CHAPTER TWO

Should Dalit Women Talk Differently?
–The Need for Separate Identity
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Feminist, Dalit and Human Rights Movements and 'the Issues at Stake'

The post independent period witnessed a number of social as well as political movements like Dalit, Women, Human rights, Environmental, peasant, Trade Union and other such movements. Most of these movements can be traced back to the pre-independent days. In the pre independent days itself Dalit Movement had taken a very clear trajectory in the form of non-Brahmin movement under the leadership of Phule and as dalit movement more specifically under the leadership of Ambedkar and other contemporary dalit leaders. But a movement that can be specifically called women's movement took a definite shape in the post-independent period and also became wide spread. These two movements are very crucial from the point of view of a dalit woman because they are of immediate concern to her. Her position both as a woman and as a dalit makes these two movements very crucial to her. Another movement, which can be of great importance in her life, is the peasant movement. More than 75% of dalit women are dependent on land. Most of them are landless labourers. Apart from these the other movements too have an impact on the life of a dalit woman in their own way.

Many of these movements have taken up the women's question though they are not specifically women's movement. These movements have approached, understood and incorporated the women's question differently. Hence, it is very important to take note of the issues these movements have taken up and also the views and strategies they have adopted towards the women's question. A detailed analysis of these movements becomes necessary to understand the ways in which her identity
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is affected and also transformed. It is only then that one can contemplate the need on the part of the dalit women to talk differently and also the need for Dalit Feminism and its impact in terms of building women's movement. This analysis helps to know how the identity of the dalit women has been constructed, transformed and also affected.

Today in most of the movements whether, women’s movement or Dalit movement or Human Rights or Peasant movement the absence of Dalit women is very conspicuous. It is also noteworthy that even when they are in the movement they are marked by their inactivity. Very often it is being said that dalit women are inactive because they are illiterate, poor and ignorant of their sad predicament. But there is strong historical evidence in the form of Ambedkarite Movement where Dalit women have participated with great devotion, enthusiasm and dedication. One cannot brush aside the precedent of the historic participation of the dalit women in Ambedkarite movement. The total participation of the dalit women of Oudh in the land reform movement launched by Baba Ramachandra in 1917 is another instance, which speaks of the enormous potential of the Dalit women. What was possible 50 years ago has become almost impossible today. Why is it so? This question has to be addressed very seriously. In addition to this it is extremely important to analyze the issues taken up by each of these movements referred to in the beginning of this chapter. Their priorities need to be analyzed in detail. The attitude of each movement towards dalit women should also be analyzed. It is essential to look into the factors, which have prevented the mass participation of the dalit women in any of these movements. This becomes very important because this analysis also brings out the nature and the framework of these movements and brings out whether they were transformatory or agenda based with some vested interests.
DALIT MOVEMENT AND THE DALIT WOMEN

The relationship between the Dalit movement and Dalit women is of greater significance than her relationship with any other movement except the women's movement. Caste is one of the leading factors, which decides the identity of a dalit woman. Hence a movement, which attacks a discriminatory practice like caste matters to her a great deal. At the same time within the community her positioning which is gendered is also very important. Therefore how does Dalit movement address the gender question in relation to caste becomes very crucial. Caste in itself is a patriarchal project, which operates through various media and women being the most important of all. Therefore Caste, patriarchy and gender oppression have a very intricate relationship. Hence addressing any one of these and leaving the other two untouched keeps any movement in the same old oppressive traditional framework. So a movement like Dalit movement not only affects an identity but it also has the potential to change her identity by redefining it. That is why it becomes a crucial discourse for dalit women. Those who have attacked caste directly have also been in most of the cases more open to the questions of women’s rights, a reminder perhaps once again that caste and gender domination remain intertwined in structures. Phule began with a school for girls of lower castes, and later daringly set up an orphanage for the illegitimate children of windows. Periyar is noticeable for anti-patriarchal statements and Digindra Narayan revived in Bengal a concern for the plight of widows.1

Dalit movement can be traced back to the days of Phule. Phule thought very seriously about the plight of a dalit and more significantly about the Dalit women. He had perceived very early that the position of the Dalit woman in the Indian society as well as within the Dalit community is very different. For him these issues were so crucial that he prioritized this
over the Indian National Movement. 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.² 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'.³

Phule was sharply aware of the crucial role played by women in the transmission of traditional culture and religious attitudes. It is also shown in his early concern for women's education. In education he thought, lay the key to a fundamental change in social attitude. Phule opened a school for girls of the low and untouchable castes in Pune and undertook the task of teaching himself. The arguments for female and low caste education given by Phule and his colleagues reflect strongly the view of India as a society materially and intellectually impoverished. The failure to educate women in particular was seen as the prime cause of India's decline. The Marathi address at the Second Annual examination of the female schools in Pune on 12 February, castigated traditional attitudes 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" (119, O'Hanlon) Satya Shodhak Samaj had set many clauses for its members and one of the main clauses stipulated that they should make every effort to spread education by teaching women and children and spread the knowledge of improved techniques of agriculture. (233, O'Hanlon) Projects of education figured very largely in the early activities of the Satya Shodhak society. This emphasis on education was to provide one of the most important themes of Non-Bhrahan movement as it developed towards the end of the century. Satya Shodhak Society was convinced that the harmful social customs like the child marriage, expensive weddings and the reluctance to educate women, undermined the ability of the lower castes to reach any sort of secular prosperity and well being. He appealed to the women in his audience contrasting their own toil alongside their husbands in the fields with the life of ease that Brahman women led "These Brahmana women sleep on late, in the morning get up at leisure and do their hair; sweep and wash their houses and do a little bit of cooking and washing, and then sit around all day listening to old religious tales and puranas being read to them."(262, O'Hanlon) This led on to a bitter attack on the distribution of social and economic resources in society.

Phule had clearly perceived the role of patriarchy among the lower castes. He could discern that unless women are brought into the transformatory agenda through education and awareness the question of caste as well as exploitation resulting from it couldn't be addressed. In addition to that Phule had understood that patriarchy existed among all castes irrespective of whether it is higher or lower. But he also points out that caste made a qualitative difference in the lives of the women depending on to which caste they belonged to. Hence he places or at least hints at organizing the lower caste women separately. In his play The Third Eye, the character of the cultivator is reluctant to do what the Brahmana priest suggests but the priest's wife convinces the cultivator's wife to persuade her
husband to perform those rituals and succeeds. In the context the priest and his wife are shown equally constrained by the traditions of their own caste. Suggestively he suggests the mechanism of women becoming a part of her caste constitution rather than the constitution of women. Thus perhaps unintentionally he is hinting at the greatest problem that the women's movement would have to face in order to mobilize women cutting across the caste barriers. When the question of women comes within the caste he prioritizes the question of patriarchy and a separate identity for women, while beyond the community framework he prioritized to differentiate them on the basis of caste. This again is very important to understand the way a dalit woman is positioned within the family and in the society.

Later on Ambedkar too seems to have followed the footsteps of Phule. Like Phule he had understood the way the women are positioned in this society and the dalit woman within her own community. Therefore he addressed the women separately. He knew very well that they needed to have an independent identity. He was aware that if he ignored them, he would also fall into the trap of patriarchy into which others have fallen. Ambedkar's movement has always conscientized women to look upon atrocities committed upon them in a broader perspective. Ambedkar tried to draw the attention of the dalit women towards the intricate relationship between the caste, patriarchy and the gender. This approach of Ambedkar becomes very significant because he tries to understand the concepts that lie at the root of the exploitation of women in general and the dalit women in particular. While dwelling upon the caste system and subordination of women; Ambedkar says that in the caste system which is characterized by hierarchy and stratification lower the position a woman has higher the exploitation she suffers. Therefore he urges all women to fight for the annihilation of caste.
One of the striking features of the Ambedkar movement is the mass participation of women in the movement. Except for the Gandhian movement (nationalist period) probably no other social movement in India shows such widespread participation by women. From 1927, dalit women have been in the forefront of the social, cultural and political programs of the dalit movement organized by Ambedkar. Separate Parishadas of women is a case in point. Dr. Ambedkar organized several conferences of the Untouchables. He saw to it that women’s conferences were held simultaneously with those for men. By 1930 women had become so conscious that they started conducting their own meetings and conferences independently.

In Mahad in 1927, during the historic satyagraha movement to claim the right of Untouchables to take water from the public tank, Dalit women not only participated in the procession with Dr. Ambedkar but also participated in the deliberations of the subject committee meetings in passing resolutions about the claim for the equal human rights. In the Nasik satyagraha, started by Ambedkar in 1930 for the right of Untouchables to enter Hindu temples, several hundred women conducted sit-in agitation in front of the temple and courted arrest. Every batch of volunteers consisted of some women. This satyagraha was carried on until 1935, During this period, women conducted meetings to support separate electorates for the Untouchables and passed resolutions accordingly. In May 1936 the women held an independent conference along with one for women in Bombay to support Dr. Ambedkar’s declaration of his intention to convert to a Non-Hindu religion. The speeches of women, reported exhaustively in Janata weekly, show that women were very frank in stating that they wanted a religion that would recognize their freedom, dignity and equal status with men. They expressed confidence that Dr. Ambedkar would not drag them...
into a religion where women would have to wear the burkha or live in purdah.

The resolutions passed by women in various conferences demanded:

1) Free and compulsory education for girls;

2) Women's representation in state legislative assemblies, local bodies, etc.

3) Training for self-protection of Untouchable women, such as wielding of sticks or karate;

4) Starting a women’s wing in the *Samta Sainik Dal* (Equality Volunteer Corps);

5) Prohibiting child marriages.

Efforts were made by all Ambedkarite workers to encourage women’s education. The research revealed that the first girl’s school in the Untouchable community was started by Kalicharan Nanda-gawali, who later became the Untouchable representative from Gondia to the Central Provinces legislative council during the 1920s. Similar schools were started in the Konkan region and at a few other places. In 1924 in Nagpur the first woman to start a girls school was Jaibai Chaudhari, who herself secured an education against heavy odds and against the wishes of her husband. She was encouraged and helped in her work by a Christian nun. Other women social workers started independent hostels exclusively for girls during the 1930s.

The political movement begun by Dr. Ambedkar brought forth the political ambition of untouchable women. Women conducted conferences and passed resolutions to support the Independent Labour Party and later the Scheduled Castes Federation programmes.
Describing the 1942 conference of women in Nagpur, held at the same time as the meeting of the Scheduled Castes Federation, Dr. Ambedkar said, “The presence of women at the conference in their thousands was a sight for the gods to witness. Their dress, their cleanliness and the confidence brought delight to my heart”^5. Similar conferences of women of great magnitude were organized at Kanpur (1944), Bombay (1945) and Calcutta (1946). At all these conferences, women leaders, viz. Minambal Shivraj from Madras, Sulochana Dongre of Amravati, Shantabai Dani and several other women addressed the meetings. Radhabai Kamble, a worker in a cotton mill, had come up as a labour leader in the Ambedkarite movement in the 1920s. She gave evidence before the Royal Commission of Labour in 1929. During the Scheduled Castes Federation’s 1946 satyagraha in the state assemblies the untouchable women also joined political agitation, courted arrest and were jailed. While joining the processions, satyagrahas, etc., these women had to entrust their children and family responsibilities to a neighbour or to a close relative like a mother or daughter. Occasionally some of them had co-operation from their husbands, but some of them had to face brutal beatings at their husband’s hands. Some women courted arrest along with men in satyagrahas. At such times, some of them took their infant babies with them to jail and some carried all their belongings, including chickens. Those who left their nursing babies at home complained of breast pains in jail. In order to facilitate social work a few women underwent family planning operations, while a few brought home a second wife for the husband. These women who were once meek and shy became self-reliant and dare-devil. Taking into consideration the extremely backward social atmosphere, the achievements of these women were most commendable. Women like Jaibai Chaudhari and Deshbhratar in the Nagpur area started schools, hostels and orphanages for girls. Radhabai Kamble shouldered leadership in the labour movement. Sakhubai Mohite
and Suman Bandisode were among several women who led organisations and participated in movements such as the struggle to rename Marathwada University, extending (affirmative action) reservations to Buddhists and provide land to landless labourers. From all this it will be clear that women had made great strides in achieving political consciousness.

Women were also interested in reforming the marriage system. Untouchable society already permitted divorce, remarriage and widow marriage, but the women in the movement brought several further reforms to the marriage system. They opposed child marriage. They tried to eliminate unnecessary rituals in marriage. They even adopted marriages through advertisement, which was not acceptable then, even among higher classes. Even marriages among different Untouchable sub-castes were welcomed. Such reforms were often ahead of the higher castes.\(^6\)

In his lifetime Ambedkar did indeed give birth to a movement that encompassed all the needs of human society – economic, social, cultural, political and spiritual. He sought a total transformation and in doing so, attempted to make use of the best scholarship and the greatest insights of his time. His movement had all the aspects of being an alternative way of living, of working for reforms of redeeming Indian society from the hold of Brahminism, and of launching a transformative social movement. It sought to deal with the problems of caste and Brahmans, and went beyond this to talk of the issues of development in a way different from either the Nehruvians or more dogmatic Marxists or the Village romantic Gandhians. Liberty, equality and fraternity, socially transformative economic philosophy and cultural transformation were all on its agenda.\(^7\)

But the participation of Dalit women within the Ambedkarite movement is also mainly limited to areas where his influence was pervading
and his presence is felt strongly. Otherwise their participation is not only thin but also absent. For example in the remote villages of Karnataka most of the women don’t know anything about Ambedkar and his movement. Even the women of older generation do not seem to have participated in any such movement.

Ambedkar had broader insights and transformative agenda as far as the question of patriarchy and gender is concerned. But the attitude of most of his followers reflected only the larger patriarchal framework. Hence the participation of women in the movement did show a marked change only in the places where Ambedkar’s influence was strong. Otherwise it was characterized by patriarchal values and gender bias. (Give examples) In many places the role of the movement was so negative that they were totally relegated to the background. Therefore the participation of the dalit women in the dalit movement organized by Ambedkar has to be understood bearing two different aspects in mind. As members belonging to the dalit community they did take part with all vigor and enthusiasm. But here one should not fail to notice the notion of gender and the working of patriarchy within the dalit movement.

In the post Ambedkarite period there was a shift in the rhetoric of the dalit movement particularly the Dalit Panthers. In their initial phase they were extremely aggressive in their expression. The categories of experience and personal politics were at the core of the epistemology and politics of the Dalit panther movement. The deeper problem was that in spite of their all-encompassing revolutionary rhetoric, the Panthers failed to move forward to the kind of total transformation that Ambedkar or Phule had envisaged. The panthers failed to elaborate a vision for the socio-economic programme of a new society and a strategy for moving forward. Their dissatisfaction about their placement in the caste hierarchy came out in open through literature and politics. But dalit literature in general constructed dalit women in the
similar patriarchal framework of glorification of motherhood and overall subjugation of women. The same attitude continued to be reflected in Dalit movement and Dalit politics. Similarly Dalit politics also looks at the issues of empowerment of women as a non-issue. Women in dalit politics figure only in number and are also caught in a trap of our women framework; wherein women mattered to them more as members belonging to that caste. Hence as it happened in the case of family where well being of the family is measured through the men who are the heads of the family, here women's identity got totally merged with the identity of the male members of the caste. This resulted in further marginalization of dalit women. Without their active involvement the movement cannot be transformatory in the true sense of the word.

The very environment and the attitude within the Dalit movement somehow kept out the Dalit women from the movement. The observation made by Vasantha Kannabiran regarding the attitude of male activists towards women during the Telangana People’s Struggle of 1948-51, holds good to the Dalit Movement in Karnataka to a very great extent. “A feudal patriarchal attitude, which felt that women are problematic in the movement because of their tendency to attract men and create conflicts within the ranks was prevalent among the leaders and organizers. There was also an emphasis on a code of morality which ran as an under current in the movement. In fact they perceived the duties of women within the traditional framework itself. The leaders were always afraid that the party would lose the reputation. There was always an anxiety in the leadership to maintain the “Pure Image. The leadership failed to see how trapped they were within the very culture they sought to destroy”.

Almost a similar attitude seems to have prevailed within the Dalit movement. Their attitude towards women was not very much different from that of other men. Apart from thinking women as seductive and
ensnaring, they were also thought of as vulnerable and to be protected. They again cast the women in the so-called traditional "Indian framework" and did not think of them differently. Also they did not perceive their role in a more transformatory terms. This seems to be the case not only with Dalit movement in Karnataka but also in the Maharastra.

In Karnataka in the pre independent days no dalit movement which can be compared to that of Maharastra did emerge. In Maharastra it had a very clear ideology and a concrete theory. In Karnataka it was a paternalistic kind of attitude, which in fact amounted to upliftment of the downtrodden. The princely state of Mysore took certain drastic steps like opening schools for the untouchables, granting them scholarships, and reserving a certain share of in the jobs for the untouchables. It was partly due to the deep influence of Swami Vivekananda and partly as a political move to balance the unrest among the different castes which were aspiring for social mobility. But most of these were limited mostly to the urban areas, which were in proximity to the princely state of Mysore. Similarly in South Canara region the enormous work done by Kudumal Ranga Rao is unsurpassed. But again it was not wide spread and more in the areas in and around Mangalore. The same can be said of the Hydrabad Karnataka area. Hence, for all practical purposes there was a theoretical and ideological vacuum and no trajectory for the dalit movement to move was there. Therefore dalit movement in Karnataka took its birth more as a response to the violence and atrocities on the dalits rather than as a movement with a clear social, political, cultural and economic idea. Dalit Sangharsh Samiti is the most important autonomous dalit organization, which emerged in Karnataka in 70's and 80's. Today in Karnataka dalit movement is almost identified with DSS. A cursory look at the way the dalit movement has taken shape in Karnataka shows that neither can this be placed within the discourse of Phule, nor that of Ambedkar as it is going to be seen later. It
seems to be much nearer the Dalit Panthers in their emotional outburst. Hence it is essential to take a look at the 'ideological framework' within which DSS operated.

One of the closest associates of Prof. B Krishnappa\textsuperscript{12} while recollecting his experiences in Dalit Sangharsha Samiti since the days of its inception brought out the various details about the participation and involvement of dalit women in the D.S.S. and also the attitude of the leaders. He recounted, “We have not taken up everything connected to women exclusively. We think in terms of a family. If a man in a family gets the benefit it means that the whole family has got that benefit. Women are still not independent enough to carry on a struggle by themselves. If both men and women come out, who will fend for the family? Women have to stay back and maintain the family. (The study carried out by Dasgupta and Partha in poor countries corroborate this trend.)\textsuperscript{13} In addition to that, there is an environment of fear in the world outside. Hence they cannot be taken out to participate in all the activities of the Samiti. Moreover involving women in the movement is highly problematic. Protecting them becomes our moral responsibility. During protest demonstrations and rallies men can spend the nights even on the footpath. But if we take women along with us we have to make all arrangements for them. That is why, even when hundreds of women were over enthusiastic to accompany us to Bangalore to stage a demonstration against the rape of Anasuymma;\textsuperscript{14} our leader was not inclined to take them with us. He was afraid that it would affect the reputation of the organization. Hence he refused to take them to the rally.”\textsuperscript{15} But, D.S.S. claims that it has always taken up the problem of Dalit women. The very first crucial issue on which D.S.S. organized a state level protest rally was the incident of rape of Anasuyamma of Hunasekatte near Kolar. D.S.S. organized a historical protest demonstration against the “Bettale Seve”\textsuperscript{16} at Chandragutti near Soraba in Shimoga District. Most of
the Participants in that Bettale Seve were Dalit women who were uneducated. D.S.S. organized state level jathas to create awareness among them and put an end to that evil practice. Of late, D.S.S. has a woman’s wing called Mahila Okkoota, which functions at the local level. "The women’s wing is not very active. Usually they do not take any independent decision. Decisions are usually taken by D.S.S. Women are given a place on the dais during functions. They are given an opportunity to deliver speeches. We have always taken up the cause of women."17

Taking up issues related to women is one thing and making women participate in a movement is another thing. Whenever the DSS has taken up the issues concerning women it has done so largely as the question of atrocities on dalits and not as women's issues. The very history of reforms related to women is nothing but the history of men deciding what women need and how they should be and what they should be. It was never a decision taken by a woman for herself. Beginning from the days of Rajaram Mohan Roy and to very recent times men decided for women and took care of women. The architects of Kanya Maha Vidyalaya decided that women should learn knitting and crotchet not because women had asked for it but because they thought it necessary for women. The attitude of the Dalit leaders in the Post-Ambedkarite period is very much within the larger tradition of the subcontinent. Referring to this Prof Rodrigues in a National Seminar on the Dalit question points out that, "There is no space to negotiate with a normative order that has already been set by the society and state; which leaves Dalit men in a poor bargaining position."18 But the trajectory treaded by Phule and Ambedkar was certainly much more emancipatory when it came to the question of mobilizing women and conceptualizing the role of women within in this patriarchal set up. The dalit movement in Post-Ambedkarite period did not seem to move in this
trajectory not only practically but also even conceptually. It seems to have worked more in the nationalist framework.

A dalit activist from Maharashtra of the post Ambedkarite period brings out the attitude prevalent within the movement, which is responsible for the absence of dalit women in dalit movement. Educated dalit men have not given psychological space to women in the house nor freedom of opinion and expression. The atmosphere in the regular dalit movement is not conducive to dalit women to trust dalit male activists. This hampers their wholesome participation. Educated Dalit women who have become more and more sophisticated are becoming highly sanskritized. They are more worried as what their husbands would think.

The DSS is much known for its struggle regarding land and its distribution. Because of its active struggle and also the pressure brought on the government, the government has passed "The Prevention of Transfer of SC/ST Land" This has enabled the dalits to be permanently in possession of the land, which is in their name. In addition to that the DSS has always pressurized the government to distribute land to the dalits. And in Shimoga district in Karnataka they have succeeded in making the government distribute the land among the dalits. At least 80% of the Dalit population are rural agricultural labourers who are totally dependent on land. Of them more than 60% are women exclusively engaged in agricultural activities. In most of the households women are the basic bread earners whose source of income comes from labouring on land. The Dalit women perform 2/3 of the agricultural activities. In the case of the dalits who own a little bit of land and do marginal farming, it is usually the women who do all the work related to cultivation. The field survey has always shown that dalit men who own a little bit of land have often mortgaged that land and have taken loan on that. It is, as good as not possessing the land. This is the reality of the life world of dalits. In spite of it DSS does not seem to have articulated
the idea of registering the land in the name of the woman or at least doing registration jointly in the name of both the husband and wife. A leading DSS leader of Shimoga district made it very clear that at the time of land distribution DSS never placed a demand either to issue the pattas (Land registration record) in the name of the dalit women or to issue patta jointly in the name of both husband and wife. This has not come up in DSS meeting even as a passing suggestion. It is worth remembering in this context that Ambedkar resigned for the post of the Minister of Law because he could not secure equal property rights for women in the Hindu code bill. For him economic autonomy for each individual within the family was very important. Ambedkar never lost an opportunity to fight for the amelioration of the condition of the poor women. When an important Bill proposing maternity benefits for women labourers was introduced in the house he showed intensity of feeling for the cause of women. He said "It is in the interest of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the prenatal period and also subsequently." But, DSS as an organization has always thought of the man as the head of the family and hence its approach to the issues like land patta goes thus.

The DSS claims to have a lot of dalit women membership. Of late a women's wing also seems to have come up in the DSS. They do not take decisions independently. Instead, the regular DSS takes the decisions. Women are given a space on the stage and are allowed to speak on the dais. The visit to the samiti office in Mysore was marked by the absence of women members. DSS declares that its motto is to fight against hunger, untouchability and gender inequality. Its agenda is to fight against atrocities against women and land issues in villages. They claim that there are women leaders in DSS. But they do not name anybody in specific. But their evasive answer suggests that the membership is rather on the paper than at the decision-making bodies. In the course of discussion they stress
that a lot of women do take part whenever there are protest demonstrations. In one of his interviews Devanoora Mahadeva of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti says, "With an exception of one or two incidents of struggle Dalit women are not very active within the DSS. There is a separate unit for women but it is not very active. There is dearth of women leadership in DSS." Statements like these are very rare and very few Dalit leaders lay out the situation so barely. As one of the key figures in DSS and also the State Sanchalak of the cultural wing of DSS even Devanoora Mahadeva doesn't seem to have articulated the need of training and creating women leadership within DSS which is very essential for the movement to play a transformatory role. The period under his leadership doesn't sound any different from the gender point of view because there wasn't any change either in the policy or the program of DSS.

In defense of the absence of women, the men in the DSS do have strong arguments. Some show the large number of women who participate now a days in the protest rallies. But the question is, do these dalit women who come to the protest demonstrations are really aware of what they are protesting against and why are they protesting? The question really remains to be answered. A Dalit woman whose husband is a very active member and also an office bearer in the Hunasoor DSS tells that usually dalit women do not know what they are protesting against and why they are doing so. On the day of demonstration a lorry is taken to the villages and they are just hoisted into it and are brought to the place of demonstration. Usually the DSS does not just bother either to consult them or take their suggestions. The lady who made this observation is herself an activist who had worked for the cause of dalit women both in the Mahila Samkhya (a government sponsored women's organization aiming at mobilizing dalit women.) as well as Mahila Sangrama (a women's organization). It appears that the participation of women in the demonstrations is quite mechanical. There
does not seem to be any initiative on the part of the leaders as well as cadres to educate and sensitize the dalit women about the issues fought by the samiti as well as the problems faced by the dalit community as a whole. This attitude doesn't seem to be a part of the programs of the Samiti.

But on the issue of the participation and mobilization of women a highly reputed leader[25] feels that "DSS came into existence as a spontaneous response to the atrocities and violence eked out on dalits hence in those movements the question of organizing dalits either as women, men and children does not come. Such considerations arise only when it grows into an institution."[26] But after nearly 25 years of its existence with a lot of experience going into the organization, the rhetoric doesn't seem to have changed. But this puts the credentials of the movement into question.

Since the days of Ambedkar the violence on the Dalit women continue to exist in our society. It is the nature of this violence, which in fact prompted Ambedkar to go deep into the women's question. This probe in fact gave him great insights into the intricate relationship between caste, gender, patriarchy and economic status. This awareness made Ambedkar to dwell seriously on the separate identity of women and its importance in bringing about larger social changes.

Another woman activist who had been associated with the DSS says she had to gradually withdraw herself from the DSS because she strongly felt that she had no voice there. She felt that it was totally a male dominated group where women were not consulted over any issue. Decision making was not a woman’s cup of tea there"[27] Jyoti Raj of REDS an organization working with the dalit women at the grassroots near Pavagada in Tumkur, said, "I felt the need to work separately because, patriarchy of course worked within DSS in its own way. They were not interested in a woman coming and taking up the strings of leadership. See even today there are very few women within DSS. Treating women as an independent
entity has never been their way of thinking. I think even Prof. Krishnappa had no such inclination. (She said that she is making this statement with due respect for him.) In addition to that most of the times DSS worked with the hostelites and youths. It had never percolated to the grassroots. Secondly its very program was not to create more and more leaders both men and women who can take the movement further."

Dr Laxminaraya who was with the DSS movement right from the beginning brings in certain interesting details about the movement and its attitude towards women. He says that in spite of its deep concern for women, the DSS has always remained a male organization. Its basic values were patriarchal and especially Mysore district was more so. He recollects that Kolar always had more women participants than any other unit. He does not remember DSS having organized any camp for women to initiate them into the movement. Beginning from the decision making to the organizing everything was in the hands of men. He feels that this is generally the case with DSS all over the state in spite of a few exceptions."

In this regard, the observations made by Prof. Gopal Guru on the contemporary dalit feminism in the context of Maharastra are highly significant. "The Dalit leaders in the state fail to articulate gender equality and are in no mood to confront the dalit patriarchy. The Dalit feminist confidence in such a leadership appears misplaced, if not misleading. However, a few feminists have maintained their distance from such leadership"

"How can the Dalit leaders feel empowered when they feed on the political passivity of their common people on the issue of internal critique? Moreover the common dalits do not undertake the painful exercise of internal critique as it undermines their power of patriarchy. The contemporary Dalit politics therefore seeks a definite political departure from Ambedkar, not realising or deliberately avoiding the lack of internal critique. This also robs Dalit politics of its universal character of reaching
out independently to other oppressed sections, which are also in need of a fresh grass roots initiative entailing a new vision of the world, based on the concept of truth.\(^3\)

If empowerment can be broadly understood as a process of enabling women or similar marginalized sections to take greater control over their lives and to transform dependencies leading to their subordination by ensuring them greater autonomy then the means of empowerment happens to be giving knowledge and greater information. Without such empowerment the new vision of the dalit movement will be meaningless.

Of late, Dalit intellectuals who are writers, professors as well as officers in different firms have been seriously thinking of reshaping and reorienting the dalit movement. A very important Kannada novelist Devanoora Mahadeva, who is culturally an extremely important figure not only in Karnataka but also internationally feels that the dalit movement has exhausted itself and it has lost its freshness and has become monotonous. Therefore a new movement should be created using new and different tools. While pondering over the question of creating a new movement and the issues to be taken into its fold: the gender question and patriarchy do not figure in it. But he broadly says that Dalit movement when restructured should involve the interests of all those who are exploited. When the DSS was in its initial stages its slogan was Ella Shoshitaroo Dalitaru” – All those who are exploited are Dalits. "Ella jatiya Badavru dalitare" (Poor people of all castes are dalits.) But that was like telling His-story also includes her story, which never happed in practice. He feels that Dalit woman is neither more oppressed than dalit men nor is doubly oppressed. He feels, ”The situation of dalit woman is equally good or bad as any other dalit man. May be she is socially doubly oppressed but still I have doubts. In the lower strata they are more liberated than the middle class women are because they work and can get food. All their families are women centered."\(^3\)
But the experience of talking to the dalit women workers of the Sujata Mill at Nanjanagood is worth a reference here. A number of dalit women worked in Sujata Textile Mills. Most the women who worked there were widows or divorcees or whose husbands were disabled or drunkards. Some women worked to compensate the meager income of their husbands. Due to various problems the mill is closed down and all of them are totally unemployed now. An interview with those women brought out the fact that none of them took any decision within the family, even when they were earning. Everything was being decided by their husbands and in families where the woman was either a divorcee or a widow the decision maker was either the brother or the maternal uncle. Even to sit with this researcher for a talk they waited till a male member of their family arrived. One of the male members who was also in the group which was being interviewed told the researcher, "Earlier when the factory was working in full swing, in most of the dalit families where the husband was capable of working, only men worked and women stayed at home but with the closure of the factory when men in the family lost their jobs the families were pushed into poverty women were drawn out and were forced to join the unorganized labour force." The tone was intensely sad when he told this. There was a sense of shame in his narration.

It is also noteworthy that even dalit women did not express any inclination to go out and work either in the field or in the factory. It appears that very often it is rather the pressure of poverty, which has made the dalit men send their women to work. The dalit women to go out and work because of the destitution they suffer from, rather than because of the awareness that economic independence shapes an identity for her. Majority of women in Hosahalli told that if their husbands brought home enough bacon they would certainly prefer to be housewives rather than work outside. The former is the life of their choice while the latter was forced
upon them. Many came out with this statement with a deep sense of sadness.\textsuperscript{34} Nearly 50 women were interviewed in the Hosahalli village to express their choice about working outside. They told that poverty, scarcity, economic compulsion, and absence of male earning members in the family were the reasons for working outside. Given their personal choice they wanted to stay at home if the husband earned sufficiently or do some work at home like silk worm rearing, etc.

It is also important to understand that in most of the families, which were reasonably, well off with an assured income, women were not interested in going out and working. Some in fact told that their husbands earn enough and why should women go out and work. They proudly said that their husbands did not like them to go out and work. It is other way round also. In comparatively affluent dalit families women told that their husbands neither liked their wives going out nor doing some kind of work like tailoring, etc in their homes.\textsuperscript{35} In most of the families though men are not in favour of their women working outside. Still they are sending because they have no other alternative. It is helplessness, which makes them send their women to work outside\textsuperscript{36}.

It is in fact here that the role of the movement becomes important. The movement should not only express the realities of life world but should go beyond that and at the same time it need not just express what is natural but move towards the ideal that is equality and social justice. It is only a movement with a transformatory agenda that can make its common people realize the changes that should take place in their life world, which would really give them a more positive and meaningful identity. Only a movement can change a situation of helplessness and inevitability into one of strength and autonomy. This is where the movement launched by Phule and Ambedkar made a difference.
Today Dalit movement in Karnataka seems to be unable to grapple with the situation. They are unable to perceive the social realities and psychological state of mind of a dalit woman. Secondly the goals of the Dalit movement are not clearly defined and the leaders themselves are confused in deciding what the movement should aim at. This is preventing them from evolving a clear plan of action. It is true that they are placed within a larger framework of patriarchy. But at the same time they should also realize through self-introspection and internal criticism that they and their women are moulded by the very same values. But the leaders of the movement have failed to realize this, hence the contradiction within the movement. On the one hand they think that dalit women are more liberated and enjoy a greater degree of autonomy because they go out and work and also enjoy economic independence. On the other hand when it comes to involving them in the movement and putting them in decision making position they think that women are problematic, naïve, unable to take the decision on their own and are to be protected. The question is, have they ever asked the women if they really want to go out and earn and maintain the family? Have they ever listened to their women and what they feel about the kind of identity that is thrust upon them? Have they ever tried to acknowledge the patriarchy, which is not only in their movement but also in their life world? Dalit movement lacks the serious reflectivity and introspection, which can make it sensitive to the complexities of dalit life and the movement.

Prof Gopal Guru makes certain crucial comments about the dalit leadership and the dalit movement of the present day, which in fact is making the movement less and less transformatory and more and more hegemonic. This is driving the Dalit women to contemplate more seriously of working out the idea of dalit feminism independent of the Dalit movement.
Women's Movement and the Dalit women question.

The post independent period in India saw a vigorous growth of women's movement. The women activists have often been dismayed by the relatively low participation of dalit women. In spite of an independent history of nearly 55 years of women's movement, dalit women have not felt at home within the women's movement and also they have not identified themselves with these movements whole-heartedly. Moreover they have contemplated – if not always, at least many a time - on speaking differently. This is in spite of the women’s movement taking up issues related to dalit women on many occasions. This really needs a serious reflection. There is a need to undertake a caste-class analysis of the women’s movement. The socio-economic background of the women who have constituted these movements and also who have led these movements and are still leading these movements also needs to be studied. What are the issues taken up by the various women's organizations and who are the beneficiaries of those struggles should also be examined. In short an analysis and understanding of the broad theoretical framework within which women's movement is operating is very important.

As it has been discussed in the first chapter broadly two frameworks operated during the pre independent days in which all the women related issues could be placed. Nationalist framework is one in which there were of course different shades. In spite of it, it operated under one broad consensus. The ideological position of this framework is elaborately discussed in the first chapter. The second is the Phule-Ambedkarite ideological framework, which is also extensively laid out in the first chapter. {In addition to this the leftist ideological framework which has become more widespread in the post independent days.} The lineage of women's
movement in the post independent can be traced back to any one of these frameworks.

In this context it is important to go back to women's exposure to education. Theoretical position into which the post-independent women's movement fitted itself into can be understood only in relation to the exposure of women to education.

During the later years of colonial rule, a strong case was made for the women's education. The demand came from the classes whose men had already been exposed to education both Oriental and Western. Hence their concept of education itself had been shaped by the demands of their own class and the Victorian values, which basically had the interests of the elite women. And naturally women from lower castes and classes were nowhere in the scene. In the princely state of Mysore in 1881 there were only three schools for untouchables. By 1900 this number went up to 65. Gradually this was extended to some rural areas also. The entry into all government or public schools was open to the untouchables or the Panchamas only in 1919. Even then the conditions in the schools were not conducive to them. When Dalit men themselves were exposed to education so late, naturally the turn for the dalit women might have come very late. In Karnataka the first school for girls was established in 1881 by Mr Narasimha Iyengar in the midst of severe social opposition. The aim of the education imparted there was to make girls unselfish, dedicated, loving wives and affectionate mothers. Similar schools were started in Melukote and Nanjanagood in 1885 and 1888 respectively. Admission was restricted only for the upper caste girls. In 1891 entry into those schools were open to Hindu girls of all castes except untouchables. Hence majority of women who got an opportunity to utilize the English Education belonged to the upper caste and class. This appears to be a common phenomenon all over India. The reason too is very clear. These were the social groups who had
been exposed to traditional indigenous education for quite some time. In
spite of their small number they were privileged to have education even
before the arrival of the British. The men from these groups had already
been exposed to the English education and hence it was very natural as well
as easier for women belonging to these sections to get exposed to education.
They got the opportunities of socialization very easily. Even during the
freedom struggle majority of women participants were from the upper castes
and classes. It was the natural outcome of the earlier social development
like exposure to English education and socialization. A similar situation
continued even in the post-independent days for the obvious reason.
Naturally there remained a wide and yawning gap of almost a century
between the above said women and the other marginalized women.

By 1955 the constitution of India provided some of the most
progressive laws for women. Many middle class women found a place in
the expanding service and educational sectors and government structures.
They constituted the image of new emancipated Indian Women. The
women's movement in India gathered momentum after 1975. The
declaration of International Women's year and the Publication of the Report
of the committee of status of women in India were crucial happenings. In
the wake of these happenings the women's question assumed importance. It
is quite natural that again the women from the upper castes who had several
exposures to modernity gained an opportunity to be conscientized and
therefore the issues earmarked by the movement were naturally the issues
affecting the women of the upper caste and middle classes more. "Quite
naturally the leadership of the women's movement has remained
predominantly middle class. This is not unique to women's movement. It is
also true of other movements and parties including the communist parties."43
The decade from 1975-85 saw the movement centering on the following
issues:
3. Dowry

4. Conscientization and amendment in law.

During 90's issues like sex detection, sex pre-selection tests, misrepresentation in the media, protests against harmful contraceptive dissemination and test trials, demand for gender just laws, uniform civil code, and the right to matrimonial home were taken up by the movement.

The very nature of these issues reveal that their protagonists were upper caste, middle class women who had reaped the benefits of education and had felt therefore the need to organize as women. This is not to deny the crucial importance of these issues, but to note that these issues did not focus on changing the social structure and therefore could not become mass-based issues. For example the concern most of the women's organizations expressed with regard to the malicious contraceptives is the problem of the miniscule minority of the urban women who are working or well placed or affluent. In most of the villages dalit women are usually very poor and impoverished. The filed study carried out by the researcher in the Hosahalli village is just one example to bring out the condition of the dalit women in majority of the villages in Karnataka. Most of these women do not use contraceptives. The village has neither a private medical practitioner nor a government primary health center. Rarely do the people go to the doctor. Women felt that even if there was a doctor they could not afford to go to him because they don’t have money to spend on those luxuries. They told the researcher that they have learnt to live with their suffering. Sometimes while looking from below the protest of the women's organizations against various contraceptives and other dangerous drugs concerns a very small minority – the urban middle and upper class women. (This is certainly not to undermine their concern or commitment to the cause of women. Nor is it to
1. Domestic violence
2. Sexual atrocities.
suggest that women's movement should not have taken up these issues. This is only to highlight the fact that how issues taken up by the movements were insignificant from the point of view of dalit women.) These rural poor women aren't even capable of buying the most essential life saving drugs. For them the greatest question in life is the question of livelihood which is being taken away from them day by day because of the politico-economic policy of the state. The survey conducted with regard to use of contraceptives by dalit women showed that only insignificant number of them used the contraceptives. Of the 60 women surveyed only five women used Copper-T and three had underwent family planning operation.

The leadership of the women's movement has most of the times remained with the upper caste and class women. Moreover the nature of the sexual violence and atrocities changed depending on both the caste and class. Mary Maynard while articulating the difference Race makes in the lives of women says that, as earlier thinkers have thought race does not simply increase the degree of inequality and oppression which black women experience as women and that oppression can be quantified and compared, but the fact is that 'race' does not simply make the experience of women's subordination greater. It qualitatively changes the nature of that subordination. It is within this context that one has to turn to the idea of difference. In many parts of Kerala dalit women were not permitted to wear a blouse when they appeared before their feudal lords because they were untouchables. Similarly in many parts of Kerala a dalit woman had to have her nuptials first with the feudal lord under whom her husband was working. This was possible only because they belonged to untouchable caste and also because there was social sanction to use them sexually. In addition to this the problems of a dalit girl's education in princely state of Mysore is a highly befitting example to show how in case of a dalit woman both gender and caste become tools of exploitation.
Mysore is a highly befitting example to show how in case of a dalit woman both gender and caste become tools of exploitation.

This succinctly brings out how caste qualitatively changes the nature of subordination and how dalit women share the disadvantages of both the gender and caste. (The disadvantages created by the caste and class together for a dalit woman is elaborately discussed in the third chapter.) But to cite just one more example; the dalit chairwoman of Hosalli village panchayat told the researcher that on the national festivals other upper caste male members hoisted the national flag. To a query why being the chair woman she didn't do it, very innocently and naturally she told the researcher, "Sister how can I do that, they (non dalit male members do that) will do that. I will be present there." The journalist P.Sainath reports a similar but a more violent incident where a dalit woman Sarpanch in Bihar was beaten by the upper member and was prevented from hoisting the national flag because she was a dalit.

Women's movement does not seem to have taken a very serious note of this crucial factor. The movement has remained essentially upper caste, elitist and urban centered. With a few exceptions, the women's movement has always remained urban centered. Therefore, naturally these groups addressed the problems of urban and educated sections of women. Nobody can deny that there are many problems, which are common to all women. Certainly there is a difference in some of the basic problems faced by the rural dalit women. "Similarly the ignorance of the specificities of a culture mars even thoroughly well intentioned feminist analyses of women's experiences of oppression within the culture."

"The Left and Women's question:

The Marxian ideology has always thought over the question of women's oppression and the decisive role played by the economic factors in deciding the nature of exploitation of women. The main variable in its analysis is
class and economic factors. But still, in the Indian scenario these two variables are not enough because many crucial and decisive subtleties will be missing if caste and patriarchy are not used as variables. Kumari Jayawardhana in her seminal article brings out the way the women's question is placed within the discourse of left in the whole of South Asia. Even today it is true to a very great extent. The Left whether in Socialist countries or in the states of India does not have a brilliant record on women's issues. It has failed to adopt itself to new movements based on gender, environment and other issues. Hence their failure to insert the women's question into existing work/revolutionary practice and to transform it. Women's issue is a part of the democratic struggle which is central to left parties and groups and which is a struggle they have theorized for decades. Therefore, a movement calling itself socialist, and not taking up the oppression of women as a question at the core of democracy and socialism is hardly living up to socialist ideals. Evidently a correct analysis of feminism cannot be provided without an attempt to understand and come to terms with patriarchy in its historical setting and its complex and problematic relationship with dominant relations of production. In South Asia the left parties from their inception have mobilized women of all classes in the freedom struggle, in trade union activity, in peasant agitation, student and youth movement. There have also been women revolutionaries, who have played key roles in organizing workers and peasants, participating in some of the historic, anti-imperialist and anti capitalist struggle. They have lead protests against rape and harassment of peasant women by upper caste landlords and have been active in denouncing sati and fundamentalist laws harmful to women. The women's organizations of the Left have not used words or concepts like feminism and patriarchy. Vimala Farookhi explicitly stated the position thus: "We are not a feminist organization, we are not anti men, we are not the only ones who are exploited. Harijan men
are no less exploited, of course, their women are doubly exploited. Since 1971 in the CPI the two women specific points of debate have been (1) how to draw/attract more women to our struggle/movement, and (2) how to change the attitudes of male comrades to encourage women to join the political struggle/the party. One has to be a good and sympathetic husband to allow women to join the struggle." Vimala Farooqhi further says:

"Feminists are the urban middle class women having a desire to divide the people, particularly the working class, they would like women of all classes should come together to fight against men. It is also important to realize that subjugation of women is part of the class society and when the property relations are abolished, conditions for women's equality in a socialist society are automatically created. So feminists are not to divide the working class families along the sex lines. Hence any women's movement pitted against the oppression of family on women must first learn to fight against the property relations in that society."

Organizationally, the left has always had women's associations, clearly linked, controlled and organized by the party, with little or no autonomy. There has been a resistance in the left to autonomous women's organizations. It is also true that neither the left leaders nor the women in left parties have seriously debated the woman's question. They have often made self-criticism on right or left deviations, on their failures in mobilizing minorities, intellectuals and other groups, but criticism of the failure to highlight women's oppression has not been made. Autonomous groups are further criticized by the left as 'apolitical,' having a narrow world view, not being interested in seeking state power. What is important to recognize is that, like many other social movements the women's movement too, is critical of state and asks greater self-determination for itself or autonomy from state itself. By no means does this mean that feminism or women's
movement is apolitical, or uninterested in the transformation of the character and nature of the state.\textsuperscript{51}

The Left has given little attention to the issue of land rights for women and to rectify the existing agricultural wage system. Where women are lower paid than men. Moreover, there is no explanation given for the specific political and ideological oppression of women, the system of male inheritance of productive resources in connection with either land or factory production and the economic subordination of women in wage labour. A woman's relation to property is always negotiated through her relation to her husband, brother or some other male member. Like the sexual division of labour the sexual division of private property is regarded as natural and therefore not to be questioned. Very often the much-acclaimed radicalism of the left trade union movement has been relegated to the domain of masculinity.

They do not pay any attention to the very important cultural specificities like caste. This has in the Indian context decided both the nature of work as well the life styles. Prof. Gopal Guru in one of his articles on the leather workers of Maharashtra brings out that more menial the job more number of dalits appointed there. Thereby brings out the relationship between caste and job in India. Even the leftist movement, which is supposed to transcend the caste and such cultural prejudices, works very much within that. An enlightening study of the Cashew workers of Kerala is done from the perspective of dalit women.\textsuperscript{52} Cultural prejudices associated with caste and gender bias converge and very often push the Dalit woman further to the margins. While discussing gender at the work place, the author shows, how the coding of different tasks has been culturally and ideologically legitimised. Shelling, peeling and grading are considered as female occupations. Women are characterized as being patient and endowed with nimble fingers and hence more suitable for monotonous
manual work. Within this gender bias the caste also works. The caste division of labour shows that majority of the women in the shelling sections are from the scheduled caste. Dirtier the work, the lower the caste. In addition to that when the question of wages come again these and many other social formations are at work. Three elements of social formation form a historical perspective - a gender ideology based on male breadwinners, institutionalization of this ideology and the material reality with regard to wages and women's contributions to their households. Tension is created by the fact that discrepancy is created between the practice and ideology. In reality Women are the de facto providers for their households, while at the same time the ideology of the male breadwinners has become institutionalized, encompassing a broad number of classes and castes. Negotiations were going on between the Cashew workers Trade union and the Government regarding wage fixation. Then the employers always tried to portray that the female cashew workers were primarily agricultural labourers and they worked in the cashew factory only once in a while, and took up this work just for an additional income. But when this strategy failed to convince the government, a more gender-conditioned argument was resorted to. Employers came to deny that these dalit women were responsible for the economic maintenance of their families and insisted that they were predominantly housewives, (which was only true of high-caste women, who were provided for by men). The low caste women's wages were declared supplementary to their households, since their husbands were repeatedly cited as the breadwinners. The author shows that the stricter gender division of labour was in fact the outcome of the two minimum wages committees' attempt to resolve the paradox brought about by the recommendations of the Report of the committee on Fair wages (RCFW). On the one hand the RCFW recommended that men and women should receive equal wages when doing the same type of work, while on the other
hand they said that women's wages should not be as high as that of the males, because no woman could be presumed to be the sole provider for a family. However the unanimous approval of gendered wages at the 15th Labour Conference in 1957, where radical communist union leaders participated put an end to anyone's doubts that the leftists were both gender and caste blind. Secondly they were also equally prejudiced as far as caste and gender is concerned. The call for diminishing the gap between the wages of women and men subsided and in its place the notion that dalit women were only supplementary wage earners was accepted. This meant that male workers received monthly wages and got the right to unemployment compensation. Monthly male workers were given continuous employment – their salaries covering the costs of reproducing labour. Women however classified as temporary or seasonal workers towards whom their employers had fewer obligations. On the institutional level it is pointed out that women have never been part of discussions about wages.

The silence of the trade union leaders with regard to gendered wages, long periods of unemployment and wages for women below the calculated minimum, may be on the one hand an expression of a patriarchal culture possessing a strong polarised, all encompassing gender ideology. Likewise this culture blind approach of the Left based trade unions has worked against the interests of the Dalit women. It is a known fact that largest number of women headed families are prevalent among dalits and not among upper caste. It is also proved through surveys and field works that very often even though dalit men work, their income doesn't go to support the family. Such a decision could be endorsed by the trade unions because they are caste blind and blind to the cultural specific ground realities. A song by a dalit Christian woman of Kerala in a very touching way gives expression to her plight as a dalit woman:
"We shall break the
Class oppression
That thrives on
Women's labor.
If we don't,
We'll have to spend
All our lives in useless tears.

"Hunger pangs drive
Us to toil every day.
We slave
All day for a handful of gruel.
O, the merciless masters
Chase us on the one side,
And our starving children
Wail on the other side.

"O, the torments of
Our drunken husbands
On the one hand,
The persecution by our
Creditors on the other hand,
`What is right -
To live or to die?`
Is the nagging question
Burning in our hearts.

"Having borne
Unlimited number of children,
We have become
Victims of earth's displeasure
So we'll cast our
Burdens upon the Lord
And dare to stand up and
Fight for our release!"

Most of the left affiliated women's groups have reiterated the left's understanding of the women's question. The primary reason for women's subordination is their economic dependency and exploitation by a capitalist system and feudal tradition. Equal participation in public production and the struggle for a non-class socialist society and state would eventually liberate women. These women's groups like AIDWA (All India Democratic Women's Association) NFIW and others with left leanings made significant contribution towards economic and work related issues. But as Mrs Tanika Sarkar appropriately points out, "one very big part of the women has been left out in AIDWA and the Left has been very insensitive and blind to the caste. They would not actually see it as a separate problem, even though they have done a lot to the dalits because they work with poor people. They have been working for their cause in their own way. But it had been a traditional problem with the left not to have any separate idea or thought on caste question and caste identity." Overlooking this dimension has many times created a problem, which has seriously affected the Dalit women. In one of the field works by this researcher in a village near pandavapura taluq Mandya district, an educated young dalit woman told that many of the economic options are closed to the dalit women just because of their caste. She had tried to mobilize the other dalit women of her colony and prepare papads and dry stuffed green challis and sell them. She was asked to stop that venture by the village elders because that would pollute other people and make people of other castes consume eatables prepared by the untouchables. When she insisted on continuing her venture, they
threatened her of social boycott. Finally she had to give up her idea. This cultural dimension of caste and the way it works is usually left out in the Leftist discourse. This aspect has been discussed earlier in the case of dalit women working in the cashew industry. This cultural dimension cannot be either explained or understood in terms of class.

But of late there appears to be a significant shift in the position of some left organizations in this regard. There has been a growing recognition of the caste question by the Indian Left ranging from the ultras to the mainstream parties particularly the CPI(M). This Left recognition of caste and gender based discrimination is evident from two conferences. One is the national convention of the Sanza Sanskrutik Abhiyan, a cultural front of the ML groups in Chandighar from November 9 to 11, 2000 and the CPI(M)'s conference in Thiruvananthapuram in October 2000. AIDWA also recently arranged a special conference for dalit women in Delhi. It was a three-day conference. Nearly 800 dalit women attended the conference. AIDWA usually does not recognize the caste or any other distinct identity of the women participants; but this time it did call them dalit women. This is a new departure. They had not focussed on caste previously and now they are taking that into consideration.

But all the factions of the Left do not seem to share this understanding of CPI(M) or AIDWA. The CPI(ML)Liberation party does recognize the plight of the dalits in general but they still feel that they cannot take up the caste question separately and they should tackle the caste problem by widening the framework of class conflict. They strongly feel that taking up the caste question independently will lead to a deviation from real struggle. Therefore they feel that the dalit issue should be sympathetically looked at but enough care should be taken to prevent it from changing the very course of the ML movement.
Progressive women's Front, a woman's group closely associated with the CPI(ML) (Vinod Mishra) claims that they do have a lot of dalit members in the organization. But they do not lead. The leaders of the organization do take up their issues. They speak for them and try to solve their problems. The organization feels that tackling dalit women's question separately would narrow down the scope of the women's movement and ultimately lead to fragmentation within the movement and ultimately it may lead to the dissolution of the movement itself. But their stand certainly becomes problematic even for them when an attempt to analyze and explain the conflicts like the encounter between the Dalits and the Bhumihars in Bihar, which has been very frequent now a days. The Bhumihar men raped the dalit women after a severe tussle regarding the issue of land. The progressive women's Front tried to organize women against this atrocity. It is very interesting to note that at this juncture the Bhumihar women took out a procession in support of their men and justified the rape of Dalit women. In Andhra Pradesh, Gothala and Pimpri Deshmukh in Maharashtra, in which the lower caste men had been hacked to death because of their alleged indecent behaviour towards upper caste women. The upper caste women in all the three cases had, it was reported not only incited their men folk into the violent acts even against dalit women, but also participated in them. Such cases present a problem to the feminist movement in that the alleged sexual harassment of the upper caste women by the lower caste males could be a cover up for caste confrontations; in that the agency of the upper caste women had been invoked in caste confrontations.

There is yet another incident which happened in a village near Nanjanagood Taluq in Karnataka. It is an anti-liquor struggle. Every woman in that village irrespective of caste and class was affected by the liquor addiction of their men. Fed up by this the Dalit women one day marched to set fire to those liquor shops. The women from other castes just
shut themselves up in their homes and did not express any solidarity with those dalit women. Perhaps one cannot explain this without taking into account the complex interplay of patriarchy, feudalism and caste. Unless these intricacies are properly addressed a discourse about women remains incomplete. Homogenizing women as a category and looking at women's questions mainly in terms of class - leave out certain very important problems related to women. It leaves out the caste question, which is very important in understanding the women's question. The left parties however have not addressed the issues of Brahmanism also.

The AIMSS is the women's wing of the SUCI, which claims itself to be the only true left party. AIMSS brings out a magazine called Stri Mukti. The magazine expresses the views of the leaders of the organization on various issues. The organization refuses to think of women in terms of caste, religion, and perhaps class too. The leaders of the organization feel that thinking of women as dalit or Christian or Muslim etc is divisive and hence these categories should not be taken into consideration. The major issues taken up by the AIMSS are dowry, increase of obscene representation of women in the media, commodification of women, increase of prostitution in the name of tourism, world beauty contests and sexual exploitation in the work places, etc. Even among these issues anti-dowry struggle seems to be quite strong. In November 1996 they had arranged an all India Convention of AIMSS at Hyderabad. The thrust area in the convention was Dowry and its eradication. In addition to that, the convention discussed the increasing incidents of rape in public places like hospitals, trains, universities and custodial rapes and sex detection tests. The convention ended with anti-dowry slogans. On October 10th 1996 AIMSS organized a huge protest against the World Beauty Contest which was being held in Bangalore. On November 7th 1996 the organization arranged a protest procession called 'Save Culture Day'. The rally aimed at sensitizing the public about the evils
of the beauty contests. The rally stated that 'these beauty contests are masks through which the Multinational companies are planning to promote their products. They are an onslaught on the Indian culture and society. In the name of beauty contests obscenity is being promoted.' Similar protests had been arranged in different state head quarters of the country by AIMSS. In 1999 the organization launched a signature campaign against the obscene representation of women in 'F' TV channel. SUCI the parent organization of the AIMSS has planned a statewide rally "Shut Down WTO" in Bangalore in January 2002. It has brought out a preparatory booklet highlighting the issues on which the rally plans to focus. AIMSS focuses on the impact of globalization on women. It feels "Globalization has globalized obscenity. Due to the onslaught of F TV, MTV, and other foreign channels there is a steady cultural deterioration. Most of these issues very often do not touch even the periphery of the life of a dalit woman, that too rural dalit woman.

The whole approach of AIMSS becomes slightly problematic when it is viewed in relation to the prevalent situation. AIMSS refuses to recognize that women are divided on the basis of caste, class and religion. Its approach has all the problems of a mega narrative. It homogenizes, and considers women as a category. It doesn't take into consideration caste as one of the unfortunate but yet significant factors of Indian society, which decides human lives in the subcontinent. The parent organization SUCI claims itself to be the only true left party and speaks the language of class and class conflict. But it is highly astonishing to note that when women's question comes they do not even make a passing reference to the presence of class difference among women. They conveniently think of women as a category. As a consequence certain distinct problems which any women's movement is bound to face in terms of caste, class and gender are totally ignored. Even rural-urban divide is not taken note of. Basically the organization is urban centered. Hence the problems affecting the urban
middle class women are supposed to be the problems faced by everybody irrespective of the sharp differences in the socio-economic milieu of different women. Majority of the issues taken up by the organization concern the urban middle class women, working in factories, offices, schools, colleges, public sector organizations like Post office, Telecommunications, etc. The organization does not seem to have any rural moorings. The major protests, demonstrations and rallies are held at major cities and urban centers. Nowhere is it suggested that the rural folk have been organized or there seems to be any participation of the rural women in the conventions held by them. The problems of homogenizing in any field usually leave out a number of subtle and sensitive problems. As a result they never come face to face with reality and become highly superficial. Even in case of AIMSS the same can be noticed.

**Autonomous women's group.**

**Samata:** Samata is an autonomous woman's group active in the Mysore city. It came into existence in 1978. Most of the Samata activists had been the members of different groups like ML, DSS and other leftist organizations who had been disillusioned with those organizations. They came out of those organizations to form a separate and an exclusively women's group. The experience of being marginalized within those groups created an urgency to form a group of their own. One of the very active members of Samata while recounting her experience said, "We felt so voiceless there that we started feeling that we had no role to play there. We did undergo a similar experience while working with the political parties. They do not know how to behave with women. They would take away all the leadership from us. Hence we do not have male members in our organization. The Rightists have always ditched us. We cannot be open and frank with them because they are oppressive and they condemn everything that is not in tune with their ideology."
Most of the active members of Samata feel that women are not a homogenous group. They acknowledge that there is the problem of caste, class and even rural urban divide. They also confess that they have never been to the grass root level and mobilized women from rural areas, slums, dalits and other backward sections. Because of the different constraints the membership is mostly from middle class. Most of them belong to 'white collared job groups'.

Samata members argue that class, caste and religion certainly do divide women, but the role of women's movement is to bring them together and organize them as women. There are certain problems here. Firstly if the very purpose of women's movement is to take into consideration the heterogeneity of women and organize them, the question is how to address the different and unique problems of women arising out of caste, class and religion. How should the movement be redefined and restructured so as to acknowledge the difference and yet organize them by incorporating their problems. The demands and the issues of the organization should be decided bearing these aspects in mind. Merely stating that women are not a homogenous group will not do. Their style of the functioning shows that very little thought is gone into this kind of reflections and theorization. They usually do not go to people talk, to them and educate them about their predicament. Instead they work more as a counseling body. It is the aggrieved who come to the Samata with their problems, seeking solutions. Then Samata tries to find ways and means to solve their problem. Its nature of work shows that it works more like family counseling cell. But this doesn't mean they haven't ever been to people to mobilize them. They have tried to mobilize women around certain incidents like the dowry death of Jayamma, Deepak-Shridevi bigamy incident, and Susheela's murder case. They had organized huge protests against the yellow journalism of a local paper and had also staged protest against the Kudure Moti incident. They
had arranged a "face-to-face" with the Mysore City police on the question of
eve teasing. The organization becomes active only when there are issues.
Otherwise it is more involved in counseling. Hence to some extent the
organization is far removed from the rural situation and also what is going
on in the lives of the marginalized women. They do agree that the problem
of the dalit women is unique but because of their own constraints they are
unable to evolve a strategy which can address the dalit women too.65

MAHILA JAGRUTI: It is an organization working among the slum
dwelling women of various Taluks throughout Karnataka. In its Manifesto
It states: "Always the women belonging to the oppressed classes and lower
castes bear the brunt of any large scale politically initiated violence They
are the ones who are susceptible to greatest exploitation in this exploitative
socio-political set up. They are the groups who are exposed to the
maximum sexual abuse. Untouchability has made their lives all the more
miserable. Gender in addition to caste and class has intensified their misery.
Therefore while fighting against the evils of caste the roots of class
exploitation should also be taken into account. A strategy should be
designed having both these in mind. It is a fact that greater part of the
unorganized labour both in agriculture and industry is constituted by the
dalit women. Therefore all progressive women's movement should give
prime priority to organize these women." In practice Mahila Jagruti has
been organizing the slum dwellers and menial workers in and around
Shimoga, Bangalore and some districts of North Karnataka. They have
been working among by creating awareness about their rights and various
ways in which they are exploited both by the state machinery as well as the
private bodies. Their radicalism has always ended in violence. Very
recently a few women who were actively working for the Mahila Jagruti
were killed in the police encounter near Mangalore. In spite of their
commitment to the cause of the marginalized, the means they have resorted to realize their commitment has many a time driven common people away from them. Hence Mahila Jagruti in spite of its commitment to the cause of the most oppressed has been unable to achieve a rapport with other women's groups because of its associations with certain militant leftist groups in Karnataka which advocate arm struggle. Hence other women's groups are hesitant to associate themselves with Mahila Jagruti because they feel that any kind of violence should be kept at a bay as far as women's movement is concerned because again women will be the victims.

Even at the national level The 70’s and 80’s saw a growth of middle class women’s organizations in urban areas and also organizations of working women fighting for their right to independent livelihood and basic resources like credit, training and access to technology. The self-employed women’s Association (SEWA), and Working Women’s Forum in Madras were formed in this period organizing women in the informal sector. The Bodh Gaya movement in 1978 is another landmark, which confronted a local mutt owing most of the village land. During the struggle, women were very active and militant, and tried to combine the issue of land rights with specifically women’s right to resources. However finally when the government intervened and distributed land, both the male leadership and the government rejected the women’s demand that land should be given in their names. Ultimately, very little of the land was given to women.66

The autonomous women's groups politicized and made public the issue of violence against women. Serious debates on class v/s patriarchies emerged. The autonomous women's groups of the early 1980s had remained largely dependent on the left frame even as they emerged as a challenge to it. It must be underlined here that most of feminist groups broadly agreed that in the Indian context, a materialist framework was imperative to the analysis of women's oppression. However in keeping with their roots in the
'class' framework, there were efforts to draw commonalties across class and to a lesser extent across castes or communities.\textsuperscript{67}

For the rural dalit women finding employment, drinking water, fuel and fodder are the pressing needs. Displacement due to the projects of development, construction of big dams, loss of the means of sustenance, migration to urban areas, changes in the forest policy withdrawing subsidies to education and health become burning problems, as these affect their lives immediately. In times of drought, the rural women come to be preoccupied with acquisition of drinking water. In the light of the New Forest policies and the shortage of kerosene, fuel is becoming a major problem. How has the women’s movement looked at these issues? These issues do not seem to have become central to the movement. “Tap for every home” has never been a major demand of the women’s organizations.\textsuperscript{68}

An analysis of practices of violence against women by caste would reveal that while the incidence of dowry deaths and violent controls and regulations on the mobility and sexuality by the family are frequent among the dominant upper castes, while dalit women are more likely to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault and physical violence at the work place and in public. A cursory look at the statements issued by women's organizations during the Mathura rape case clears some of these statements.(the details are to be furnished) The NFIW looked at the rape in 'class' terms, the socialist women in terms of loss of honour, the AIWF sought psychological explanations, the autonomous women's groups highlighted the use of patriarchal power.\textsuperscript{69} Looking back at the agitation it is apparent that the sexual assaults on dalit women in Marathwada during the Namaantar agitation do not become a nodal point for such an agitation. In fact they come to be excluded. The campaign therefore becomes more of a single-issue campaign. Consider also the campaign against dowry, while the left based women's organizations viewed dowry in terms of the ways in
which capitalism was developing in India, the autonomous women's groups focused on the patriarchal power/violence within families.

The present practices of dowry cannot be outside the processes of brahminisation and their impact on marriage practices. That Brahmanic ideals led to a preference for dowry marriage is well documented. Moreover the principle of endogamy and its coercive and violent perpetuation through collective violence against inter-caste alliances are all crucial to the analysis of the dowry question.70

The History of agitation and struggles of the second wave of the women's movement articulated strong anti-patriarchal positions on different issues. Issues of sexuality and sexual politics – which are crucial for feminist politics, remained largely within an individualistic and life style frame. Issues of sexuality are intrinsically linked to caste and addressing sexual politics without a challenge to Brahminism results in lifestyle feminism.

In the Post Mandal agitation and caste violence at Chunduru and Pimpri Deshmukh for instance, women of the upper castes were involved as feminist subjects assertive, non-submissive and protesting against injustice done to them as women (Chunduru or Pimpri Deshmukh) and as citizens(anti-Mandal). In the anti Mandal protests young middle class women declared that they were against all kinds of reservations (including those for women) and they mourned the death of merit and explicated that they were out to save the nation. Their placards said we want employed husbands – sexuality and caste became hidden issues as they protested as citizens.71 At Pimpri Deshmush in Maharasstra following the hacking to death of a dalit kotwal (active mobiliser for the local Buddha vihar) by upper caste men, the upper caste women came out in public complaining that the dalit man had harassed them and was sexually perverted. They claimed that they had incited their men to protect their honour, thus the
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agency of upper caste women was invoked. The issue was not an issue of molestation alone but one that underlines the complex reformulation that brahmanical patriarchies undergo in order to counter the collective dalit resistance.

The increasing visibility of dalit women in power structures as sarpanch or panchayat member and in new knowledge making process (Bhanvari Devi) has led to increased backlash against dalit women. The backlash is expressed through humiliating practices like rape and hacking to death of their kinsmen. These incidents underline the need for a dialogue between dalit and feminist activists since inter caste relations at the local level may be mediated through a redefinition of gendered spaces. Sexual assault on dalit woman has been used as a common practice of undermining the manhood of the caste. Prof Gopal Guru lays out the problem of this kind of reasoning very sensitively and perceptively. He says that very often it looks as though it is the male sexual urge and brutality which are behind such incidents involving the violation of the social honour of Dalit women, thus accord only one dimension to this and places it in the framework of the violation of the rights of Dalit women. What is lacking in such academic discourses or even in the perception of human rights activists is that the sexual violence against Dalit women and also women from the minority community has more than a gender bias. Because, along with men high caste women also are found in certain cases, responsible for destroying the social honour of Dalit women. This was evident when high caste women, in order to exonerate their men folk took to maligning the image of the victims by charging them with loose morals. In Karnataka Mudigere in Chikkamangalur is famous for Coffee plantations. It is also notorious for the exploitation of the workers by the plantation owners. Kariyappa a dalit belonging to the Adi-Dravida caste worked in the plantation belonging to Shashi Gowda. When Kariyappa demanded the money, which, the owner
owed by way of wages, he was tied to a pillar along with his wife Dharmamma. She protested against the owner when he started beating her husband. The enraged owner abused her using a foul language and started beating her. The owner's wife who happened to pass that way gave him a belt and asked him to beat her nicely. Not withstanding the beating Dharmamma suffered an abortion then and there. Recently in Mandya in Karnataka, the amorous relationship between a dalit boy and a Gowda girl triggered off caste tensions. The dalit boy was nicely beaten up. Then it is interesting to note that most of the Gowda women failed to see this as a natural case of love between a man and a woman. But they perceived this as a premeditated act of dalit boy to stain the reputation of a upper caste girl. In fact these women supported their men and endorsed the beating of the dalit boy. It is quite significant that so far Mandya has witnessed innumerable number of rapes of the dalit girls by the Gowda community. But nowhere have these Gowda women protested against their men. Similarly Incidents like the killing of the Kotwals in marathwada and the stripping and beating of Dalit women in some villages in Mul and Brahmpuri talukas of Chandrapur district in Maharashtra by the high caste women of sexual violence by their men folk on Dalit and other women confirm this fact Kumudini Pati who is very seriously involved in mobilizing the dalit women in Bihar made some very significant observations about the dalit killings by the Ranbir Sena. Soon after the massacre. instead of protesting against the massacre of the dalit men and the rape of dalit women, the upper caste women went out in procession in support of their men who had involved in such heinous crime. One can look at this absence of feminine conscience and the internalization of patriarchal violence among upper caste women. This poses a serious question to feminist discourse and the feminist movement in the country. The emancipatory agendas of dalit and women's movements will have to be
sensitive to these issues and underline the complex interface between caste and gender as structuring hierarchies in society.

**The state led emancipatory programs for dalit women.**

Since 1980’s there is a large-scale co-option of feminist rhetoric by the state and the empowerment of women is a slogan glibly rattled off in government documents. However, it is increasingly being recognized that this kind of government program aims at empowering women only to the extent that it would serve the purposes of education for population control through, for example drives against child marriage. This has resulted in a distinct shift from ‘struggle’ to ‘development’, in the agenda of women’s’ organizations.

The programs of UNICEF and WHO as well as of the government operate on the premise that women’s primary role in society is that of being mothers and keepers of family health. It is assumed that it is women’s ignorance, which leads to high rates of infant and maternal mortality, rather than poverty, malnutrition and lack of medical facilities. So the focus is on education of mothers along with providing of services in top-down schemes which ignore the structural constraints in which poor women work. For example, the government campaign on breast-feeding is not accompanied by measures to make breast-feeding a feasible option for working mothers. There is an increasing trend to link up relief work or employment schemes with pressure for family planning, for example, the Rajasthan government gives famine relief on a priority basis to those who get themselves sterilized. 

Therefore to understand the nature of emancipation of the state sponsored programs it is necessary to take a brief look at the dynamics which works through these programs. Mahila Samakhya is one such program, which is relatively active in the rural and semi urban areas basically addressing the dalit women. Mahila Samakhya came into existence
in 1989. Through Mahila Samakhya the Government intended to reach the so far unreached i.e. the Dalit women. "Its target group was mainly dalit women because it felt that other groups would not organize them and dalit women in turn would not approach the women's groups and join them. Therefore, samakhya thought that if they are organized and put on the path of progress, gradually other women will also come to the dalit women join them."^^

Mahila Samakhya is a bilateral program whose entire funding comes from Holland. The funding is mainly for training and workshop. Even then the main thrust is on health, information about law, literacy. Samakhya does not either organize a struggle or in principle aim at it. Samakhya does not claim itself to be very much different from any NGO. Its working pattern is almost similar to the NGOs. It believes in giving information to the people and people can use this information in whatever way they want to use. It is left to them. But the question becomes crucial what kind of information do they provide and what is it related to? It is usually about taking loan from some financial institution, or asking for a nurse in some primary health center or some similar demand.

Samakhya says that its important aim is to mobilize and organize women of all age groups because they think it is extremely crucial for breaking the patriarchal schemes and frameworks. (Very often in practice it doesn't enter into any controversy with any of the existing values.) Mahila Samakhya mainly aimed at educating the dalit women who are totally illiterate. Education is not perceived in the formal sense of becoming literate. It includes training them to go to banks, post-office, Municipalities, Village Panchayat office, etc. Empowering them is also a part of their concept of education. Similarly literacy campaigns are also a part of their schemes of education. They also take up gender sensitization. Educating Dalit women with regard to health, hygiene and child welfare is one of its
major programs. Family Planning programs too come under their schedule. With the implementation of The Panchayat Raj Act, training the Dalit women in the matters of administration, helping them to contest elections and carry on the proceedings of the panchayat, etc came under the Samakhya program. By 1998 Samakhya tried to concentrate on other things too. It intended to create awareness among women regarding sexual abuse and rape and educate them regarding the legal procedures related to rape. Prevention of child marriages and reporting cases of dowry also came to be included in its program. Samakhya also decided to take up the case of the women deserted by their husbands and try to get them maintenance as well a share in the husband’s property. The Government issued a circular, according to which only those people who had toilettes in their house were eligible to contest in the elections. The Samakhya members protested on the grounds that the 73rd amendment has no such condition. In addition to that a roof to live under itself was a luxury for them and hence they cannot afford to have toilettes in their houses. They pressurized the Government to withdraw the order.

The dalit members of Samakhya feel, that this training has helped them to utilize the greens and vegetables available in and around their house. They have learnt to treat their sons and daughters on par. They have done away with the superstitions connected with menstruation. They have learnt the use of condoms and also how to protect themselves from STD. They know about the laws related to rape and sexual abuse. They have learnt to prepare ORS when babies are suffering from dehydration. They have learnt to go to hospital to take treatment. They have decided to give up the superstitious rituals they used to practice when the daughters attained puberty. Its basic approach is to help Dalit women to get some money from the bank, form self-help groups, rear cattle or chicken, etc. It does not want...
Dalit women take up the question of caste discrimination, isolation and various other manifestations of patriarchal attitude. Very often Samakhya prefers to work within the existent hierarchy and patriarchy in which Dalit women are placed. Its plans and programs bear the fact that they are designed to work within the given gender roles and caste roles. It trains them to make the best of their poor living conditions, disadvantages of caste and gender. It does not prefer to question these existent values very seriously.

This approach reminds one of the comments made by Ambedkar with reference to the social reform movement inaugurated by people like Ranade. He told that Ranade and his Social Conference aimed at reorganization and reconstructing of Hindu society. But he said he aimed at abolition of caste system and restructuring Hindu society on the basis of equality. Therefore the basic intention of Samakhya is not a total transformation but a kind of pacification.

Samakhya is well aware of the caste division among dalits themselves. They know fully well that dalit women are divided among themselves into different sub-castes. They prefer to ignore this and very often overlook this. They feel that if they try to confront this it may lead to different complications. Hence they want to play safe rather than confront reality. They do not mind these dalit women going by their caste hierarchies in their own villages. They are satisfied if these women do not do so as long as they are in their camps. The ultimate beneficiaries of these internal divisions are men because they are politicizing and cashing on it. But these divisions directly or indirectly increase the suffering of women. When the researcher questioned the Samakhya about this, and its role in healing the fragments, the co-ordinator of the Mysore district told that unless a demand to heal the fragments came from the dalit women themselves it would be dangerous to raise such issues with these dalit
women. She felt that such discussion would divide them and facilitates the involvement of men in the activities of women. It sounds really paradoxical that if other projects are taken up without being sought by the Dalit women why not this issue be taken up and dalit women be educated of the dangers of such division?

The larger questions of today's economic policy, which affect the lives of dalit women in particular and women in general, are not taken up by the Samakhya. During the discussion the district coordinator of Samakhya made it very clear that since its inception in 1989 there hasn't been much change in its economic programs. It has almost been the same during the whole of this decade. This decade is in fact very crucial in the India's economic scenario because of the drastic changes resulting from the economic policies of the government. The large-scale displacements of the dalits due to agricultural and industrial policies, policies related to fisheries, forest management and other market-centered policies do not seem have any impact on the policies of Samakhya. So far Mahila Samakhya has never paid any attention to the concept of development at the policy level. Samakhya claims that it has always shown dalit women that there are alternate ways of earning money for the betterment of their living like forming self-help groups, or helping to buy sheep or rear cattle or take up poultry forming, etc. Therefore, in a sense Samakhya instead of creating questions in their minds pacifies them and never puts them on the path of struggle, which is inevitable to change their predicament in the long run. In some three or four places they have made these women to take somebody's land on lease and cultivate that and give a share of it to the owner and then sell the remaining and earn money. That has not worked out profitable for them. The income and expenditure is almost the same. They could not make any profit. According to Samakhya it is probably because of the technological problems of storing and preserving what they have grown.
Therefore it has been inevitable for them to market the yield at the low but immediately available prices, which are in fact not fair compared to what they have spent in terms of money and labour. Hence instead of becoming analytical and treating the cause of the disease, Samakhya just treats the symptoms and shifts the focus from the real problems.

Both Samakhya and DSS have taken up the cause of Dalit women and Dalits in general respectively. Samakhya claims that it thinks differently than the DSS. It aims at changing the society's perception of dalit women. They feel that the path of struggle isolates Dalit women from the larger society. It should never be done so. They have to live in that society. Therefore they are to be made to live in peace with the rest. If an antagonism develops then they find it very difficult to live there. Therefore they want to get justice without entering into confrontation. If in case a problem crops up in a village with regard to a Dalit woman, they approach the village headman and appraise them of the issue and see to it that women get justice within the existing system. But Samkhya is not ready to confront the question if within the existing system justice is denied to her what is to be done. It does not even contemplate addressing the question of unequal power relations inside the family and in the society. They have always avoided confrontations.

Some Samakhya Sahayoginis (voluntary workers) who wanted to remain anonymous told the researcher off the records that they had a strict instruction by the organization not to take part in mass demonstrations. Samakhya does not want to address the basic structure of exploitation in society and family but claims work for the dalit women. This approach of Samakhya in mobilizing Dalit women raises certain very important questions with regard to the role played by Samakhya and other such organizations, which are funded, sponsored and set up by the government in order to bring about changes in the lives of the Dalit women. The most
important question is what kind of transformation do they want to bring about in the lives of the Dalit women?

The absence of economic plan or project in Mahila Samakhya is quite a serious problem. Without an economic project some times the most important aim of the Samakhya itself would sound meaningless. Some Sahayoginis who work for Samakhya narrated their experience. "Scheduled Caste women come to the literacy classes after eight o’ clock in the night. That would be only after finishing the day’s work both in the field as well at home. Teaching them the alphabet very often sounds meaningless as well as useless. Most of these women live below poverty line. This learning does not help them in any way. They don’t even get an opportunity to use what they have learnt. There was not any economic program which would not only provide them an initiative to retain what they have learnt and also provide them an initiative to learn further. Their poverty is acute. They do not eat vegetables for many months. Very often their diet consists of rice or Ragi balls salt and a green chilly. It is really ironical to speak to them of the value of being literate and all that." They felt that the Samakhya programs should change over the years. But that has not happened. Samakhya was unable to provide them not only economic help but also failed to stand by them socially when they faced a crisis. Once a Scheduled Caste girl was raped. The sahayoginis helped to recoup and mobilized people to protest against this atrocity. With this in view, they approached the Samakhya officer. They not only rejected the proposal but also told that this was not their responsibility. Some organization should take up this issue. It was not their responsibility to protest against such atrocities. The sahayoginis were shocked. Every day they used to preach them a lot about rape, sexual abuse and exploitation. But when it came to practice, they had not stood by them. The sahayoginis felt that they didn't really have any moral right to go back to them. It was not only shameful but also ridiculous.\textsuperscript{84}
Like any other NGO Samakhya lacks a critical assessment of the schemes implemented by the Government. Sometimes it misses certain very subtle constraints, which are in the projects implemented under the schemes, which are detrimental to the interest of the Dalit women or girls. These subtle problems in fact are very important because they are capable of preventing the Dalit women from availing of those facilities. One example is the case of the Ashram schools established by the Government for the SC and ST children. These Schools are of course one very important measure taken by the Karnataka Government in providing education facilities to the Dalit children who are denied of that privilege. The Report of Guruswamy Committee set up by the Government of Karnataka to study the conditions of these Ashram schools is really shocking. All the details of the committee are not furnished but one important condition prevalent in those Ashram schools is worth one's attention – "These Ashram school hostels do not have proper facilities to protect the girl students. Safety is one missing principle there. There was an attempt to molest a girl student in Surapura village in Gulberga district. In many hostels the sanitation facilities are highly inadequate. Very often the students have no other go but to go out to the fields for the morning ablutions which is really pathetic and leads to a lot of problems which are highly specific to the girls."

These are of course not very big problems but certainly the ones, which prevent the girls from running into risks. The Samakhya co-ordinator throughout expressed the feeling that these Ashram Schools are best suited to the Dalit girls and has reduced their problem. Does this arise out of ignorance or out a feeling that being totally without any facility all these years, even this flawed rotten system is all right for the Dalit girls?

Addressing the question of justice with women and especially the Dalit women is highly problematic. Oppressed people have often internalized the their oppression so well that that they have no sense of what
they are entitled to as human beings. This is certainly the case with gender inequalities. As Papanek writes the clear perception of disadvantages …… requires conscious rejection of the social norms and cultural ideals that perpetuate inequalities and the use of different criteria – perhaps from another actual or idealized society – in order to assess inequality as a prelude for action. People in seriously deprived conditions are sometimes not only accepting of them but relatively cheerful of – "the small mercies" – situation. Depravation sometimes becomes gagged and muffled for reasons of deeply rooted ideology among others but it should surely be ethically deeply mistaken to attach correspondingly small value to the loss of well being of such people because of their survival strategy." What Papanek points is exactly the danger inherent in the approach of the NGOs or the similar institutions. The small material favour, which they offer to the dalit women often, diverts their attention from their basic predicament and the acute exploitation they are suffering from. The interest of the movement is usually transformatory, while the interest of the NGOs is basically appeasing. This is very clear when one looks at the ways of working of Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka.

But Samakhya because of their acquaintance with the dalit women has been able to foreground some of the genuine problems of dalit women which can really be really be enlightening for the women's movement activists. A serious look at them can make them self-critical and help in building more meaningful movement encompassing more number of marginalized women. One such incident was narrated by one of the Sahayoginis. The dalit women in some villages made some progress within Samakhya and collected a substantial amount through saving. This coincided with the desire of the non-dalit women to participate in the activities of Samakhya. It is quite interesting to note that at this juncture the dalit women were not only apprehensive about the involvement of non-dalit
women but they did not like the idea itself. They were afraid that the leadership would be taken away from them. They had a strong feeling that they would be dominated upon and the money they have collected would be used for the benefit of the non-dalit women. Another observation was also brought to the notice of the researcher. In some places a number of new members joined the Samakhya. Of them dalit women adapted themselves very easily into the existing group. The non-dalit took a very long time to integrate into the group.\(^7\) The attitude of both dalit and non dalit women throws light on the point of divergence and difference between the two and also foregrounds the hidden fears as well as the prejudices.

**Hindu Right wing organizations and women.**
The Right wing activists have also been organizing women on a large scale. RSS and VHP have made enormous efforts to involve women, train them in yoga and martial arts and give them a role in their political campaigns. However this was done while reaffirming patriarchal family ideology – indeed, these organizations project themselves as extensions of the family. They stress complementarity rather than equality. Thus by giving women a public role, status and skills within a structure that reaffirms the patriarchal ideology, the Hindu right-wing organizations have been able to mobilize women without threatening the community. But the very constitution of these right wing organizations is upper caste and highly patriarchal. They do firmly believe and uphold the traditional Hindu concept of purity, pollution and the varnashrama dharma, in other words the caste system. All the past records of these organizations do confirm the same. For the same reason they are against all kinds of reservations. One of the women activists Mrs Poonam gupta very clearly voices the stand of their women which in fact is the stand of the right wing organizations too. She says, “We are against all kinds of reservations whether for women or for a particular caste.
Merit should be rewarded." She even deplores over the issue of reservation for women in the legislature. She calls it unfortunate because 'Merit' takes the back seat. They don't want to place women's question in general and dalit women's question in particular in a historical framework. They try to make it as ahistorical as possible. Unless the question of dalit woman is discussed historically one would miss the real issue itself.

They do have women's wing within the main organization, but they don't have a say of their own. They are mere shadows of their male counterparts. "Hindu revivalism or cultural nationalism has provided a very different moral imperative. Instead of self-determination as a right of the female individual off the people, it referred to the uniqueness of the culture of Hindu volk. It also referred to the powers over individuals that the volk or community required in order to preserve itself from extinction when faced with a different and triumphant cultural system. Here the Hindu woman was allotted a unique responsibility as the site of past freedom and future nationhood, since the Hindu man had already supposedly compromised his cultural authenticity. She was therefore, the source of authenticity, nation making, and freedom. But this huge political role depended on an abdication of all agency and self-determination in actual practice." The right wing women's organizations regard women's problems as misfortunes, individual aberrations due to personality problems or the forces of urbanization and the breakdown of the extended family. Some years ago the Bharatiya Janata Parishad's women's wing in Pune had organized a street demonstration to protest against what they called devious propaganda being spread by 'The stree Mukti Women'. They rejected that the women were oppressed and claimed that by and large women were happy as mothers or as wives. (Dandavate P, Interview 1985)

What cannot be tolerated, however and what is powerfully and continuously denounced as the fruit of the western poison tree, is the notion
of equal gender rights. Poonam gupta says that too much talk about the rights of Indian women has led to domestic competition, unhappiness, broken families, blighted children. According to them colonial foreign education is the biggest single problem in India today because it has taught women all wrong things. But the proper Hindu education teaches women to sacrifice themselves to keep the family together and not to fight their men about rights. Rights may be there but it is wrong to fight for them. Talking of laws on equality deprives women of what is due for her; for ex, Reservation of seats in the bus. According to them rapes occur because women have forfeited their older modes of honour and motherhood status by being addicted to struggles and enmity with men. Moreover, the western films and cable programs have created a vulgar preoccupation with sex and desire that was unknown to Hindu society of past. Demand for rights is the sole cause of male oppression of women - "Happiness and safety versus rights and equality." Thus women in movements for rights are necessarily made a non-wife and a non-mother movement. Motherhood and wife-hood are made incompatible with employment and public identities. It is assumed that women seek jobs for consumerist desires. They reiterate all the time that "we don't approve of reservation whether for women or for some castes it does not help any one. Merit must be the criteria, it must be observed. The samiti office bearers are quite contemptuous about the issue of the women's reservation in Parliament, arguing that it denoted a tragic dilution of the principle of merit. Mridula Sinha, Secretary General BJP Mahila Morcha's had become a center of controversy a few years ago when she had endorsed dowry and given a statement that women should learn to adjust themselves in their conjugal homes.91 Krishna Sharma of Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Woman's Wing openly endorses gender discrimination by prioritizing the education of male child in a family where there are many children. She endorses wife beating on the ground that 'don't parents
admonish their children for misbehavior? As a wife she must keep in mind her husband's moods and must avoid irritating him.' She even suggests that a wife should put up with her husband in case of bigamy for the sake of her children. The Right claims to represent Hindus, there are groups that disappear from sight: the poor, low caste, people with non-heterosexual preferences, non-Hindus of any sort, tribals and displaced people. The Right is not at all prepared to recognize the rights of women even as a category. In addition to it, strongly adheres to the principles of caste and goes by the norms of patriarchy. Hence the question of recognizing the problems of the dalit women is miles away from its agenda.

**Peasant Movement and Dalit women.**

Peasant movement matters a lot for the dalits. It is more so for the dalit women because majority of them especially in the rural areas are agricultural labourers. Hence the issues taken up by the peasant movement can have far reaching effects on the lives of poor dalit agricultural labourers.

The peasant movement in Karnataka can be traced back to the pre independent days, that is, to the days of the princely state of Mysore. There were sporadic incidents here and there and there was not an organized movement. Moreover most of them were not well planned and articulated responses but sudden responses. A full-fledged peasant movement is clearly visible from 1956 onwards. The present work does not go into all the details of the movements but limits itself to the presence of dalits in general and the dalit women in particular in the movement and also the primary issues taken up by the movement for its struggle. All the major studies on the peasant movement in India as well as in Karnataka commonly endorse that the leadership of the peasant movement was always in the hands of the middle and rich farmers of middle and upper castes. Hence naturally the demands of the movements were in conformity with the nature of the
leadership. The definition of the word peasant itself was very ambiguous. In a way it was used as a hold-all term to suggest rich, medium, marginal, poor and landless peasant. Therefore naturally including Karnataka in majority of peasant organizations all over India rich peasants represented peasants of all hues and shades. M.D.Nanjundaswamy, a noted leader of Raita Sangha of Karnataka told, "We should not be divided as landlords and landless peasants. Instead of this let us put up a united fight which would strengthen the movement." This statement very will brings out the nature of the leadership of the peasant movement in Karnataka. The Raita Sangha placed 19 demands before the government. All the major demands were related to the needs of the middle and rich peasant. Only the demand for suitable wages and other facilities to the farm labourers pertained to the marginal and landless peasants. But throughout the movement the Raita Sangha does not seem to have pressurized the landlords to pay such wages. It doesn't appear to have brought pressure on the Government to categorically implement minimum wages or ban child labour. This attitude of the Raita Sangha has a direct bearing on the dalits and dalit women in particular. The demands discussed above have a direct relationship to the dalit women. Majority of the agricultural labourers are women. All the major agricultural activities are done by dalit women. (Detailed statistics are furnished in the third chapter of this work.) The caste and the class interest of the peasant movement was entirely different. While being interviewed Prof Nanjundaswamy was asked "what has the Raita Sangha done to the poor peasants?" His answer reflects the attitude of the movement itself. He told, When there is no milk in the mother's breasts, what can it give to its children?" Self interest was more important than the interest of the different categories of peasants. Their basic demand was always for supportive prices and liquidation of debt. Land to the tiller and equal and minimum wages were never their choice demands. In fact that demand would have
been detrimental to the interests of those who had the reins of the peasant movement.

The analysis undertaken so far of the different movements and of the different streams of women's movement clearly lays out that most of the movements and each stream within the women's movement has not addressed at least one important aspect related to women. Each of these elisions shows a significant impact on the dalit woman and has prevented her from being an active part of the movement. The significant categories which affect the lives of dalit women are Class- in terms of poverty; gender and patriarchy in socio-cultural terms; and caste which is mainly cultural but has permeated itself into all these. Both class and patriarchy are intricately woven within caste. Hence class addressed separately without taking into consideration any of these becomes both caste and gender blind. If Patriarchy is addressed per say, the subtleties of class may not be totally lost and the discourse remains incomplete. While addressing patriarchy there is always the danger of leaving out caste, which is one very important patriarchal project. Caste is a very powerful expression of patriarchy but ironically it has camouflaged patriarchy in such a way that these two appear to be totally unconnected. And finally addressing caste without understanding the patriarchal project and the class dynamics entwined with it will be highly detrimental to the interest of dalit women...She will be much more ghettoized. Hence the trajectory of the movements today is making the dalit woman contemplate again and again the need to talk differently.

The argument presented so far looks like obviously falling into the trap of post modernist politics of difference. But in spite of its divisive tendency post modernism is of great critical value too. It can in fact offer a chance to reconsider all that has been left unsaid. Not all forms of recognition politics are equally pernicious: some represent genuinely
emancipatory responses to serious injustices that cannot be remedied by redistribution alone. Struggle for recognition can aid the redistribution of power and wealth and can promote interaction and cooperation across gulfs of difference. Everything depends on how difference is approached. This means that the struggles for recognition should be conceptualized in such a way that it can be integrated with struggles for redistribution. It should develop an account of recognition that can accommodate the full complexity of social identities, instead of one that promotes reification and separatism.95

In order to understand the dalit women's need to talk differently it is necessary to delineate both the internal and external factors that have a bearing on this phenomenon. Dalit women justify the case for talking differently on the basis of external factors. There has always been the fear of non-dalit forces homogenizing the issue of dalit women. Within the women's movement they have a very negligible space. There are certain internal factors too like the patriarchal domination within the community of dalits.96 Very often the dalit organizations do not have substantial number of women members.97 In addition to that they present a rhetoric of 'our women.' Dalit movement thinks of the benefit of the family as a whole which again subsumes the interest of the dalit women. Hence patriarchy dominates the dalit discourse.

Even within the Dalit academic discourse dalit women find neither a reference nor a space. A prestigious university, like The Kannada Vishwavidyalaya, Hampi had arranged a two-day seminar to discuss the question of internal divisions among the dalits. It was planned by none other than Mogalli Ganesh a very important Dalit writer/intellectual. But the whole seminar was marked by the absence of dalit women. Not even one-woman speaker had been invited, even ornamentally for the sake of eye wash! Throughout the two day seminar there was not even a passing reference to Dalit women. In addition to that most of the Dalit intellectuals
and leaders do not even think that Dalit women do have problems which are different from Dalit men and other women. Post Modernism recognizes that women have different interests due to the diversity of women's experiences. Therefore recognition of differences between women would help us to seek to explore the ways to counter tendencies within movement. Asserting the question of difference between women need not become a point of immobility but a point of solidarity. The different articulations around the category women should open up a possibility of different localized emancipatory practices, based on solidarity but without suppressing differences under overarching category 'woman'. Such a practice would replace the notion of emancipation informed by theories of emancipation and instead based on localized, discursively organized plural struggles. Such a practice would explore the possibility of coalition politics between different women's movements in India on different issues at different points of time.

Discussions of differences have rightly, drawn attention to serious problems, which existed in the narrowly defined nature and overgeneralizations about women where a concern for caste is almost lacking. Their overemphasis on fragmentation, however, offers neither political nor intellectual support in confronting oppression with which feminism has historically been concerned. It runs the risk, in fact, of overlooking the every existence of such oppressions.

Caste has significantly affected the Dalit woman's experiences of and treatment in the areas such as education, health service and the labour market. Different experiences can result from the influence of 'Caste'. Caste has also made difference visible in two other senses. The first is an acknowledgement that the impact of caste may mean that the chief sites of oppression are not the same for dalit women and other women. But at the same time Dalit itself cannot be treated as an absolute and coherent category
because there again class, region, rural, urban and such other things have an impact on the lives of the women.

Therefore using the concept of gender and refusing to let differences gag women or fragment feminists' analyses does not mean that it should be over generalized or apply standardized solutions are to be applied to the problems of women in different circumstances. Chen argues for situation by situation analysis of women's roles and constraints before plans are made and programs are designed. Papanek too shows how helping to educate women to awareness of their oppression requires quite deep and specific knowledge of the relevant culture.

Gender is an extremely important category of analysis but one should be careful and develop one's judgements in the light of empirical evidence, it is possible to generalize about many aspects of inequality between the sexes and also about women in very different cultural contexts. If these considerations do not go into the articulations of the movement the difference cannot be bridged to build a movement and there can never be healing of fragments. Secondly if these considerations do not go into the articulations of the formulation of economic policy the identity of the dalit woman who is the most marginalized is not only affected but there is the danger of total annihilation of her identity. An analysis of the impact of the economic factors on the lives of the rural dalit women would drive home this point. This is taken up in the following chapter.

END NOTE

1Sarkar Sumith, Writing Social History, OUP 1998, p 386.
3 chakravarti Uma, Gender, Class and Nation; Ramabai and the Critique of Brahmanical Patriarchy. Quoted in Dalit Visions, Gail Omvedt, 1995. P-23.
4 O'Hanlon Rosalind, Caste,Conflict and Ideology.
5 Moon Meenakshi, Introduction to "We Too Have Made History", in Communalism Combat, May 2001


Jayavardena, Kumari, The Left and Feminism, Economic and Political Weekly, September 23, 1989. Quotes the poor peasant women of Bihar who speak about their marginality in politics. These women critically questioned the sexual division of work in politics and the present day responsibility of the 'whole timer' in maintaining themselves and putting the entire burden of the household on the wife. They grudged that their husbands did politics at the expense of women and as a corrective measure suggested that a wholetimer should share equally and fully the responsibilities and burden of household work and child care. Participate in production in order to support himself as well as the dependents of the family and participate in political work and make full efforts to help women in the family, e.g. wife, sister, mother, daughter to actively participate in mass organization/political work. Seemingly only then would it be possible for women to accept ungrudgingly and support the husbands' mass political work and for the women themselves to participate in the political process of social transformation.


Mahadeva Devanoora, Personal interview, 6-11-2002. Mysore

He the founder of the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, a premier organization in Karnataka to fight for the cause of Dalits in the post independent days. It was founded in 1975 by bringing together the dalit struggles and organizations under its canopy. It was started in the mode of the Dalit Panthers.

Dasgupta and Partha. An Enquiry into well being and Desitution. oxford, Clarendon. He says that the family centered attitude is problematic because, given the greater political voice of men, public decisions affecting the poor in poor countries are often guided by male preferences not (frequently conflicting) female needs. The maximization of well being as a model for explaining household behaviour must be rejected. Even though it is often difficult to design and effect it, the target of public policy should be persons, not households.

Anasuyamma is a OBC woman belonging to the potter's caste. She lived in Kolar with her father Sheshagiriappa. She was raped. DSS took up her cause and mobilized a statewide struggle to fight against this atrocity. This was the first mass struggle organized by the DSS.


Every year Dalit women take a holy run in the name of Goddess Renuka naked


Prof Rodrigues, National Seminar, Dalits and their livelihood, held at Vagamon from 1-5-2002 to 3-5-2002.

These statistics are collected from the following sources. But the problem here is these data are also sometimes caste blind and sometime gender blind. Therefore the data is again analyzed using the data collected during field work in three villages in Karnataka quoted earlier in the introduction. This analysis is further corroborated using the statements made by Commissioner labour and other concerned officials of both pre independent and post independent period.
Sources: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Indian Union Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Paper-1 of 1993, PP. 1-10. Quoted in Prof. G. Nancharaiah 2002. Paper-1, Union Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, quoted in Prof. G. Nancharaiah. Liberalization of Indian Agriculture and Rural Poor with Special Reference to Dalits, Presented at the seminar at Dalit Intellectual Collective at Wagamon, 2002.
20 Field Survey in Hosahalli, Kanenoor and Chikkade villages.
21 Ibid. Giriappa.
22 Ajinkya Julie, Personal interview with DSS office bearers, Mysore, 1-12-2001.
23 Mahadeva Devanoora in an interview with Lata Mysore and Baburaj P.P. Published in SAMBUDDHA, January 1998.
24 A women activist, Mahila Sangrama, Hunasoor.
25 Mahadeva Devanoora, Personal interview, 6-11-2002. Mysore
27 Dr Rati Rao, Samata Vedike, Mysore.
28 Raj Jyoti, Dalit activist and Founder of REDS, at National Seminar on Dalits and their livelihoods at Wagamon Kerala.
29 Dr. V. Laxminarayana, personal interview dated 10-11-2002. Mysore.
32 Field work with dalit women workers of Sujatha Mill, Nanjanagood. 12-7-2002. Participants Chinnamma, Veerbhadrappa and other women.
34 Field work, Hosahalli, 14-11-2002. A similar feeling is expressed by the women in Maharastra. The percentage of the female-headed households among the lower castes is as high as 70%-75%. Since the incidence of desertion is very high and even in cases where the husband is present it is the women’s income that goes towards the survival of the family. The situation of dalit women who are at the receiving end of both the upper caste and lower caste patriarchies, has been portrayed by Teresamma, a lower caste activist in the following poem:
We go to work for we are poor,
But the same silken beds mock us.
While we are ravished in broad daylight,
Ill-starred our horoscopes are,
Even our tottering husbands hiss and the shout for revenge;
If we cannot stand their touch.”
35 Field work in Chikkade village near Pandavapura Taluq in Mandya District in Karnataka on 19-01-2004
36 An aged man told this during fieldwork Sakshibeedu near Mysore.
37 Omvedt Gail makes a similar observation in connection with the dalit movement in Maharastra. She seems unhappy with the current state of dalit politics. Until today, sadly, the Dalit movement as a whole has failed to evolve its own perspective on the problems of environment and women, though Dalit women have been active from the very beginning of the movement and Dalit and Bahujan feminist organizations have
begun to emerge. "The post-Ambedkarite dalit movement has come under an eclipse. It is floundering without a total vision" This has happened because after Ambedkar, Dalit movements became reformist in nature. Though they use caste for mobilization they do not try to destroy caste completely. While some changes have indeed come about and a small section of dalits has surely been benefited, a large majority of them continue to live a life of poverty and misery.


A dalit speaking for the dalit can be justified but such cultural specific claims of representation though initially desirable remain problematic for two reasons. First they do not create a sufficient condition for a transformative dalit politics as they tend to foreclose the possibility of dalit acquiring the intellectual leadership to speak in the universal language of emancipation. In order to claim a moral status to their representation claim, dalits have to acquire the moral capacity to question themselves vis-à-vis both their intellectual and political moves. In other words they are supposed to substantiate their claim not on the basis of external reasoning, but an internal ethic informed by public accountability, a historicization of dalit reality and tolerance towards internal intellectual dissent.

Dalit leaders are also hegemonized. The opinion makers are based in metropolis. They do not go to the people for political education. Of course there are problems in this approach too because the cognitive map of people is marked more by thick emotions than reason. But still the moral question remains, is there not a greater need to go to the people again and again not only with promises but also problems? But unfortunately the dalit leaders only make promises, thus making the discourse absolutely easy and free flowing.

Valid dalit representation claims should be informed by a historicized projection of social reality meaning that the claimant should not shy away from depicting the reality in its fullness without avoiding the uneasy or inconvenient dimensions of social reality. Did dalit representative show this moral courage of confronting their reality in its totality?

The pragmatic politics sometimes acquires a sharp edge, as it should against the external adversary but fails to show the same tenacious criticism against the internal one. Any claims to representation including by dalits, can be valid only when they have the moral capacity to confront reality, howsoever ugly it may be. They become authentic only when their claimants resolve the uneasy tensions between the pragmatic and the moral component of politics.

If the representation claims are driven primarily by the force of pragmatic considerations and the sense of easy and quick political victory, then they have the tendency to render the claimant less tolerant of internal criticism. In fact, they can drive them to eliminate the internal adversaries, not so much by force of argument but by deploying extra intellectual factors. The representation claims established through these methods necessarily become self-limiting, in as much as they keep the concerned interrogators from the non –dalit groups out of the discourse. In a way such claims are ultimately converted into truths to be believed without question. Such claims also lack a unity of purpose in as much as they are exclusionary in character. The paradox is that such representation claims produce the very same processes of exclusion against which they had emerged in the first instance.

Prof Gopal Guru finds fault with Dalit cultural movements, including the literary movements. While during the initial phase, dalit cultural movements, played a positive
and progressive role, of late they have been appropriated by the state and tend to have a regressive role. Of late they have been appropriated by the state and tend to have regressive impact on the emancipatory project of the Dalit masses. There has also been a growth of professionalism among Dalit singers, who now sing for money with scant concern for any kind of political agenda. The Dalit writers too have become inaccessible to the common dalits. In order to establish their credentials as writers, they have increasingly begun to write in an abstract language. The dalit literary establishment according to Guru has become a hindrance for an emerging mudhouse dalit from the struggle against the dominant culture (Gopal Guru, quoted in Dalit Identity and Dalit Politics, edited by Ghanshyam Shah, 2001)


41 Personal interview with a colleague, Government First Grade College, Kuvempunagar, Mysore, 03-03-04. "Her father was the inhabitant of a village near Ooty in Karnataka Tamilnadu bordor. He was not allowed to enter into the classroom. He had to sit outside and take down what ever was written on the board. He thought it polluting to talk to the dalit student. Therefore, he stood inside the classroom and held a long stick in his hand. When the untouchable student wanted to know what he has written is right or wrong, he spoke only through gestures. He used to raise his stick and mime a tick mark in case of correct answer and an X in case of a wrong answer."

42 Dr. Chandrashekhar S. Mysooru Samshthanadalli Sudharane mattu Pratikriye, in Adhunika Karnatakada Andolanagalu, P 28, Published by Namma Prakashana, 2002.


44 Fieldwork in Hosahalli village near Malavalli Taluque.

45 Mary Maynard, Race Gender and The Concept of Difference in Feminist Thought, p.no 304. in Feminism: Critical concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, Vol 4, edt Mary Evans.

46 Dr. Chandrashekhar. S, quoted in ibid 2002.


48 Harris Angela, in Susan Moller Okin, Gender Inequality and Cultural differences, in Political Theory, February 1994.


53 "During 1929 the textile mill workers in Bombay were on strike sponsored by Girni Kamgar Union. Ambedkar’s opposition to the communist-inspired strike was greater than ever because of the fact that the communist leaders had never raised their voice against the prohibitive barriers that kept the Depressed class workers away from the lucrative departments in the Mill industry on account of untouchability." In Bahistkrut Bharat, 31 May 1929.

54 Anna Lindberg, Experience and Identity, 2001.

Interview with Tanika Sarkar, 16-11-2000, JNU Department of History.

Sainath P. The Hindu. The Dalit women in Orissa tell him that poor women of other castes can at least sell puffed rice when they have no other job option while being a dalit they cannot even do that because nobody will buy it from them.


Interview with Nandini Pati, General Secretary of Progressive Women's Front, 30-9-2000, 4-30 P.M. Place: Samata Office, Mysore.

Personal interview with Saraswati, A sahayogini of Mhila Samakhya, Nanjanagood.

Com. Chaya Mukharjee, Chief Secretary, AIMSS, Excerpts from the paper presented at a seminar held at Calcutta. Quoted from Stri Mukti, Feb-April 1997.


Rati Rao, Samata, Mysore, 18-3-2001.

Menon Nivedita, Gender and Politics in India ed, 1999, P-19, OUP


Bhanvari Devi is a dalit woman living in Bhaten village in Rajasthan. She was working as a sathin (voluntary worker) for Women’s Development Project (WDP) and aimed at making rural women participate in development process. Her job was to prevent child marriages. She tried to prevent the marriage of Ram Charan’s minor daughter. Consequently her 11 year old daughter was beaten unconscious. The police did accept her complaint and called her a whore. The following day she was gang raped by upper caste locals at her hut. She decided to fight the violence meted out to her. But finally in the supreme court the accused were acquitted. The verdict (judge Jaipal Singh) told that it is not possible in the Indian culture that a man who has taken a vow to protect his wife in front of the holy, just stands and watches the wife being raped. It is highly impossible that uncle his nephews could commit rape together. The presence of a Brahmin among the accused also led the jude to comment that gangs in the rural areas are not usually multi caste. The judge concluded that Bhanwari Devi was a dalit and the accused were upper caste men could not have raped her.


Kumudini Pati, President of Indian Women’s People Front, Personal Interview at Mysore., 30-09-2000.


Personal interview with District Co-ordinator, Mahila Samakhya, Mysore, 13-1-2002.

Parimala, District Co-ordinator, Mahila Samakhya, Mysore, 13=012002.

