 scheduled caste people had not at all suffered any injuries or causalities. If at all any man had suffered it was because he was mistaken for a caste Hindu. Otherwise, when a man told the rioter he was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim he was left untouched. So again the question stands who are Dalits and what is their identity?

Dalits also faced another serious problem. Many Dalits who migrated from Pakistan worked on the land. According to the administrative rule compensatory land was made available mainly to those who could be defined as agriculturists i.e. those who owned land. Ironically Dalits were never the owners of the land but they were always tillers. Therefore they could make no legitimate claim to get compensatory land. A number of appeals were made to the Government. In a letter dated May 3, 1948 Rameshwari Nehru the head of the Harijan section wrote about the plight of these dalit tillers of land and pleaded the government to relax its rigidity regarding distributing land only to those who owned land earlier. But the government just did not bother to reconsider its policy. All the compensatory schemes and policies were owner to owner.

These same Dalits who were non-entities, and also invisible when compensatory and rehabilitation schemes were implemented suddenly became visible by virtue of their absence. Who would perform the entire menial tasks that needed doing – the swabbing, the sweeping, and the sanitary services? How would people live? Caste Hindus now began to "see" Dalits. Dalits acquired an identity. But the question is, is this the proper identity of an individual in a democratic set up? Is this the right concept of citizenship?

Dalits wanted political clout, political power and representation and most important of all, equal citizenship. Shortly after the partition plan was
announced H.K. Khandekar president of All India Depressed classes league sent a representation to Mountbatten asking that adequate representation be given to the depressed classes in The Boundary Commission. A sense of separateness seemed to have become essential to establish a sense of identity. P.N. Rajbhoj who visited Punjab is reported to have said: "Scheduled castes have nothing in common with caste Hindus..............There, Punjab should be partitioned into three parts - Muslim Punjab, Sikh cum Hindu Punjab and Scheduled caste Punjab."\textsuperscript{33}

In the month of November Mr Beah Lall started the 'all India Achhutistan movement. They just did not demand an independent state but actually gave it geography. They also claimed that the present Harijan MLAs are in fact the representatives of Hindus and not scheduled castes because they have been returned to the assembly with the majority of Hindu votes. The scheduled castes have no faith in Congress. So, they demanded a separate state consisting of Jullandhar and Ambala, which was mostly inhabited by scheduled castes.\textsuperscript{34}

Now the dominant groups too need to win the Harijans over not only for their political presence but also for the most basic need of the services they provided. Anxious to win Harijans over to their side the Indian Government set up a number of institutions for their rehabilitation. The tragic irony that underlay this particular form of attention was that it reinforced the very basis of the discrimination the Harijans were attempting to fight.\textsuperscript{35} The segregation continued.

While in Pakistan to prevent the break down of the sanitation system ESMA was passed and this disallowed Harijans from leaving the country. Then, suddenly the Indian Leaders were very much concerned with the plight of Harijans and raised a hue and cry in Parliament but in vain. The Government turned a deaf ear. Ambedkar refers to this during an election tour of Punjab in 1952: "I requested Pundit Nehru to take immediate action
and strive for the removal of ban on this migration. He did not do anything at all. He slept over the issue and did not even casually mention this during the course of various discussions with Pakistanis. None of the Congress Harijans raised a finger at the persecution of their brethren in Pakistan. Ambedkar complained to Nehru: "so far all care and attention has been bestowed by the Government of India on the problem of Muslims. The problem of Scheduled castes has either been supposed not to exist, or deemed to be so small as not to acquire special attention."

The Nationalist discourse was not at all ready to recognize the claims of Dalits as a category. Similar is the case with the Women's question. Therefore it is quite logical to conclude that it is highly impossible to expect the nationalist discourse to recognize the claims of women as a category in general and dalit women in particular. At this stage it has to be discussed as women's question because issues related to women were very often discussed and taken up by the educated men. "Two questions are to be asked by women about the nationalist discourse – Who is constructing it? In whose interest is it being constructed?" It is quite interesting to note that women themselves did not have any say in the issues related to women. Men decided what women need and what they should learn and how they should behave. They constructed not only a notion of women but also standardized the image of what constitutes a good woman. They articulated an ideal image of woman. This is essentially elitist and upper caste/class, which was very much similar to the image of the Victorian woman of 19th century. Not only did they construct an image of an ideal woman but also brought in a number of reformations in the life of Indian woman.

The nationalists were highly selective in their adoption of liberal slogans. Therefore it is worthwhile to inquire "What was the ideological sieve through which they put the newly imported ideas from Europe?" "It was not always desirable to imitate the West in anything other than the
material aspects of life, it was not even necessary to do so because in the spiritual domain the East was superior to the West. What was necessary was to cultivate the material techniques of the modern western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture. No encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in that sanctum. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women they must not lose their essentially spiritual virtues. It followed as a simple criterion for judging the desirability of reforms. The new woman defined in this way was subjected to a new patriarchy.

The larger mass of subordinate classes in this country have very little time at their disposal to either acquire or practice the accomplishment which are supposed to be the essential feature of an ideal woman. For these women the question of their survival is most important and their day to day livelihood is the burning issue before them. The hardships of life make them rude and terribly outspoken which is certainly unbecoming of an "ideal woman". This construct of ideal woman has gone very deep into the movement and has certainly affected the identity of dalit woman. This raises important questions regarding the issues of women' rights today.

During the colonial rule, a number of reforms were designed for women. In this context questions like "In what way did the colonial state's new structures, transform and reorganize gender? What was the new agenda being set for women by paternalistic reformers of 19th century? Was this new agenda common to all women or aimed only at particular categories among them? How did women receive it; to what extent did women withhold consent to the dominant model of patriarchy emerging in the late nineteenth century?" need to be asked. These are some of the questions, which are to be addressed because they did affect the Dalit woman’s identity in many ways. This can be clearly understood with a cursory look at the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, which is just one of the innumerable number of
reforms designed by the colonial state. Lucy Carroll has provided an exhaustive and illuminating account of the consequences of this act. (The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856) The British appear to have believed that they were legislating and creating a practice where none had existed. This may be attributable to the fact that, by and large, only the high castes were visible to the British and to the middle class reformers; thus when legislation was introduced it tended to extend the biases and the ideology of textual Hindu law to apply to those who had been either outside or on the margins of such customs earlier. Widow remarriage and the right to the deceased husband's property even after the remarriage was allowed in most of the Shudra castes. A law, like the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, did not bring about mobility in the caste, but it imposed the brahminical biases on the low caste woman. The interlocking dimensions of different patriarchies working together to uphold marital rights and obligations drawn from overtly dissimilar cultures and legal codes but performing similar functions can be seen. One can notice the interlocking of an indigenous patriarchy with new forms of patriarchy brought in by the colonial state produced a situation where apparently spaces opened up for women but were simultaneously restricted. It did away with at least some of the advantageous customary rights they possessed and subjected them to greater patriarchal oppression in addition to the caste oppression they already suffered from. One representative incident can be cited. It is the Harcharan v/s Nandi case. The case came before the Allahabad High court. Nandi is a bhangi by caste. After her husband’s demise, she became heir to a piece of land, which belonged to him. She remarried after a few years. Then her husband’s brothers filed a petition in the court that on the event of her remarriage she has lost right on the property of her deceased husband. And now it should belong to them according to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. In fact under the customary law she continued to have the right of possession of
deceased husband’s property even after the remarriage. The local units like the village panchayats or caste organizations followed to a greater extent the customary practices while deciding the cases. Usually the lower caste woman approached these village panchayats for justice. But they had been rendered powerless by these new colonial laws. As a result these women had to approach the colonial courts. But, these courts applied laws, which had been codified based on the oppressive brahminical practices, which were not at all favourable to women. As a result, these women permanently lost their hold on the property of their deceased husband.

The debates of the reformers during the colonial period were based on the upper caste religious texts and the forms of violence being addressed (widow burning, child marriage, seclusion, enforced widowhood) were all primarily upper caste Hindu practices. In fact these issues had no relevance for the lower caste women. For example Widow remarriage was not at all a problem among the lower castes. Sanga or Sangat appeared to be a recognized form of marriage among the lower caste social groups. This was so even in urban areas. “The evidence of a woman textile worker before the Indian Factory Commission, who said that she was a widow and was living with an ‘adopted husband.’” Even a practice like sati was never a lower caste practice. The lower caste widows could remarry freely until colonial intervention through the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Most often field survey shows that the dalit castes have recognized that sexual need is common to both men and women. Therefore not much constraint is there among them regarding widow remarriage or kudike. Sexuality was perceived differently by the lower castes. Even today there are more liberal sexual spaces among the lower sections. During fieldwork in rural areas a number of such cases were documented.

These reforms did not pay any attention towards the women who were being marginalized because of the new land legislation. The lower
caste women who were being marginalized by the new land legislation and were exposed to the threat of sexual violence under the Zamindari system of land legislation and the distress sale of women following the new land settlements in the 18th century are absent in these debates. Even the problem of the migrant women and the consequent increase in the prostitution never figured in their discussion. The “Indian woman” in the reform debate was essentially Hindu, upper caste and symbolic of the emergent middle class.48

The colonial reforms had both positive as well as negative impact on the lives of the lower sections of the Indian society. The colonial reforms were disadvantageous not only for the women but also for the backward class people and dalits in general. It enhanced the legal expense so enormously that it was almost impossible for these people to approach the court. In addition to that the inordinate delay caused in the deciding of the litigation caused unforeseen problems for them. This is most evident in the case of divorce, which the reformers claimed to be introducing for the first time to Hindu society even though they were repeatedly being told that formal divorce existed amongst large sections of the population. Divorce was very easily carried out. Some two, four or five of them sit together, both the contending parties come and they break some stalk of grass and that would amount to divorce. Neither a penny had to be incurred nor was there any delay. That is why in 1945 the Madras Provincial Backward classes league said: “... The procedure for obtaining divorce should be simplified and made within the easy reach of the poor backward classes who constitute nearly 65% of the Hindu population...”49

The implementation of colonial reforms in collaboration with the 'nationalist leaders' had different implication for men and women. Because of the colonial reformation, men from various lower and intermediate castes got an opportunity to educate themselves, which had been denied to them so
It also opened up for them new job opportunities. But the same cannot be said of Dalit women. At the same time these reforms reinforced and strengthened the already existing patriarchy. The educated young men were more inclined and enthusiastic to imbibe stringent patriarchal values along with the education. The education also had created a concept of culture and sophistication which was both brahminical and patriarchal. Though education and jobs improved the economic status of men it meant more control over women. As a result of these developments lower and intermediate caste men ignored their customary practices more and more which, were in fact, less oppressive as far as Dalit women were concerned especially in matters of marriage and divorce. On the contrary the new form of colonial domination and subjugation had built in it a sense of liberation thanks to open policy with regard to educational and occupational opportunity. This promised new openings for the suppressed castes at least theoretically for those who were supposed to have been traditionally deprived of these opportunities. That is why Biswas, Illaiah and others had mentioned the colonial rule as a saving grace for the dalits.

Apart from the National Movement During the later part of 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century there were various other movements, which took up the women's question. But their approach was entirely different from that of the National movement. They went to the roots of women's problems. They took up the question of caste and exploitation of women quite seriously. They had rightly understood that the problem of women's exploitation couldn't be understood without addressing the question of caste and patriarchy, which are inter-linked. The emphasis of these thinkers was mainly on the low caste, working class and peasant women. In this context Jyotiba Phule figures as a very important personality in Maharasthra. He took up the question of identity and existence of the nation in 19th century in opposing the elite led nationalist project. His argument
was that a society divided by caste could not constitute nation and those claiming to represent the nation were in fact its destroyers since they did not ignore these hierarchical divisions, but actually sought to maintain them as a basis for their power. He tried to place the women's question in the context of conquest and power. He saw them as the primary victims of force and violence emphasizing the miserable life of peasant women. He took a strong position describing male patriarchal power as a specific form of exploitation. The double standard, which oppressed women was prevalent, he argued, not only among the upper class Brahmins as seen in the pitiable conditions of Brahman widows, but also in the patriarchy of Shudra households in which the woman was expected to remain a loyal pativrata. The feminist scholar Uma Chakravarti has described Phule as a forerunner in establishing the theory of 'brahminical patriarchy'. Phule was sharply aware of the crucial role played by women in the transmission of traditional culture and religious attitudes. Therefore his earliest concerns were for women's education. Phule's first active project of social reform was founding of schools for the education of girls and the lower castes in Pune in the late 1840's. He thought the key to the fundamental change in the social attitudes lay in education. It was often difficult to persuade the lower castes of the value of education to their children. The failure to educate women in particular was seen as prime cause of India's decline. The Marathi address at the Second Annual Examination of the female schools in Pune on 12 February 1853 he castigated traditional attitude towards women in these terms: "In their opinion, women should forever be kept in obedience, should not be given any knowledge, should not be well educated, should not know about religion, should not mix with men, and they bring out extracts from our Shastras in which women are so deprecated in support of these idiotic beliefs and ask whether anything written by the great and learned sages be untrue." The purpose of education itself was perceived differently by the
elite reformers and Phule. According to the elite reformers the purpose of educating the women was to make them better women, wives and mothers. Its purpose was to make them discharge their domestic duties in a better and sophisticated way. It worked within the accepted framework of the concept of womanhood without questioning any of its assumptions. According to Phule the very purpose of educating the women was to make them change the role assigned to them by the society and the Shatras.

Shahu Maharaj came on throne of Kolhapur State on 2nd April 1894. Shahu built a large number of hostels for students of all the different castes, and provided all facilities to non-brahmin students from temple revenue. In his kingdom, schools, hospitals, water reservoirs, palace and even the royal dining was thrown open to all castes. He opened a Teashop for Dalits and took tea there and employed dalit servants. He helped Ambedkar to start a fortnightly journal “Mooknayak”, and also helped him in his education in England. He stopped the Dalit "vatan" (bonded labour - for which they got a small piece of land) and later appointed them as "talathi" (keeper of village land records). What he did in 1918, Brahmin Chief Minister, Kher, of Bombay Presidency could not do in 1937, but was done by a non-brahmin Chief Minister, Chauhan, in 1959. Shahu started Industries, built tanks, opened schools for training of 'patils' (non-brahmin village administrators) and later canceled 'kulkarni vatans', for which all brahmin community raised a hue and cry. He passed a law allowing remarriage of widows in 1917, and allowing Inter-caste marriages in 1918. He started in his State the work of "Satyashodhak Samaj" of Phule in 1911. He started "purohit school" i.e. school for making a priest for non-brahmin students, which was unheard of till then, and conducted 1513 religious functions, including 226 marriages, by them in the capital alone, just in one year in 1913, by non- brahmin priests, causing hue and cry among the brahmins. He was the first king who advised opening of Labour Unions, saying that such Unions are necessary to
keep a check on capitalists, who "are mostly from Brahmin and Vaishya castes." This was in 1918, much before Jawaharlal Nehru or Communist leader S. A. Dange paid attention to the Russian Revolution, and thus furthered the cause of Labour Movement started for the first time by Mahatma Phule and Lokhande, in India. Shahu declared he wants "swaraj" but first he wants to remove caste distinctions and discrimination. Otherwise, he said, swaraj would mean a Brahmin Rule of a fistful over the majority of Bahujans. Accordingly, he sent memorandum to Governor General demanding Caste wise Representation. In his historic speech in Mangaon near Kolhapur on 15th April 1920, he criticized those like Tilak, who wondered what the relation of politics with untouchability was, and declared unless you treat all men as human beings there can be no patriotism.

These years saw protests by 'muralis' against caste based prostitution in the campaigns launched by Shivram Janoba Kamble. The 1930's saw the organization of independent meetings and conferences by dalit women in the Ambedkarite movements. This was an obvious consequence of Ambedkar's practice of organizing women's meetings. In these parishads of the 1930's dalit women delegates passed resolutions against child marriage, enforced widowhood and dowry, critiquing these as brahminical practices. Women's participation in the Mahad satyagraha, their support to the independent Labour Party and the Schedule Caste Federation have been well documented. Women in large numbers supported Dharmantaar as a need for a religion that would recognize their equal status. Ambedkarite movement must be read in the context of the fact that in Ambedkar's theory of caste there is also a theory of the origins of subordination of women and that he saw the two issues as intrinsically linked. ……. He underlines the fact that the caste system can be maintained only through the controls on women's sexuality and in this sense women are the gateways to the caste system. In his speech at the gathering of women at the Mahad satyagraha, he draws
linkages between caste exploitation and women's subordination by underlining this. He calls upon women to contest the claims of upper caste women's progeny to purity and the damnation of lower caste to impurity. He locates the specificity and varying intensities of women's subordination by caste and thereby draws their subordination both as 'dalit' and as 'women'.

The self-respect Movement of Periyar in Tamil Nadu took up the issue of the identity of dalit women and other marginalized groups very seriously. In the Self-Respect movement women understood caste as not only a division of labour and labourers but as a system, which divided women as well. Such a division secured for some women comfort and security but also bound them to ignorance. So much so, that these women persisted in thinking that they were better off than their lower caste, working class sisters. Women self-respecters were particularly critical of nationalist women in this regard and took great exception to their entreaties to women to abide by tradition and serve the nation.

However, during the colonial period the nationalists and the Marxists regarded the caste issues and caste based movements as basically 'divisive' and dangerously pro-British. This was due to their strong belief that the 'main contradiction' during the colonial rule was that of the oppressed Indian nationality and imperialism. As Bipan Chandra puts it: the nationalist movement stood at the center of the broad democratic revolution in India, and the National Congress was the core of this, with other major movements including working class and peasant movements having a complex relation to the Congress and only communal and casteist movements forming an alternative stream of politics not nationalist or anti imperialist but loyalist pro-colonial tendencies.

Dalit and anti-caste movements could only be seen as diversionary by the Marxists because, Marxists had two important assumptions:
1. Class has been the most important factor determining exploitation and oppression.

2. The national movement was defined as the anti-imperialist movement against colonial rule and has been the over reaching movement of the third World countries in the era of imperialism. Within this perspective the Dalit and anti-caste movements cannot be anything but diversionary. Therefore Leftists criticized Ambedkar's demand for separate electorates for Untouchables as a distraction from real anti-imperialist work. Marxists in India have veered between a rather sectarian, pure class perspective (represented for instance by B.T.Ranadive and the CPI in its class sectarianism period) and pro Congress nationalism (represented by the CPI in other periods and by neo Marxists academics such as Bipan Chandra).

Analysis of the Dalit movements has suffered from both these interpretations. It has been seen as diversionary from the point of view of economic class struggle because it argued for the necessity of struggling against social oppression. It was diversionary in terms of national struggle because of its insistence on putting the needs of the most oppressed, exploited group first, and because of its willingness to treat the Indian elite, not foreign powers, as the 'main enemy'. Within this mindset that takes an overriding 'national oppression as self evident, Ambedkar's justification for compromise with the British on the grounds that 'we cannot fight all enemies at once' could seem only a betrayal. "People such as Phule, Agarkar, Gokhale and Ranade who talked about misery and servitude of the Shudras and Atishudras, who criticized varna system, and demanded social economic and political reconstruction, were declared enemies and were attacked from all sides. The intelligentsia won. They succeeded in turning the Indian liberation struggle into a lop-sided fight, and in reducing the other movements to a secondary status. Perhaps, the anti caste movement was in
its own way nationalist and anti imperialist; it saw opposition to colonial power as fundamentally connected with the struggle against what Marxists and nationalists would call feudalism or the caste system. For the anti-caste movements both these were parts of a fundamental national struggle. It seems necessary to move beyond the narrow class approach as well as the understanding of nationalism only in terms of political opposition to a foreign power. This involves taking a 'revisionist Marxist' approach at two levels: in terms of the relationship between 'superstructure' and 'base' {the ideological and the economic} and in terms of a vastly expanded analysis of the economic structure itself. In fact these emancipatory projects are crucial for the spread of a broad democratic ideology. They subvert the subordination and inequality and help in establishing Democracy in the true sense of the word. If democracy is to be understood as a system where all sections of the society are to be happy and enjoy equal rights and privileges, then these emancipatory projects instead of becoming diversionary become unifying force to bring them together on an egalitarian principle.

In addition to this "The radical historiography of colonial India, though emphasized the autonomous role of peasant, labour and other subaltern groups, equated the historiography of colonial India with that of Indian nationalism." These are some of the important fields where a greater part of Indian women eke their livelihoods. But in the nationalist discourse these narratives find very little space. There are some passing references to these, which do not give crucial details about the role of these groups and also their opinions. Therefore a greater India is missing in the Nationalist discourse.

These missing narratives become very significant for various reasons. Firstly they bring out the issues around which the nationalist discourse shaped itself. Secondly they throw light on what important issues are left out in the nationalist discourse on women. Thirdly by ignoring both the
caste as well as class questions what damage has the nationalist discourse caused to the poor and marginalized people and among them especially women from the lower castes becomes very clear. The question of land has always been the major preoccupation of the rural poor. In such crucial issues who did the national leaders prioritize is very decisive because it decided the livelihood of millions of poor that too women. The role of the rural women of Oudh during 1917-47 and the land reforms brought by nationalist government headed by Congress is worth attention. This incident brings out the enormous potential of the women from the lower strata to fight against the oppression and also passing decisions which are entirely different from those formulated by the elite women. Amongst the peasants was a doubly exploited section – women. On the one hand women faced all the miseries of the tenants and agricultural labourers and on the other they also suffered as women due to the rigid traditional structure of rural society. The role of women from the oppressed social strata – in transforming economic, social and political life in the countryside stands neglected in historical analyses. The study shows that women are not a homogenous social group. Both class and caste divide them. Women taluqdar and moneylenders are equally oppressive towards their tenants whether male or female. The problems of who have a control over the means of production who have a dominant position in society with greater privileges and social security were largely related to social customs and patriarchy while those faced by women cultivators and agricultural labourers were economic as well as patriarchal. Other corroborative recent field studies show that caste also becomes a very powerful determinant. Hence gender-class-caste approach to the feminist question becomes inevitable.

In Oudh, Women outnumbered men as agricultural labourers. The agricultural labourers were a socially degraded class not only because of their occupation, which kept them at the lowest economic stratum, but also
because of the caste structure. The bulk of the rural proletariat was drawn from 'low castes' who for generations had been prevented by the feudal aristocracy from owning land for cultivation in order to facilitate the supply of labour. They were not only paupers and serfs but untouchables as well. The extreme economic and social pressure, to an extent, explains the large number of women amongst the labourers coming out to work. Because of utter poverty there was the practice of *Kanya vikray* among them. The system of Murdafaroshi (selling of land holding after the death of the leaseholder) and the taluqdari (conferment of proprietorial rights in land) made women's situation very pathetic. They were the worst victims. During 1917 and 18 Baba Ramachandra came to Oudh and lead a militant peasant movement. Baba Ramachandra did not perceive the peasant question in isolation but tired to understand it in relation to women, caste, power and patriarchy. He not only tried to mobilize the peasants but also tried to bring out reforms in the caste relations and his wife Jaggi mobilized women and they participated in the meetings.

Here the most important thing from the point of view of women was the resolutions brought forward by the women themselves. Baba Ramachandra argued for the upward mobility for lower caste women. When the Sarda committee was seeking evidence he advised the village panchayat heads to demand a similar status for the women of lower castes as was enjoyed by high caste women. We find he first instance of an active participation by women in the peasant struggles in August-September 1920. The peasant movement in Oudh assumed the dimensions of a class war as the desperate peasantry resorted to militant action. When the police opened fire the women did not remain passive in the struggle. They pelted brickbats from their housetops on the policemen. In many instances women belonging to the upper classes were subjected to humiliation, maltreated and abused by groups of oppressed. This demonstrates the awareness on the
part of women of the class – contradictions of rural society. On the 19th
February 1925 in Pratapgarh, an all women conference was held under the
presidency of jai Kumari. It was described as a Kisan Devi Ki Sabha and
the following resolutions were passed in that sabha:

1. The Panchayat in every village should maintain a cow so that milk
is available for small children.
2. After the death of the husband and on confirmation of the proof of
marriage the wife should get her right. If the wife is not there then
the son or daughter should have it.
3. For achieving these demands of Kisanin, we shall organize
meetings in every village.
4. We shall contribute one anna per woman and form women
panchayat in every village.
5. We shall hold meeting in our own villages and for the redressal of
our grievances we shall get our own laws constituted from the
government.

Concrete efforts were made in 1930s to form peasant women's
organizations. The aims of the Kisanin Panchayat were:
a. To fight the grievances faced by them as women.
b. To fight the grievances faced as peasants and agricultural
labourers.
c. Political mobilization for the national movement.
d. Those who work as labourers should get full wages.
e. The women from the kisan families should not be forced to work
under the threats of lathis.

Both the aims and the pledge of the Kisanin Panchayat were an overt
expression of the oppression faced by women in the countryside. The
kisanin Panchayat organized exhibitions to educate the kisanin and these
were financed by the Praja Sangh. Women attended these from distant
places. The Kisanin Panchayat would send separate invitations to women to attend the meeting.\textsuperscript{62}

The reaction of the Indian National Congress is extremely significant. In the late 1930s the right wing leadership was particularly hostile towards the Kisan Sabha and at many places, peasant members of the Congress were not allowed to vote in the organizational elections. In the Pratapgarh countryside women had enrolled themselves in large numbers as four anna members of the Congress. These women were not just passive members. They played an important role not only during the direct action struggles but also in the organizational matters. During 1938-39 organizational elections a large number of women found their names missing in the voters list for organizational elections. Certain changes had been made in the tenancy laws during the congress ministry in U.P. but they failed to meet peasant exceptions. On the contrary it was the landlords who were able to extract some concessions from them. One among these was the enhanced power of the landlord to take over the lands, which had been used for generations by peasants for grazing their animals. In October 1940 Baba Ramachandra organized a movement against this and more than 10,000 were taken in a procession to the D.C. office. Women played a vital role in organizing this march.

On 4 December 1940 during the individual satyagraha Jaggi made a request to the president of the Pratapgarh D.C.C. that she was a congress member and she should be issued a satyagrahi pass. She wanted to offer satyagraha because the peasants were oppressed and the government had insulted Mahatma Gandhi. It is important to note here that while offering satyagraha for the nationalist cause she stressed peasant oppression and this signifies the peasants' own perception of nationalism. A hand written leaflet was issued under her signature appealing to the peasants to:

1. Never believe the alien government.
2. Not help or be the rajas and maharajas as they were the friends of the alien government.
3. Look after your homes, family, lands and animals yourself.
4. Break all the caste norms in crisis.
5. Not side with those who indulge in violence and looting.
6. Be with the poor and not with the rich as they are all one.

The role of Baba Ramachandra is very significant. He would urge the women to stand on their own feet, but being aware of the existing social reality he knew well that their amelioration would not come through their own efforts alone. The attitude of the men towards women had to be changed. Like all political and social reformers he was patronizing towards women but did not want them to be submissive. He struggled for transformation in the condition and status of women, which he sought by using traditional and cultural idioms to mobilize them not only as peasants but also as a separate group - women.

Thus Nationalist Discourse as well as the series of reforms designed in collaboration with the colonial state had been formulated by elite men and targeted the elite women. But they had very different implications for the marginalized women and specially the Dalit women. Caste does not simply make the experience of women's subordination greater. It qualitatively changes the nature of subordination. Hence even among other marginalized women the brunt borne by the dalit women is not only different but also comparatively more intense. The way it affects her identity is also different. This larger framework initiated by the nationalist discourse with certain changes (none very basic) continued to provide the basic framework for the different social movements including the Dalit movement in the post-independent period.
It is the title of W.H. Auden's poem of the same name.

Sumit Sarkar, Writing Social History, P. 367, OUP.

Bannerjee Himani, "Projects of Hegemony: towards a critique of Subaltern Studies Resolution of the Women's Question", Economic and Political Weekly, March 11, 2000, PP902-920. The Subaltern Study Scholars too fall in line with Tilak but in a subtler and refined way. They have also supported the traditional role of Indian Women and made the issues of patriarchy and power structure irrelevant. They are more interested to show that Indian elite was able to challenge the colonial rule by remaining true to their traditional life. Commenting on this trend among the subaltern scholars, Himani Banerjee writes, "Partha Chatterjee applauds the brahminical patriarchy for their success in partially subordinating modernity through the imperatives of tradition or religious communitarianism, the crucial factor for anti-colonialism or subalternity. This provides the legitimacy to the Hindu fundamentalist agenda. The crux of this enterprise lies in the fashioning subjectivity and agency for women and a domestic conduct, which are commensurable with this religious traditional ideological stance. For Dipesh Chakrabarty the Hindu construction of Grihalakshmi or the goddess of the home and Kulalakshmi or preserver of purity of lineage and tradition, through undeniably phallocentric are less problematic than the advocacy of individual rights or personhood for women. For Chatterjee the highest form of personhood (for women) was one constituted by the idea of self-sacrifice, the idea of living for others not in the spirit of civic virtue that Rousseau would have applauded, but in a spirit of subordination to non-secular and parochial principle of Dharma. Thus according to Chatterjee and other subaltern scholars the idea of an autonomous individual when applied to women in her own right to her own ends is considered a colonial design (westernisation) but similar autonomy for male would be no such thing. In this scheme of things it becomes impossible to have any genuine social critique and discussion of tradition and modernity. Men are accepted as natural rulers of women in the essentialist order of national cultural religious communities. Both Chatterjee and Chakarbarty, treat the references to women's oppression, as either the colonial government or indigenous lies and treachery. By doing so they are able to create a more sophisticated version of Hindu revivalism, which in turn contribute to the legitimization of various forms of violence against women.


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Chanana Karuna, Social Change or Social Reform – The education of Women in Pre-Independence India, In Socialization, Education of women, Edt by Karuna Chanana, Orient Longman.

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Fieldwork, Mudinahalli and Sakshi Beedu, An old man aged around 75 while answering the query if they do want their women to stay at home, told "How is it possible? She has to go out and work. We have to think of our stomach, they cannot sit at home like that. Hunger is there."

11 Sarkar Tanika, 1999, Ibid.
13 Omvedt Gail Omvedt, 1994, Ibid.
14 Writing and Speeches, Vol II PP 661-63.
16 Gail Omvedt, Dalits and Democratic Revolution, 1994, P170-1.
17 Gail Omvedt, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution, 1994, P170, sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
18 Writings and Speeches. Vol II, PP 661-3.
19 Jain Devaki, Gandhian Contribution towards a Feminist Ethics, in Speaking of Faith, ed by Diana L. Eck and Devaki Jain, Kali for Women, 1986.
20 Sarkar Sumith, op sit.
27 Kdwai Anis, Azadi ki Chaon Mein, PP 80-82. in Ibid. Urvashi Butalia (1998)
29 Ambedkar to Nehru, December 18, 1947, quoted in Ibid. p 227
31 AICC Papers, Relief and Rehabilitation, F. No 9-26 (II)/ 1947. Quoted in Ibid. PP 229-230.
34 AICC Papers, F.No G-26, 1948.
36 Das Bhagwan, Thus Spoke Ambedkar, Selected Speeches, Vol II
37 Ambedkar to Nehru, .December 14, 1947
38 Chakravarty Uma, quoted in Feminist Narratives of Conflict and Nation State, Rita Manchanda, EPW, April 12, 2003.
39 Sarkar Sumit, Writing Social History, OUP.
41 Chakravarti Uma, Rewriting History,. , Kali for Women, 1998, P121.
Chakravarthi Uma, Opp Cit. Non-sacramental marriage was prevalent among most of the lower castes which, had enabled the woman to hold the property of her diseased husband even after remarriage.


Personal Interview, District Co-Ordinator, Mahila Samakhya, Mysore.

Fieldwork, Hosahalli Village, Malavalli Taluq. For example in the village called Hosahalli, a young woman recounted that her father passed away when she was five years old and her mother was just 21. A year after her husband's demise it was found that the woman was pregnant. Then the caste panchayat decided that after all she was very young and it is quite natural that she has such sexual desires and accorded a legitimate status to that child and finally she married the man who was responsible for the birth of that child

Vaid and Sangari, Opp cit.


Uma chakravarti, Gender, Class and Nation; Ramabai and the Critique of Brahmanical Patriarchy. Quoted in Dalit Visions, Gail Omvedt, 1995. P-23.

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