INTRODUCTION

The present chapter probes casteism/casteist patriarchy as a political challenge confronting the contemporary postcolonial (PC from hereafter) academic mission. PC project's rejection of grand (liberal, Marxist) theoretical and methodological paradigms has been accompanied by an urge to reconfigure versions of the nations and formulate a new set of theoretical paraphernalia. Many of their theoretical inventions are casteised, gendered and more importantly gendered on caste lines. The penchant to characterize mainstream Indian nationalist discourse in terms of "autonomous nationalist thought" obscure both caste/caste patriarchal underpinnings of the discourse and the violence (epistimic, physical, material) that targeted Dalits. They often use culture to determine meanings of nationalism/nation/home. The PC discourse on such concepts as nation, nationalism and postcoloniality is setting new political parameters along the repudiatory lines of caste, gender and so on. The centrality of caste/caste patriarchal to mainstream Indian culture and nationalist discourse is evident. This realization does not seem to match understandings of nationalist discourse reflected in PC literature, which give no attention to caste/caste patriarchal dynamics. There is a need to consider these dynamics very seriously. But the PC project seems to be immune to such realizations. The present dissertation thus tries to register Dalit feminist frustration over this immunity.

They tend to project the Hindu nationalist course as the mainstream one. Such attitudes relegate Dalit nationalist fights/discourse to the margins. It thus privileges upper caste hegemonic domination in the field of scholarly production. Moreover, it also accords unquestionable vitality to certain ideological streams that are prejudiced. The present work engages itself in deconstructing this prejudiced literature. This is not only to point out at the Dalit concerns but also to challenge the politics of accepted language and concepts like "nation", "nationalism", "family" etc. These omissions are particularly hitting in the emerging contexts where Dalits' contribution to nationalism and nation building, and their alternative discourses have been put to debate.

The present work concentrates on PC theory, drawing attention to ways and methods in which "the nation" is predicated on specific caste identities. It tries to reveal the limitations of PC theory. The conclusion is that Dalits do not find space in this theory. They don't appear as nationalist subjects. No committed scholar writing about nationalism can ignore the caste/caste patriarchal dimensions of Indian nation. The question is not whether the PC literature is "dalitist" enough. The scrutiny is more towards understanding the implications of PC literature to the Dalits. Their notion of "peasants", "masses" or "subalterns" is incapable to present us with their caste background. It is also time to challenge the artificial divide that they formulated between the inner and outer domains. Dalits energetic involvement in numerous reform and nationalist movements throughout the British colonial period would rise questions on their status as nationalist subjects; the victory of upper caste nationalists in the so-called "inner domain" and the caste dimensions of PC literature itself. PC scholars seem to subscribe to the notion of nation-as-kinship/family. It is evident in their unequivocal endorsement to Hindu religious nationalist discourse.
The present work specifically deals with the exclusions of the Dalit woman in PC literature. It is not an exaggeration to ascertain that their very historiography is based on excluding her. Therefore the present study is particularly designed to focus on the casteised gender dimensions of politico-cultural constructions of "the" nation. For them boundaries of "the" nation are fixed and eternal. Dalit woman does not serve as idealized image or boundary of the nation. Their biological status as social reproducers is not claimed by the nation. They are therefore not given the place of "battlegrounds" in nationalist conflicts. They do not symbolize national collectivity. Their children are not treated as the natural heirs of nation. PC scholarship does not debate all the exclusions in their theory. Moreover, they continue to manufacture their very theory on these exclusions. Therefore the present work examines ways in which ideas about insiders and outsiders are constructing the meanings of the nation. It also draws attention to the self-other dichotomies within PC discourse. PC school takes up the cultural approach to nationalism and operates as a site of ideological production. It has so far never looked at how caste patriarchy and nationalist projects are politically embedded.

*The concept of Caste:*

One methodological issue that is to be considered seriously is the parallel application of the terms Dalit and *caste* by all most all the scholars reviewed here. Unfortunately it has become a settled practice to use these two terms interchangeably. It sounds too paradoxical to find that the Dalit movement, which fights against *caste*, is often addressed as a *caste* movement. Certainly the researcher is aware that the Dalit movement has made large departures from its anti-*caste* path to that of consolidating the *caste* identities in order to fight against hierarchies existing in the name of *castes*. Such attempts at consolidation are also should be understood as a kind of fight against the same *caste* oppression and the usage of 'caste' here as a matter of strategy. Thus the terms *caste* and "Dalit movement" cannot be used interchangeably. If the Dalit movement can be termed as a *caste* movement how does one address the violence's launched in the name of *caste*? How does one understand the aggressive invasions of the upper *castes* against the lower *castes*? *Caste* by definition is casteist, that means oppressiveness is its essential core. Therefore it is absurd to treat the Dalit movement as a *caste* movement and anti-Dalit movements as casteist movements.

However, by the 1990s with the emergence of identity politics, *caste* has come to be understood not only as an oppressive apparatus but also as a social identity. This social identity is again located in the body of a person since *caste* attaches itself to a person from his/her birth. It is a paradoxical situation where *caste* has become both a system that has to be eroded and as a marker that should be cared for as an identity. It has become a marker of persons and of communities. But it is apolitical to apply the term in these ways. Therefore, in the present work the term is used in 'italics' to indicate its oppressive core, its constructedness and also the difficulty of avoiding the term altogether.
There is a trend towards the transvaluation of the term *caste*. 'Dalit' is coined as a term to indicate power, and dalitness is to be acclaimed not ignored. The opinion was that perceiving Dalits as part of a caste is a strengthening element. Such negative potential drawn from caste identity only subverts the idea of caste. Such efforts only conceal the jaundiced implications of caste and fail to counter its real purposes and violent nature. It is necessary to use the term for the purpose of consolidation, and at the same time to be careful enough to see how it operates in the hands of the Dalits.

*Caste* is defined by various people in various ways. The present work sees it as a system of stratification that places people in hierarchies according to certain artificial parameters (which range from birth, culture, religion etc.) which is premised on the division of occupations into respectable and demeaning. Any-body's place in the caste system is defined by the accident of his/her birth and therefore by the societal status that follows.

**Casteist Patriarchy:**

Dalit women are ruled by this system of casteist patriarchy. It is not always exercised by upper caste men alone. All the kinds of oppressions, which are exercised on Dalit women, can be said to emanate from this system because of Dalit woman's location as a woman and as a Dalit. It does not simply double the oppression but multiplies it and manifests itself in numerous ways. This oppression can arise from two counters; one, because she is by birth situated in this plane and the other because the world which relates itself with her also operate in the same plane of casteist patriarchy. Thus even the Dalit women who are in a slightly better position are understood as being under its subjection since society always comes to terms with them through this structure.

This structure is maintained with much keenness since women are the permeable edges through which social relations are reproduced. They are the potential frontiers, which can result in the mixture of castes if they are not kept in their right place. Since the nation is imagined as the possession of the upper castes, it is necessary to see that only the upper caste progeny inherit it. During the great transitional times of British colonialism, there was an enormous fretfulness about preserving these traditional boundaries. It was thus deemed important to reproduce the caste consciousness both at the mind and the institutional levels since the modern laws and rules would soon have un-stigmatized the interactions between the castes. While they were trying to both liberate their women and preserve their homes with this precautionary care, rejuvenating the old casteist patriarchy became an essential strategy. This rejuvenation or giving a democratic face-lift to this system necessitated the deployment of various tactics. Writing and speech thus assumed enormous importance, which took up the meaning-making task. From literary to academic writings and speeches everything was soaked in casteist patriarchy. The fifth chapter "Religious Nationalism as Épistemic Violence" specifically explains how this task had been carried on by the religious nationalists, a legacy they inherited through their ancestors and from religious scriptures. They keep
producing such ideologies and they have different strategies for doing so. The refusal to offer an equal status to subjectivity in their writings and speeches is one such effective method. They produce their theories as if the others do not exist.

Such a refusal to give subjectivity to the Dalits is the main feature of postcolonial theory. This strategy of denying subjectivity to the Dalits in general and to Dalit women in particular happened primarily by branding the Dalit movement and its discourse as a mere community-oriented one. The continuous practice of denying the space of nationalism to the Dalit discourse and movement that extends to this date is part of the programme of denying a nationalist subjectivity to them. The present thesis tries to examine how this practice is being reproduced by the postcolonial school and also by those schools who stick to the “Cultural Studies” approach. This can be found in the first chapter "Postcolonial Theory and the Dalits".

Dalit Movement as Nationalist:

A cryptic code of nationalist language came in hand for them to reach this end. A particular jargon became standardized and it also became an effective tool to achieve certain ends without being responsible for specifying who gets what, how much and when. The nation and Hindu became identical at one phase. The nation was sanctified and became a generic entity in almost all streams of nationalist thought and it was anathema to think of the specificities of communities. The Dalit movement is not considered as a nationalist movement precisely because it was premised on the primacy of these specificities and because it posed the question of the allocation of values and resources. Even today, the query, 'Is the Dalit movement a nationalist movement?' has not gained any momentum. It is assumed to be a movement, which strived to work for the Dalits. Is not the Dalit question then a national issue? If Dalits are citizens of the nation, why are their issues not national questions? Why does not their liberation amount to the nation’s liberation?

For someone to understand that the Dalit question is a nationalist question also, it is important to realize the continuation of caste cruelties in the British colonial period also. One of the central hypotheses of this work is that the rule by the upper castes during and before British colonialism was actually a first wave of colonialism. In this sense the liberation of Dalits from the caste system should be understood as a liberation of the nation. Then it will become clear that the Dalit liberation movement too is a nationalist movement. Such an argument does not violate the traditional definition of colonialism where it is defined as a system of establishing colonies in the land which is not their own. The dwelling places of the Dalits were nothing but the colonies of the upper castes...even their bodies. Since the Dalit movement tried to target the caste system which is oppressive and has been settled essential feature of the land, it is evident that any movement which tries to purify the nation from such anti-human systems ought to be considered as nationalist movements.
Central to Ambedkar’s nationalist thought was the equal importance he accorded for Dalits to be liberated from both the British and the upper castes. He is one among the very few who thought that even if the nation was liberated there was every chance for the Dalits to remain unliberated. What kind of liberation or independence is it that cannot free some of its people? And also can such independence be of any importance for the Dalits who are not freed from caste oppression? Many scholars do not take these questions seriously since they feel complacent with the existing imagination of the Indian nation.

Postcolonial Theory:

It is in this context that the importance of Subaltern Studies (SS hereafter) lie. Unlike the earlier scholarships this school claimed that it would look into various subaltern voices so far submerged by the dominant academic practices. Initially it looked like a big promise, which would look into the fissures of the nation that Ambedkar had pointed out to. But even after the almost twenty years of research the SS has not yet come across a name called Ambedkar, leave alone the gaps that he wanted us to look at in the body of the nation.

"Caste", the term itself is denied by these scholars and very often they pull a nomenclature like folk communities, popular classes, discreet categories and so on to address this system. Thus this term has lost all its political meaning, which the Dalit movement had so laboriously tried to give to itself. For instance, Dalits underwent the painful experiences with the politics of naming by making the upper caste world use the term ‘Dalit’ instead of harijan to address them. The SS’s refusal to respect this historic struggle of the Dalits in naming themselves is fundamentally done by their attempts to promote the idea of caste as a cultural system rather than as a real souci-economic and political one. Such an extremely erroneous messages carries wrong information to the world academic body about this supremacist structure of caste and misconstrues the ways of looking at it.

The main problem that they see is not in Indian nationalism and its claims but in how they are portrayed by academicians whose knowledge frames were influenced by western Reason. As a result, they tend to possessively try and preserve those ideologies, which are basically predicated on non-western, native ideas. Whatever little theory exists on the caste/Dalit in their volumes is thus either marshaled to justify conservative upper caste versions of the nation or to negate any unified integrated theory on caste/Dalit. When the possibilities of any integrated theory of caste/Dalit become impossible, constructing any single theory of liberation and resistance also becomes unimaginable. It is to be seriously noted here that the requirement for one integrated theory of caste need not necessarily rely on the total rejection of the heterogeneity of the caste system itself. What the scholar tries to argue is that the force and strength of the caste system predicates essentially on this heterogeneity which is manifested in the form of
segregating the communities by a principle of hierarchy. In other words, dividing the people into various caste communities is the very strength of this system. Thus considering the reality of heterogeneity is extremely important both to understand it as an essential manipulation of the caste system and also to pay keen attention to how it further divides and hierarchies the lower castes. But SS does not see this feature of heterogeneity as a fundamental dividing feature and tends to portray it as proof of the flexibility of the system (this point is exemplified in Dipankar Gupta’s concept of “discreet castes” which can be found in the third chapter ‘Caste Studies’).

The end result of this postcolonial theoretical praxis even appears to be manipulative to a Dalit feminist. With this, the very conceptual paraphernalia of deconstruction that was inherited by the emergence of progressive ideologies of the world become an imperialist ethnocentric paradigm. The Dalit question basically lost two grounds, there is no space for it in the SS academic mission and it was also bereaved of the theoretical baggage gathered from negotiating with the liberating theories emanated in the west. More than denying the rightful space for the Dalit question in its mansions, what the SS does is to horrendously delegitimize the very conceptual ground that the Dalit movement has constructed to assert its identity and rights. This is done mostly as argued elsewhere in the dissertation through the backdoor policy i.e., by denying western Reason. This backward revivalism set by SS/Postcolonial Studies, consequently attributed a new pro-human colour (they may not allow the word ‘democratic’ here since it is the contribution of western Reason) to hindutva nationalism.

What is resurrected without fail in the name of peasant studies, the autonomy of nationalist thought and of giving agency to the subaltern classes (on the pretext of denying the monolithic notion of one ideologically neutral Truth set by western historiography) by Indian Postcolonial writers (who call their project Subaltern Studies) is hindutva. Their generic usage of the “subaltern” has given rise to more problems than it has set out to solve. This school also depicts politics or history in installments, in a broken fashion. Their defense of the native argument, archives and forces peep out throughout their articles and make feeble struggles against the more sophisticated and democratic western Reason. Most of the time this leaves the Dalit reader in what can be called the postmodern wonderland.

The direct questions now are, “If the ideology of the West is inherently ethnocentric and thus inimical to the understanding of any reality of the colonized, what is the state of the politics of pre-British colonial India? Was politics in this land completely neutral and apolitical in the pre-British colonial times?” In the pre-British colonial past politics and culture/religion were conglomerated. When the modern nationalists of the past tried to evade this past as essentially backward, there were certain leaders who tried to incorporate this past as an essential core of the nation. And finally, incorporating the past as an essential feature of the Indian nation was time and again done by the collective work of mainstream and hindutva nationalists. It is this category of politics and people that SS tries to re-understand and re-legitimize. The SS’s main task, therefore, is not only to criticize western Reason but also to give a new life, meaning and legitimacy to hindutva and to pre-British colonial Indian past. The present thesis thus
tries to examine the implications of postcolonial theories on the nation and to realities like caste and gender. Such a deconstruction obviously deals with the concept of the nation.

Chapterization:

The first chapter gives a general introduction to postcolonial studies and its claims. Apart from deconstructing certain concepts specific to this discourse the chapter also tries to register various criticisms existing against this discourse. The second chapter tries to unravel how the postcolonial discourse deals with the concept of caste and Dalit politics. It criticizes the upper caste solipsism of PC theories, which ignored the theoretical and practical contributions of Dalit movement to the making of the nation. It points out at the coercive energy of certain exclusionary practices and assumptions within the PC theory. It tries to combat the modes of thought which offer stereotypical images of Dalits as mere agents who pursue for artha. The third chapter explains the major trends of omission that mainstream Indian feminism, Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Studies tend to make against the Dalit woman. A few major texts are deconstructed here for this purpose and the chapter also tries to present concepts of postcoloniality regarding the issue of gender and nation. Some of the studies though they do not claim directly to be postcolonial texts are also put to scrutiny (for example feminist texts) here only in order to prove the collaboration between postcolonial and dominant feminist ideologies. It examines the repercussions of these practices and collaborations on the Dalit women community. The fourth chapter culls Hindu nationalist discourse on both Hindu and lower caste women. It is very difficult to find out many direct references to Dalit women in this discourse. The silence on the Dalit woman in this discourse carries two meanings. One is that she is not a full national subject to deal with and the other that such silence explains the very degree of the violence against them. Most of their prejudiced views can be deciphered from what this discourse usually thinks and preaches to the Hindu woman on how to become an ideal national woman. But the silence or lack of evidences on the Dalit woman in the Indian historical sources is not a virtual silence at all. This silence speaks! The congruence between these religious scriptures and mainstream or hindutva nationalist thought is examined in order to prove how casteist patriarchy was as essential input in the imagination of the Indian nation and for banishing the Dalit woman from its domain by reviving traditional casteist patriarchal strategies and ideology. The last chapter deals with the mainstream Women's Movement for rights during the British colonial period. It presents the collisions of the Hindu women with their male nationalists and their consistent rejection of the claims to Dalit rights as legitimate political rights.

It was during this period that the battle for hegemony over nation itself arose from the side of upper caste women's movement. Which women and which politics would be defined as "nationalist" in this historical configuration? What broad alliances were advanced and what caused their break down? How do contemporary feminists assess this so-called "first wave of Indian women's movement? And, importantly, how does this legacy continue to influence the contemporary upper caste women's fight for
reservations? This chapter tries to look at all these queries. Broadly this chapter is a narration of the systematic betrayal of organized upper caste women's movement. Apart from general registration of the apathy that they showed to the community of Dalit women what surprises one is the continuation of the same tendency even in the so-called postcolonial India. Contemporary feminist currents towards the present "women's reservation" issue is enclosed as an evidence to explain that mainstream women share the caste patriarchal politics and ideology of their men.

What is Dalit feminism?

Understandably the frame of the present dissertation can be called Dalit feminist. The purpose is not to claim any chronological account or lineage to this theory. It is not that such a motivation is not necessary; it is that the present work attempts to define what is this "ism" and what does it hold? Here is an attempt to tell what it is, what it means to Dalit women, and what it holds for social science academics. As mentioned before Dalit feminist thought emerged out of the sheer necessity that the realities and views of Dalit women were not seen and would not be in the future either, unless and, until they are able to tell what they feel about a particular theory, about a reality and about history. It is all about what they need, what do they stand for, what is near to them or what is not available, what is true for them and what makes something untrue for them.

One may easily pose a question on the heterogeneous nature of the Dalit women community. As argued elsewhere in this thesis the dichotomies between the touchable and untouchable women are not only stratified but also multiple whereas it is not the same case with the different castes among the Dalits. To reiterate, it is always a political necessity to address the question of heterogeneity of Dalit women only in relation to the hierarchical heterogeneity with which they are situated vis-a-vis the upper caste women. This is a political necessity because all the hierarchical power relations among the Indian women are neatly fixed within the caste system. Moreover, digging only on the aspect of heterogeneity among the Dalit women would portray it more as an intra-community feud thus making one forget the role of caste patriarchy, which is the creator of this segregating system. Caste patriarchy's role here should be understood not merely as categorizing women into various castes and thus determining their status but also by keenly guarding the level of segregation between them.

The present brief notes tries to, thus to (as one of the initial steps towards such attempts) formulate a Dalit feminist theory in the light of which the research of the present work can be earned on. Like any incipient theory, which can have lapses, this theory also may come up with obvious lapses between what it is and what it aims at and so on.

First of all Dalit feminism need not always take up studies on the issues of Dalit women only. It is not mature enough to declare all that it stands for since like any other responsible political theory Dalit feminism also subjects itself to changes. Over time it
will try to enrich itself by absorbing meaningful features of other theories and by contributing its own political sensibilities to the former. It is an integrated ethico-political standpoint, which is capable of studying various issues from its own perspective. It believes that every aspect of the Indian nation is gendered on caste ways. It is therefore an attempt at re-writing most of the theories, and dismantling most of the methodologies, and facts and rejecting the neutral claims of truth of many mainstream theories (even those theories which address themselves as having emerged from the dismantling of such claims by earlier grand theories).

It is not a mere retaliation to dominant theories, which are built on the exclusions of Dalit women nor does it intend to carry simplistic macro-level studies with mechanical questionnaires which ascertain only 'yes' or 'no' responses. It is a theory by itself, a self-conscious, and integrated one. It resents such versions, which see Dalit women as an extra or additive subject, which can be added or discarded at the wish of the academicians.

For instance, the studies on poverty, according to Dalit feminism should not start with what the grand theories lay out, but with what she explains as her reality; what she feels as the real poverty line. It means that the study should start from the periphery to the center, not the other way round. It implies making the periphery the center of analysis. Some theories on Indian realities are faulted because they carry the views of those who are not subjects of the issue in question. Then, "Does Dalit feminism claim that only those who are the subjects have the right to talk about them?" Ideally, such an idea of making the Dalit women’s issues a monopoly of Dalit women is not suggestible (for that matter reserving any subject for any community since it is their own community issue is politically undesirable for it may result in the production of closed theories). But as the third chapter has proved, it is not only desirable but also inevitable for the Dalit women to produce her own theories with her own experiences otherwise her point of view would never see the light of day.

And finally it should be acknowledged here that it is not practically possible to draw a conceptual boundary to what the Dalit feminism can be in all the contexts and regarding every thing that implies the Indian nation. The main intention is to acknowledge that this thesis is based on Dalit feminist ideology. It means that this work tries to see all the issues that come across in the study with a Dalit feminist point of view, where researcher’s own commonsensical point of view (inherited from Dalit feminist sensibility) counts for more than all the rest. Such a realization strings the arguments throughout the thesis.
Methodology:

This work adopts descriptive and analytical method. The sources of the information include both the primary and the secondary texts. The primary sources include mainly archival material. Secondary sources include books and articles.