

INVISIBILITY OF DALIT WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS

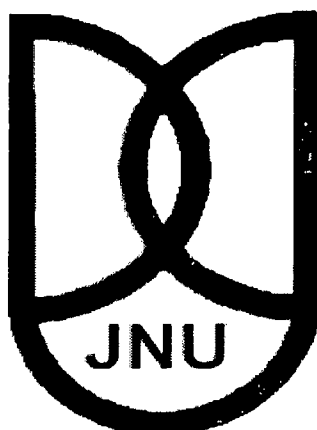
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**Invisibility of Dalit Women in Parliamentary Politics**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University** is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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Shweta Rathore

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIADMK-	All India Dravida Munnetra Karzaghama
AVDS-	Ambedkar Village Development Scheme
BAMCEF-	The All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation
BC-	Backward Castes
BJP-	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSP-	Bahujan Samaj Party
CPI-	Communist Party of India
DMK-	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DP-	Dalit Panthers
DPI-	Dalit Panthers Iyakkam
DS4-	Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti
GDI-	Gender Development Index
HDI-	Human Development Index
M.K.Gandhi-	Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
MPs-	Member of Parliament
NFDW-	National Federation of Dalit Women
NGOs-	Non-governmental Organisations
OBCs-	Other Backward Castes
PMK-	Pattali Makkal Katchi
PT-	Puthiya Tamizhagam
RPI-	Revolutionary Party of India

RS NAICKER-	Ramaswami Naicker
SCs-	Scheduled Castes
SP-	Samajwadi Party
STs-	Scheduled Tribes
T.N-	Tamil Nadu
U.P. -	Uttar Pradesh
WRB-	Women's Reservation Bill

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Indian scenario, the two entanglements which are most nuanced are gender and caste. But what is particularly interesting are the spaces of its intersection. It is such a dual entanglement of discrimination, disenchantment and subsequent disempowerment that has propelled me to work on the aforementioned theme.

In the dissertation, an attempt is made to look at the reasons for low political participation of dalit women. The broad reasons can be subsumed under two heads: deprivation induced exclusion (socio-economic condition) and institutional exclusion (how political parties treat dalit women). The dissertation also looks at the role of political parties in empowering dalit women as dalit women are largely dependent on political parties to give them tickets or office positions in the party as they have fewer resources to contest elections independently or power to influence the government.

Societal Discrimination

In a caste-ridden society like India, caste becomes an important marker of one's identity and determines all the aspects of one's life and especially if one is born in a low-caste; life becomes all the more difficult. Our Indian society is characterised by a rigid, hierarchical caste system. The caste system is subsumed under five major divisions- the fourfold division and there are people who fall outside this typology. They are referred as untouchables and harijans. The five categories are the Brahmins (they are the priestly caste), Kshatriyas (they are the warrior caste), Vaishyas, (they are the merchant caste), Shudras, (they are the artisan caste) and those who perform ritually polluting work are considered 'untouchables'.¹ They prefer to call themselves as dalits.

In India, every fourth person is a dalit and despite the reservation policy, it's not easy being a dalit. So, the question that comes to one's mind is- if being a Dalit is so tough, how tough it will be to live a life of a Dalit woman as women in any caste are considered lowly creatures. So, how does a lowly creature among the alleged lowly creatures live? *Dalit women in India are considered the Dalits among Dalits and suffer from a three-fold oppression on account of gender because of the*

¹Dana Dunn, "Gender Inequality in education and employment in the Scheduled castes and tribes of India." *Population Research and Policy Review* 12, no.1 (1993).

*existing patriarchy, on account of their caste 'the untouchable' and finally, on account of their class - as they hail from the poorest and most marginalized communities.*²

In the total context of the country the status of the Dalit women was and still is the worst compared to others. It is not the cruelty which is limited to domestic violence but laid wide open in the society. The Dalit women are discarded and pushed away in the name of their caste and creed. They are not left with much choice of occupation but to become scavengers in the upper-caste houses, sweepers the Baidis or maid servants ; or given into body trade or prostitution for the sake of their livelihood. The pitiable condition of dalit women makes it clear that their problems and issues do not make part of the dalit movement.

Ambedkar also expressed the same view. He described the caste system as a pyramid of earthen pots set one on top of another. Not only are Brahmins and Kshatriyas at the top and Shudras and untouchables on the bottom but within each earthen pot, men are at the top and women of that caste are on the bottom like crushed and wasted powder. And at the very bottom are the dalits and below them are the suppressed dalit women³.

The evidence shows that within a Dalit community itself, Dalit men (husbands, brothers and fathers) often act out their oppressed position through violence against their women (wives, sisters and daughters). Dalit women have been the recipients of violence at the hands of upper caste men and also functioned as property of Dalit men. This is to say, that Dalit women are triply exploited on the basis of caste, class and gender.⁴

The above account shows that the burden of honour is on the shoulders of women and thus, in order to settle the scores, men of one caste humiliate the women of another caste and therefore, women's freedom to move outside is restricted.

Now, let us see how caste and gender operates in Indian society?

It is said that Caste operates through a number of social and economic institutions and it preserves the domination of the upper castes and the subservience of the lowest castes. Lower castes women remain at the bottom of the hierarchical order and hence, they have no right to privacy or decision-

² Ruth Manorama, *Informed Giving*, http://informed_giving.org/story_details.php?i=MTQx (accessed June 4, 2012).

³ Gail Omvedt, "The Downtrodden among the Downtrodden: An Interview with an agricultural labourer." *The Labour of Women: Work and Family* 4, no. 4 (1979): 3.

⁴ Vivek Kumar, http://www.ambedkartimes.com/vivek_kumar.html (accessed August 25, 2009).

making and no right of protection against sexual exploitation.⁵Caste operates at societal and institutional level and practise discrimination against the lower castes.

Pierre Bourdieu discusses “doxa”, which means a set of shared beliefs and norms within a community which condition the behaviour of its members without being openly declared. Any member of the community who violates the rules of the doxa invites social sanctions of various kinds, including the most violent. But the doxa operates on an unarticulated level apart from one's consciously declared beliefs.⁶

Institutional Exclusion

India is one of the largest democracies in the world and elections are an important part and parcel of the democratic process. Other than electing the representatives periodically, electoral process works as an agent of social change. It is an integrating factor within the political system and a mechanism of social change at the three main levels *i.e.*, village, the state and the nation⁷. As India is a diverse country; the need was felt to integrate its minorities. Minorities were defined in terms of gender, language, social status, religion, region etc. Despite the constitutional provisions to safeguard its minorities, they still face societal as well as institutional discrimination. The unequal status in the name of religion, gender, caste, region and language is much embedded in the Indian society..... The threat to minorities in India arises from the situation in which mechanisms of state power have been over shadowed and over-ruled⁸.

In democracy, it's true that the majority rules and therefore minorities are politically excluded or remain politically vulnerable and their participation in the election process is minimal to voting and choosing the representatives. Participation in the elections means voting and if interested further, attending party meetings, campaigning, supporting various activities of the party, raising funds, holding party offices, having links with pressure groups and contesting elections⁹. In other words, minorities remain passive citizens and do not become active agents of social change.

Geddes has very rightly explained political exclusion as “the isolation of poor people and communities from the mainstream of the political process and the making of decisions about their

⁵<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/ACJP-Report.pdf> (accessed Feb 12, 2007).

⁶Wandana Sonalkar, “An Agenda for Gender Politics,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 1/2 (1999):3.

⁷Duncan B. Forrester, “Electoral Politics and Social Change,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 3, no. 26/28 (1968):1075.

⁸Akhtar Majeed, *Nation and Minorities; India's Plural Society and its Constituents* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2002), 9.

⁹Subrata Kumar Mitra and James Chiriyankandath, eds., *Electoral Politics in India a Changing Landscape* (New Delhi: Segment Books, 1992), 201.

lives elsewhere by others. This is particularly the case where geographical concentrations of poverty and deprivation exist - in inner cities, on peripheral housing estates, or in poor rural communities¹⁰”

In her book “Politics of Inclusion; Castes, Minorities and Affirmative Action” Zoya Hasan talks about the politics of inclusion and gives two important reasons- firstly, the increased presence of historically excluded groups is a sign of inclusiveness in public institutions, and this, in turn, is an important marker of the fairness of democratic regimes. Secondly, greater inclusion of the excluded groups in the decision making institutions would provide these bodies with the presence of people who can articulate the interests of these sections, which may otherwise be neglected by default¹¹.

The above account very clearly shows the importance of being politically active and the ability to take part in decision-making bodies. Women constitute minority not so much in terms of its numerical strength but in terms of the resources and the power it possess in private as well as public life. Basically, there are two important views regarding the political participation of women in India. Praveen Rai states that,

The electoral participation of women in India is a much discussed issue with a wide range of opinions and differing views. On the one hand, some theorists argue that the electoral process in India is fraught with male patriarchy and dominance that act as impediments to women participation. The lack of political voice and poor representation in parliament is a result of exclusions on gender basis. On the other hand there are theorists who dispute the argument and feel that the increased participation of women in electoral competition in the 1990s as voters and sharing of political power at the grass root level reveal that electoral politics in India is no more gender exclusive but is quite inclusive¹².

In all the castes, women are seen as a weak category and were thus, confined to the four walls of house; her activities were restricted to housekeeping activities as she was seen incapable of pursuing politics or any outside activity. In India, submission of women is embedded in socio-cultural settings

¹⁰Janie Percy Smith. ed., *Policy Responses to Social Exclusion: Towards Inclusion?* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

¹¹Zoya Hasan, *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities and Affirmative Action* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.

¹²Praveen Rai, “Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key determinants and Barriers”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no.3 (2011):47.

whereby all socio-cultural norms justify the inequality in the division of labour between men and women and the subsequent discrimination against women. As compared to western countries, Indian government gave the right to vote to women much earlier than most western countries. But despite the right to participate equally in politics; their representation in parliament and state legislatures still remains low and the struggle still continues. One important thing to note is that women do not form a homogenous group as lower castes women face more discrimination as compared to upper castes educated women and therefore, the political participation as well as representation of upper caste women vis-a-vis dalit women vary. Amrita Basu in "Gender and Politics" talks about the various factors that influence the voting behaviour of women. These are cultural outlook, exposure to western influence, industrial development and urbanisation, literacy, awareness of caste and class and of the surroundings have an impact on the voting behaviour of women¹³.

If we analyse women's political participation and representation in the elections and other decision-making bodies; there has been a significant change but still we see very few women in politics playing active roles. Although our constitution ensures equality between sexes and prohibits any kind of discrimination on any basis (sex, caste, colour, religion etc); women still face discrimination at both society and institution levels. Women have always been excluded from politics and still face institutional discrimination is evident from low number of women in legislatures. To analyse this, I have looked at the dalit women's participation in the elections vis-a-vis upper caste women and there is a huge gap between the two by analysing their representation in the legislatures since independence. There is no doubt that dalit women are under represented in parliament and higher decision making bodies. The representation of dalit women in parliament has not increased much from 1.23 percent in 1952 to 3.13 percent in the 2009 elections as compared to 11.05 percent of women in 2009. The number of women in lok sabha are so less that they do not form the "critical mass" that is considered to be very important in order to bring gender parity in legislation and political decision making. This shows the complete gender exclusion from politics, few women who make it to legislatures are not in a position to make any significant changes in women's lives.

One important reason for women's marginalisation in politics is due to the discrimination they face within the political parties as women are mostly dependent on the parties to give them tickets but the parties hesitate to offer them tickets and if given, they are given to the wives, sisters etc of powerful male politicians. Women's access to power is still mediated by their relationship to male kin, and is

¹³Amrita Basu, "Gender and Politics", in *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India*, eds. Niraja Gopal Jayal and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 172.

often indirect and symbolic¹⁴. This shows the “patriarchic” nature of the political parties that deliberately excludes women from the public arena. The obvious reason is male domination in political and public life. It is not that women do not form part of politics; they do as “sevikas” serving the party by performing sewa. All their life is spent in doing samaj sewa and supporting the parties; only very few women hold any party office and very fewer reach the leadership positions in the parties and those who become leaders have strong links with the powerful male politicians. Almost all the leading parties have very strong women’s wing. In fact most of these parties are just using them as weapons during the election campaigns and also to make their processions and the public meetings more ‘colourful’. Even if few of them come to power, they are not recognised adequately and they are assigned low profile or ‘soft or feminine’ responsibilities¹⁵.

Another important thing to note is that all the political parties believe in gender equality in theory but when it comes to provide them positions in party offices; they are sidelined. As far as the women’s wing of most of the political parties are concerned, they are not efficient and they do not represent the concerns of dalit women as they are composed of wives, mistresses, daughters, daughters in law and other friends and relatives of the male members. Women get tickets to contest election on the basis of patronage of male leaders or they have to be from very politically influential families (or you have to be a film star).....One thing for sure, all political parties know that women are their vote bank; whoever supports the women’s issues will win the elections.¹⁶

Also the political culture that is marked by criminalisation of politics and violence also discouraged women members in politics. Although 73rd and 74th amendment made the states to reserve one third of seats in Panchayats to women which has significantly increased the participation of women in local bodies and gave an upward mobility to them and made them politically assertive. Similarly, the need is for a women’s reservation bill so that number of women can increase in Parliament but the bill is still not passed which again highlights the patriarchal mindset of power - hungry politicians who are not ready to share power with women. The reason for not passing WRB is the difference in opinions of various political parties especially between national parties and identity-based parties. On the one hand, national parties like Congress, BJP etc favour WRB but are against reservations within reservations while on the other hand parties like BSP, SP, the Liberation Panthers etc are

¹⁴ Ibid, 168.

¹⁵ South Asians for Human Rights, Situation Report India, *Advocating for inclusive electoral processes, for minority rights and for rule of law in South Asia*; Conceptualised, implemented and funded Researched and written by Dhanya Sivan.

¹⁶ Ibid, 9.

against the present form of WRB as they want separate reservation for lower castes women as they are of the view that WRB in its present form will only benefit upper caste, urban educated women.

In politics, both caste and gender plays important roles. So, we will look at the interrelation between caste and politics, gender and politics and will see if there is any point of interaction between caste and gender in politics.

Research Questions

How the category of women is not a homogenous one and how dalit women form a distinct social group?

What are the reasons for low political participation of dalit women? Are they socio-economic in nature or institutional? Do both the forces work hand in hand to exclude dalit women from politics?

How Congress looks at the question of dalit women? Does it have any welfare schemes for dalit women, does it offers tickets to dalit women? What is its attitude towards Women's Reservation Bill?

Dalits have come to dominate the political scene now. Many identity-based parties are formed and these parties exclusively aim at the welfare of dalits. Now the question that becomes important is how dalit women are treated in these dalit parties? Do dalit parties treat dalit women differently as compared to other umbrella parties?

How identity based parties addresses the dalit women question? Are they any different in their attitude towards dalit women?

Why in contemporary dalit politics as well, the dalit women's interests and concerns are being marginalised? Why dalit parties not offering space to dalit women? Why dalit politics not liberating for dalit women?

Are dalit women parts of dalit-bahujan samaj? How dalit woman leader of a dalit based party i.e. Mayawati looks at the question of dalit women?

Which is the more important identity (caste or gender) for identity-based parties?

Why the right to vote of women has not resulted in their greater representation in politics especially parliament?

What kinds of women are politically active in India? Do these women in politics are able to assert their identity and are able to speak for other women?

Review of Literature

There is a close interaction between caste and politics. Dipankar Guptain his article “Caste and Politics: Identity over System” (2005) talks about the interrelation between caste and politics. He says that Indian society is the most stratified society in the world. There are caste, religious and community differences that are deeply engraved into everyday social relations. The study of caste and politics can be analytically justified only when we accept that castes are, first and foremost, discrete entities with deep pockets of ideological heritage. As they are discrete phenomena’s, it is both logically and empirically true that there should be multiple hierarchies as each caste always overvalues itself. This implies that the caste system, as a system, worked primarily because it was enforced by power and not by ideological acquiescence. Caste and politics were always related, but the relationship was manifested differently at different periods of time. The establishment of democracy in independent India has introduced one major change in the way caste and politics interact, and that is by making all castes legally equal.

As far as women are concerned, we know that women in any caste are discriminated and considered as a weak category. It becomes all the more important to see how gender as an identity constrains women’s freedom and agency and restricts women’s political participation?

In Indian society, where the private sphere is seen as natural space for women; there are number of crucial factors that influence women’s political participation like social class, female lifestyles, familial ties, martyrdom, prison experiences, the historical context and electoral arrangements.

It is generally seen that majority of women that participate in politics are from upper and middle castes; which clearly shows that social class is an important factor in influencing women’s political participation.

Pradeep Chhibber (2002) in his article “Why are some women politically active? The household, public space and political participation in India” tries to answer which women have been able to take

the benefit of reservation in local bodies and are politically active. He argues that women are always considered unfit for political life (public life) and her role is strictly restricted to kitchen. The main cause for passive political participation of women is seen as the result of socialisation that conditions them to think that political activity is not right for them. They are passive participants in political life also because they possess fewer resources and most importantly, due to their role in the family as Chhibber argued that women who can negotiate independent space for themselves within the household are more likely to participate in political life as they have multiple responsibilities and consequently, more demands on a woman's time (household work and political work) than men.

Now the question that remains unanswered is which women are able to take benefit of the reservation policy? It is true that the 73rd amendment has given women new opportunities and the survey conducted in Northern states shows that the socio-economic status plays an important role as women who have servants to do the household work are more likely to be in politics than the women who are solely responsible for household work. Some women who have extended families are also likely to be in politics. Thus, one could say that women who are independent and have an identity of their own are more interested in politics and participate more than the women who are largely involved in household chores.

If we analyse the social class of most women leaders; we can clearly identify them with the elite-class. It is evident if we see the female members of former princely families like the Maharani of Jaipur, the Rajmata of Gwalior and the Begum of Bhopal. All of them entered politics because of the traditional support base that they have due to their links with the princely families.

It is also seen that in India, where quality education is still confined to the rich class as the poor class cannot afford the exorbitant fees of the private schools. Students of private schools speak English fluently (English is seen as an elitist language) as compared to students of government schools and these women are elitist is also evident from the fact that most of them speak English more proficiently than the national language. In India at the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha level, women with more diverse backgrounds, including film stars, are moving into politics but most continue to be from well-educated, politically active families.

Another factor that influences women's political participation is patriarchy. In Indian society, patriarchy is prevalent and is considered legitimate as all the social norms and customs approves it. As a result of prevailing patriarchy, the private sphere is generally seen as the natural sphere for

women while the public space (the polity) is the male's dominance. The impact of general gender-based public-private spheres, however, has been that women are accepted as behaving appropriately in politics when they are perceived as filling a political void created by the death or imprisonment of a male family member.

As most of the prominent female leaders have political links and have come to power due to the vacuum created by the death of their husbands or fathers etc which gives them legitimacy to acquire political power. Indira Gandhi, Maneka Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi are no exceptions to the trend.

Richter (1990-1991) argues that in south and southeast Asia, the most important political posts open to women have been so because of familial ties to prominent male politicians-the opportunity for such women having been greatly enhanced by their husbands' deaths and often dramatic martyrdom. That they, rather than other family members, assumed power and exercised it of course requires more specific answers. In most cases, they were the only person available in the family of the right age and ability to capitalize on their husband's legacy and/or martyrdom.

Romila Thapar, Indian historian, has argued that women in Asia are more likely to be active politically if their country has experienced a long struggle for independence. Her reasoning was that the population as a whole is politicized by the long struggle and that many of the important nationalist families are likely to have their men in prison. Consequently female members of the family have to assume political and business roles and even go to jail too as they struggle to take their husbands', fathers', sons', and uncles' places in the family.

As per Rita Manchanda, there are two types of women ministers: One class are the women who belongs to the freedom fighter families and second class women ministers are parvenue sycophants.

It is a known fact that women worked in the independence struggle at par with men and even went to prisons but after independence this had little lasting effect on the number of women elected and appointed to offices. After independence, women's works was restricted to social and cultural work and were deliberately kept out of the political sphere. This shows not the lack of ability on the part of women to contribute in political life but the unwillingness on the part of power-hungry men to share political power with women.

Robi Chakravorti(1999) in her article “Asia’s women leaders and dynastic charisma” talks about how dynastic charisma has played an important role in the rise of many women leaders in Asia. She basically talks about the rise of Sonia Gandhi as the leader of the Congress. Sonia Gandhi’s foreign status and her inefficiency as a political leader are criticised and therefore, her claim to represent the Congress is not considered legitimate. It is observed that most of the women leaders in Asia are able to rise to power because of their connections with their fathers and husbands. Their traditional support base stems from inherited aura of connection with famous, powerful relatives and the sufferings they underwent. One can describe this phenomenon as dynastic charisma.

Max Weber coined the term “charisma” as he talks about three types of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic and legal-rational. All these types relate to different societies like traditional authority relates to pre-modern society, Legal-rational relates to modern society and charismatic rests on leaders claiming extraordinary powers and qualities which do not belong to an ordinary person and this charismatic type is considered as the ideal type of authority. And Sonia Gandhi is the product of this charismatic authority.

Rajeshwari Deshpande (1999) argues for a Politically Sensitive Gender Discourse and talks about the interrelationship between the institutions of caste and patriarchy. She talks about two views regarding gender based reservation in politics. On the one hand, there are scholars who strongly argue that there is urgent need to look at the caste question while dealing with gender politics while on the other hand, the autonomous women's organisations and the women's fronts of the left parties are opposed to the idea of quotas within quotas.

In the article, she discusses Sonalkar’s and Rege’s arguments. On the one hand, Sonalkar argues that the category of women does not have sufficient unity to represent itself as a political group and the caste associations/groups have more claims to being marginalised social groups with a social cohesiveness and common modes of being oppressed. This entitles them to seek political recognition as a group. She argues that the struggles on behalf of women in India do not engage themselves with the forces of patriarchy on a social scale because they do not deal with the caste question. Familiar feminist initiatives get neutralised in the fractured social context in India.

This implies that women do not form a homogenous group and are divided on caste-class basis which makes it difficult for them to claim for their rights as a marginalised group while on the other hand, the caste associations are more entitled to such claims as they are able to assert themselves strongly.

Looking at the caste-class divisions among women; Sharmila Rege articulates a dalit feminist standpoint. She strongly feels that the dalit feminist viewpoint must be acknowledged by the Indian feminist movement in order to unitedly fight against the forces of capitalism, patriarchy and Brahmanism. Sharmila Rege criticised the Brahmanism of the feminist movement and the patriarchal practices of dalit politics. She strongly felt the need for women's movement to address the issues of caste and class.

Thus, we can say that both Rege and Sonalkar are keen to point out that such a political agenda does not celebrate a variety of identity politics on behalf of women belonging to various castes. The women's movement has to challenge these inequalities operating at the systemic level while dealing with the caste question. These must be seen as very significant contributions to the theorisation about the women's movement as well as about Indian politics.

When it comes to new social movements, people's movements, women's movement and left politics; all of these have underestimated the role of caste in Indian society. They felt that caste politics is dead. Especially when it comes to women's movement, it committed the mistake of homogenising women as a social category and neglected the caste-class divisions among women. As a result of this, the women's movement has excluded the women from lower castes and classes from its ambit and thus, it is strongly recommended that a dalit feminist standpoint is necessary for addressing the problems of dalit women. As in the feminist movement, the experiences of urban middle class women were highlighted as universal.

Wandana Sonalkar talks about how patriarchy in India starts with the control of women and in a way, perpetuates caste hierarchies; and the functioning of patriarchy depends upon the preservation of caste. So, there is a strong interrelation between preservation of caste and functioning of patriarchy. She is sceptical about the women's reservation bill's potential to really empower the women and fight against the forces of patriarchy? As WRB doesn't discuss the underlying caste realities. But this doesn't mean that all support WRB; some opponents are demanding quotas within quotas for the lower caste women in parliament and state legislatures while feminist movement have dismissed this argument as patriarchal.

Gopal Guru in "Dalit Women Talk Differently" makes a case for dalit women to talk in a different manner and to organise themselves on the basis of this "difference". He feels the urgent need for dalit women to organise themselves separately from non-dalit women's organisations and patriarchal forces within the dalit community as non-dalit women forces fails to capture their reality and ignores

the caste question completely and patriarchal forces within the dalits exclude them in political and cultural sphere. Thus, there is a need to recognise the “difference”.

Manuela Ciotti (2009) in her article “The Conditions of politics: low caste women’s political agency in contemporary North-Indian Society”- She is basically looking at the structural and cultural conditions of low caste women’s political agency in urban North India. She argues against the dominant perception based on ethnographic study on historically marginalised women (dalit) in urban India that outer space initiates women’s political activism. For her, women activist’s political agency is subject to male consent and their support for women’s activities. This implies the fact that dalit women activists are able to participate in politics only if the male members support their decision and motivates them. In the ethnographic study, most of the local women activists were helped by their husbands as they shared the household work with them which provided the dalit women leisure time to indulge in political activities. As dalit women are burdened with double work (household work and fieldwork); there is more pressure on women’s time and have less resources, in this way, male consent and helping attitude worked as a catalyst in active women’s participation.

Radhika Govinda (2006), “The Politics of the Marginalised: Dalits and Women’s activism in India”- This article argues that non-dalit women movements have been criticised by Dalit-Bahujan activists for their non-engagement with dalit women and ignoring the caste question and the caste identity still determines the place that women activists are given and how they use this caste identity with gender identity to enhance their own selfish interests and ignore the gender interests and therefore, the feeling of “sisterhood” can’t prevail.

Gail Omvedt, “The Downtrodden among Downtrodden: An Interview with an Agricultural Labourer”- The article is based on an interview with a dalit woman agricultural labourer in Maharashtra. In the interview, the informant revealed that there is an explicit sense of class-dichotomy but for her the sense of being treated unjustly and the “double work” that she had to do as a woman (the field work and housework) is higher than her consciousness of caste-oppression. This piece also critiques the Chicago School of Indian Studies which sees women as being acted upon as victims and not as actors.

Pitam Singh and J.K.Pundir- “Women’s Legislators in Uttar Pradesh”- This article is based on a field survey conducted to analyse the background, role and involvement of women in politics in U.P. from 1952 to 1996. The findings revealed that majority of women legislators were from economically sound families and were literate but still their levels of participation remained low and were unable to effectively pursue women’s concerns.

Sudha Pai, “Pradhanis in New Panchayats: Field Notes from Meerut District”- This is based on field study of three places in Meerut District to analyse the working of Pradhanis. The dominant perception is that the 73rd amendment is a boon for rural women as they are given 33percent reservation in Panchayats but the findings revealed a different picture. The findings show that this reservation is not helping women in a major way as they still remain “rubber stamps” of male members in the household.

Binod Khadria, “Gender-based Positive Discrimination: Is There A Case?”- In the chapter, he argues for positive discrimination in favour of women. He states that family is a cultural or institutional entity separate from community within society, where the traditional discrimination takes place. He offers arguments for and against gender-based discrimination and concludes by saying that gender based discrimination is better than other forms of discrimination.

The survey of existing literature shows that dalit women in politics have been a neglected area of concern for researchers. Although, many studies have been done on their low socio-economic background but very few on their active political participation and that too with regard to the impact of 73rd amendment that has revolutionised Indian politics by reserving 33% of seats in panchayats on dalit women but as far as their participation in Indian Parliament or state legislatures; there has been no study conducted.

HYPOTHESES-

Dalit women are excluded from political sphere because of-

- a. *their caste and gender identity (both these forces work hand-in-hand to exclude them from politics);*
- b. *their low socio-economic status in society; and*
- c. *also because political parties are not interested in giving tickets to them.*

METHODOLOGY-

This research is based primarily on primary and secondary sources of information. All possible sources like newspaper reports, archival materials, government census reports, political parties’ election manifestos, their welfare schemes, official documents, journals, books, articles has been collated and analyzed. The research will make use of “content analysis” in order to analyse the election manifestos, welfare policies of dalit women.

CHAPTERISATION-

Chapter-1: Invisibility of Dalit Women in Politics:

The first chapter is the background chapter that looks at the reasons for the invisibility of dalit women in politics. The chapter looks at how caste becomes a shadow and the category of women is not a homogenous one and how dalit women form a social distinct group? The chapter argues that although the traditional taboos are similar for Dalit men and Dalit women. But it's the dalit women who are more prone to discrimination. They are not only discriminated not only by the people of the upper castes but are discriminated within the household as well. Within the dalit movement also, their issues are of secondary importance and they are hardly appointed to positions of power; they are only seen in protests, demonstrations etc.

The chapter is divided into two sections – first section deals with the socio-economic reasons that have resulted in the low political participation of dalit women and the second part deals with the institutional exclusion. The chapter seeks to assess the reasons for the “invisibility” of dalit women in politics? Why the political parties have been hesitant in giving tickets to them? Is it because of “the culture of silence” that dalit women have adopted? Is this “culture of silence” happened because of the lack of adequate employment opportunities, limited skills and illiteracy that limited their mobility and prevented them from achieving independent status? In fact, in few cases dalit women have been active in politics but the question is does this political activism has given them more decision-making power, more autonomy and more agency in terms of raising dalit women's issues and in terms of budget allocation power?

This being the theoretical background, the subsequent chapters will look at the political parties empirically. Using content analysis, I will look at the election manifestos, welfare schemes as well as the number of seats it offers to dalit women.

Chapter- 2: Representation of Dalit Women in the Indian National Congress:

In order to investigate the hypotheses, there is a need to look at political parties in India. This chapter would look at the Indian National Congress, the traditional party of Dalits which was an umbrella party which was able to co-opt dalit politics in 1940's-1950. The question to ask is whether Congress is an “inclusive” institution in terms of dalit women? What is meant by “representation” and whether

Congress is representative in terms of dalit women's issues? And also it raise important question about representation like who can best represent dalit women's issues? Is it the Brahmin-Bourgeois Congress or an all exclusive caste based party like BSP? Does Congress give tickets to dalit women? Does Congress specifically make policies for Dalit Women and how much budget is exclusively spent on welfare of dalit women? Do they conduct training programmes for local dalit women leaders for their effective participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions? And most importantly, how Congress views Women's Reservation Bill?

Chapter- 3: Representation of Dalit Women in Identity-based parties-

This chapter would look at three dalit parties i.e. BSP in Uttar Pradesh and Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra and the Liberation Panthers in Tamil Nadu to see which party is more "inclusive" in terms of its representation of dalit women? Do they give tickets to dalit women; make policies for welfare of dalit women and also how much budget is spent on them? It would also look at North/South divide in India where North society is marked with "*culture against females*" as opposed to South society which is marked with "*pro-women culture*".

In case, dalit women are represented and are "included" in BSP and Dalit Panthers; do they exercise equal decision-making powers in comparison to other party-officials (males) and are they able to articulate their demands and demand adequate budget for the efficient implementation of welfare policies of dalit women? Or do they remain "rubberstamps" or "proxy-representatives" of dalit women as they remain mute spectators?

This chapter is important in the sense that it will help one to analyse how contemporary dalit politics looks at the question of dalit women and whether dalit politics is liberating for dalit women or not? And also to see which identity is important to them- the caste identity or the gender identity?

Chapter-4: Conclusion-

This chapter would be the concluding remarks on political participation of dalit women in India as political participation is seen as the key to socio-economic development also but the truth is that dalit women are not able to exercise their vote freely; so what about their becoming as "political representatives"? This chapter would look at whether dalit women just remained as "mute spectators"

of deprivation, exploitation etc or whether they have become “active agents of change” and are representing aspirations of millions of dalit women.

CHAPTER-1 INVISIBILITY OF DALIT WOMEN IN POLITICS

In contemporary Indian scenario, the two entanglements which are most nuanced are gender and caste. What particularly under pins the scenario are the spaces of intersection. It is such a dual entanglement of discrimination, disenchantment and subsequent disempowerment that has propelled me to look at the condition of and status of dalit women in caste-ridden Indian society and also the causes for their (in) visibility in Indian politics.

India is a caste ridden society where caste based identity is particularly nuanced so much so that it dominates from cradle of grave. Alternatively thus, it becomes impossible to escape from the atrocities of caste as caste is like a shadow as wherever one goes; the caste identity follows him. Indian society is marked by rigid- hierarchical caste-system which is followed by inequalities in socio-economic and political sphere. Broadly, Indian caste system has fourfold division- Brahmins (the priestly caste), Kshatriyas (the warrior caste), Vaishyas (the merchant caste) and Shudras (the artisan caste). In addition to these divisions, there is one more category of people referred to as *Untouchables* or *Harijans*. Just as they fall outside this typology, same way they live on the outskirts of villages or outside the villages.

Generally, the term dalit is used for ex-untouchables. As caste is depended on the basis of birth; it is believed that Dalits are born in unclean caste and therefore, they are bound to perform ritually polluting work. The term Dalit is referred to those people who are grounded, suppressed, crushed and broken to pieces. Jotiba Phule¹⁷ used the term “dalit” in the 19th century in the context of the oppression faced by the untouchable castes of India.

The focus of this chapter is on the plight of dalit women and the reasons for their marginalisation and their low political participation. There are two views regarding the status and agency of “women”. Chicago School of Indian Studies is of the opinion that women are being acted upon as victims and not as actors. This school looked at women as passive and lacking agency and autonomy while this position has been challenged by Joan Mecher in “The Caste System Upside Down” has argued that the untouchables do not accept the traditional upper-caste interpretations of what’s normal and

¹⁷Jotibha Phule, a Mali (gardener) reformer started Satyashodhak Samaj movement in an attempt to reduce Brahman influence on the lower castes. He opened schools for untouchables and a separate school for women. He used the term dalit for the first time in relation to caste in the term dalitodhar (uplift of the depressed). For details, see Zelliott’s *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*.

proper that they maintain an opposing set of values, that they perceive the system as exploitative and their own position as resulting from powerlessness rather than the workings of Karma.¹⁸

Feminism of the 1970's had developed in difference from Left. There were three differences: three categories- woman, experience and personal politics; which were central to feminist theorisation. The category woman was conceived as collectively, based on their being oppressed by the fact of their womanhood.¹⁹ As a community, in all the castes women are considered to be a "marginalised" category and the seed of this inequality between men and women lies in Hindu sacred texts like Manusmriti, Atharva Vedas, Vishnu Smriti which led to the unequal society where men are perceived to be superior while women as inferior beings. But it would be wrong to call the category of women as "homogenous category" as in different castes, women's experiences and sufferings vary. Like if we see upper caste women, they suffer only on the basis of gender because of the existing patriarchal beliefs and norms as women are generally seen bearing the burdens of honour of their family as well as their community and also because of the entrenched Sanskritisation where upper caste women are seen as "chaste" and "pure"; hence, in order to maintain their chastity, their freedom to move freely is restricted. But as far as dalit women are considered, they are triply exploited²⁰ on the basis of gender due to the existing patriarchy, caste as they belong to low- caste and class as they hail from the most poor, marginalised and oppressed community. Therefore, Ruth Manorama, an active member of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women stated that as Dalit Women are triply exploited; they are a "distinct social group" and cannot be masked under the general categories of "women" or "Dalits" (News Archives).²¹

According to Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal, the women belonging to social grouping of low caste suffer from social exclusion and discrimination due to their caste identity, which rest of the women do not. It is this "exclusion induced deprivation" which differed dalit women from rest of the women.²²

It has always been the case that women's bodies have been and are still being used as tools by the people of different castes to settle scores and bring disgrace to the other community. The trend to settle the scores is by raping, sexually assaulting and abusing the women of the other caste. As per the perception of upper caste people, their women are pure, chaste and dignified while dalit women

¹⁸Gail Omvedt, "The Downtrodden among the Downtrodden: An Interview with A Dalit Agricultural Laborer," *The Labor of Women: Work and Family* 4, no.4 (1979):769.

¹⁹Sharmila Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of "Difference" and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no.44 (1998): WS-40.

²⁰Vivek Kumar, http://www.ambedkartimes.com/vivek_kumar.html (August 25, 2009).

²¹<http://www.ambedkar.org>.

²²Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal, "Dalit women and Political Space: Status and Issues related to their participation," in *Voices for Equity, Minority and Majority in South Asia* (Rindas International Symposium Series 1, 22-23 Jan 2010).

(the lower caste women) are “sexually available” as they work in the fields and as they are out in the *bazaar* (market) as wage labours in industries; they are perceived as “*bazaar*”. As a result, the process of Sanskritisation has penetrated in the dalit society as well. The basic aim is to protect their “own” women while disgracing the “other” women (women of other caste).

This only shows the abuse that dalit women has to go through her entire life in order to earn her living but upper caste women are not an exception to this rule. Public spaces have been segregated where the entry of dalit women has been restricted and transgression of boundaries has often led to punishment. They are still prohibited to use public facilities like water taps, schools, temples, restaurants, hotels etc. There have been cases where the dalit women have been physically abused by the upper caste women while filling water from public taps.²³ Masrey also raised this issue of segmented public spaces. He argued that social relations always have a spatial form.²⁴ In a caste-based society, public spaces have become spaces of contestation and conflict where the already entrenched social structures are contested and new ones are created.

In today’s contemporary society a paradox that is crystal clear is that on one hand, there are powerful women leaders while the parameters that are indicators of gender equality like the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gender Development Index (GDI) are showing no signs of improvement. Although, there is presence of a strong wave in favour of women’s rights and there is a movement also to promote the empowerment of women but the mainstream women’s movement fails to take into consideration the “caste factor” and thus fails to address dalit women’s issues.

Writing on the same note, Cynthia Stephen states that the mainstream Indian women’s movement continues to be led by privileged dominant caste, upper class, urban feminists and the participation of women factory workers, dalit women and urban poor are co-opted to make up the numbers and has not been successful in capturing the imagination of wider society.²⁵ As a result, they felt the need to organise themselves separately to fight against caste-based atrocities, violence against dalit women and work towards political and economic empowerment of Dalit women etc.

The above account shows how dalit women are (mis)treated in the public domain. As far as private domain is concerned, it’s no more different than the public domain as the condition of Dalit women within the dalit community is also miserable as they are mistreated and discriminated by their community people. As we know that the category of Dalit is not a homogenous group; as there are

²³Nandita Sharma, “The status of Dalit Women in India- from Deprivity to Supremacy.” *Lapis Lazuli* 2, no.1 (2012): 1.

²⁴Radhika Govinda, “Re-inventing Dalit Women’s Identity? Dynamics of Social Activism and Electoral Politics in rural North India.” *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no.4 (2008): 430.

²⁵Cynthia Stephen, “Feminism and Dalit women in India,” *countercurrents.org*. November 16, 2009, www.womenutc.com.

various sub-castes and as a result there is disunity among them. In the household also, women vis-a-vis their men lack autonomy and decision-making power while her participation is only visible in the “consumption process”. Men play a very powerful role in the household and are dominant in dalit communities. As far as dalit movement is concerned, they are usually dominated by dalit men and dalit women occupy a very vulnerable/weak position in the movement itself. As they occupy vulnerable positions in the movement and they are kept outside the “decision-making” activities and hardly, any leadership position is given to them; they are further marginalised in the society. Their lower participation in politics must not be seen due to their “passive” role (as they are very active in the movement) and lack of skills but due to the “patriarchal norms” and “systemic discrimination” that is practiced against them to marginalise them. It is the result of systemic discrimination, that despite the fact dalit women have been active in anti-caste, anti-untouchability movement of 1920’s, their stories of sacrifices and heroic deeds have not been recorded in history.

Some may argue that affirmative measures like reservation gives dalit women “the agency” to represent their interests and raise their voice against “injustices” but majority of elected dalit women representatives works as “dummy spectators” and as “rubber-stamps” and most of these elected dalit women representatives belongs to the dominant political class of the village.

As far as the state forces are concerned, they are also part of “systemic discrimination” against dalit women. In India, the irony is that the Constitution has given equal rights to men and women but still women are discriminated and especially, when it’s a dalit women then the discrimination escalates to higher levels. Majority of the cases against dalit women are not even registered by the police machinery and even if some cases are registered, then the lack of proper investigation and the judge’s caste, class and gender biases (as there is no law for the upper caste, powerful and rich), affects the judgement of the case and chances are high that the perpetrators of violence remain unpunished.²⁶

Evidence suggests that there are very less dalit women in Indian politics and this is a very worrisome state. General view regarding political participation is that it’s a representative instrument towards achieving positive policy outcomes for each group.²⁷ As democracy means a system which must account for all its constituents, with women making up roughly half the country’s population, it’s likely that if there will be more women in power, they were more likely to prioritise women’s interests and needs and would not only lead to inclusion of women’s issues on the political agenda

²⁶IDSN International Dalit Solidarity Network Working Globally Against Discrimination based on work and descent. Annual Report 2006. <http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/IDSN>.

²⁷Sabharwal, “Dalit Women and Political Space: Status and Issues related to their participation,” 164.

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but once “critical mass” of women politicians have been reached, it would lead to a genuine representative democracy.

There are different views on the low political participation of dalit women. Some of them are as follows-

Gail Omvedt argues that the obstacles to women’s equal participation in governance in South Asian Countries are embedded in socio-cultural patterns of living and competitive nature of politics.²⁸

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2007 noted its concern over the underrepresentation of Dalits in all levels of government. The Committee stated that “Dalit candidates, especially women, are frequently forcibly prevented from standing for election or, if elected, forced to resign from village councils or other elected bodies or not to exercise their mandate, (and) that many Dalits are not included in electoral rolls or otherwise denied the right to vote...”²⁹

V. Vijayalakshmi in her article “Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Inclusion” argues that in order to know the reasons for dalit women’s low role in political affairs it’s important to understand the levels of inclusion/exclusion from important domains of life space and these four domains are private (household), state (policies), political (political organisations and elective positions) and civil society.³⁰

Based on the above views, we can divide the reasons for low political activity of dalit women in two broad categories. One is “deprivation induced exclusion from politics” like low quality education, patriarchy, double work, multiple responsibilities, sanskritisation etc while the other one relates to “institutional exclusion” like zero gender accountability of political parties, faulty reservation bill, party’s interests in ready material etc.

²⁸Gail Omvedt. “Women in Governance in South Asia,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 44/45 (2005).

²⁹Jayshree Mangubhai, “Obstacles to the effective political participation of Dalit Women.” *Second Forum on Minority Issues*. (Geneva, Nov 12-13, 2009).

³⁰V. Vijayalakshmi, “Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Inclusion,” Working Paper-147, Institute for Social and Economic Change, 2004.

REASONS FOR THE LOW POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF DALIT WOMEN-

DEPRIVATION-INDUCED-EXCLUSION

EDUCATION

As education is viewed as an instrument of social change, individual mobility and social equality for all social groups through social justice and of integration and mainstreaming;³¹ various affirmative measures like free primary schooling, reservation in schools, free uniforms etc were enforced in order to increase the enrolment of S.C and S.T. but despite these measures, the fruits of education could not reach dalit women.

The laws of the Manusmriti have had a devastating effect on the level of education reached by Dalit women.³² As per the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 2000, 75% of dalit girls drop out of primary school despite the Government enforced reservations.³³ The Annual Reports of University Grants Commission for 1999-2000 shows that Dalits in general have very low participation rates in higher education.³⁴ Their low participation rates in education is not because of the lack of intelligence or the lack of will to learn but the reasons are socio-economic in nature like poverty and the discrimination they face at the hands of the upper-caste students and teachers.

According to Thind, the reasons for the low literacy rate among Dalit women are lack of educational resources especially in rural areas, privatization of schools and colleges, extreme poverty because of which they cannot afford the expensive fees for the private schools, the demand for an increase in the Dowry for educated girls and humiliation and bullying by the high caste students and teachers.³⁵

One of the reasons for low participation of dalit girls in education is because of the fact that if there are limited resources then women has less access to these resources as compared to men. As a result, dalit boys are given preference in terms of education, food (leftover food is left for dalit women), health and any other facility.

There is also resistance to send dalit girls to schools, sometimes; the burden of double work on their mothers affects them also as when their parents are working in the fields, dalit girls are imposed with

³¹Chanana Karuna, "Accessing Higher Education: The Dilemma of Schooling Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Contemporary India," *Higher Education* 26, no.1 (1993).

³² Fatima Burnad, "Facing despair: Struggles and Challenges of Dalit Women," *Tamil Nadu Women's Forum*.

³³Government of India, The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 2000.

³⁴Government of India, The Annual Reports of University Grant Commission, 1999-2000.

³⁵G.S.Thind,*Our Indian Sub-Continent Heritage* (Canada: Crosstown Press, 2000).

the duty to take care of the siblings and are also supposed to do domestic chores. Sometimes, distance of schools from home also acts as a catalyst in lower turn out of girls.

Another reason for the high dropout rate among the S.C girls is the irrelevance of the content of the education. As per S.C girls, their interests, world-views are not represented in the curriculum and when they find entry in a prescribed text; they are likely to be depicted in subservient positions or as objects of patronage.³⁶ As a result, S.C girls feel alienated from the curriculum and dropout from school in large numbers.

Literacy rates also points to this difference. In 2001, 41% S.C women in rural areas were literate as compared to 58% for non S.C/S.T women. Limited education reduces employability and consequently, unemployment rates are higher. Unemployment based on current daily status in 2004-2005 was 12.36% for S.C compared with 9% for non S.C/S.T women.³⁷

As education is seen as a key to empowerment as it makes people know their rights and duties and it also helps citizens to become active citizens (contesting elections, participating in decision-making bodies etc) and not remain as passive citizens (just voting according to wishes of their male relatives) and it also inculcates the skills to fight against injustices and contest elections; the reason for the invisibility of dalit women in politics is low quality of education as political parties hesitates to give them tickets as they think that dalit women lack the “comparable capabilities” to be in politics.

PATRIARCHY AND DOUBLE WORK

Dalit women are burdened with “double work” i.e. household work and field work. A dalit woman gets up early morning and finishes her household chores like cooking, fetching water, cleaning the floor, collecting the cow pies, washing clothes etc and then, she works in the fields for an average of 16hrs but she is paid very less while men are paid more. The explanation that is given in order to justify this logic of “unequal wages” is given in terms of “*soft labour*” vs. “*hard labour*”. As per the logic, dalit women are engaged in soft labour (which requires less labour) like winnowing grain from chaff, weeding, picking cotton, taking out seeds, sowing after the rain is over and men are engaged in “hard labour” (which requires more labour) like running the plow, cutting ears of corn, collecting the

³⁶Krishna Kumar, “Educational Experience of Scheduled Castes and Tribes,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 18, no. 36/37 (1983): 1569.

³⁷Sabharwal, “Dalit women and political space: status and issues related to their participation,” 157.

crop, carrying it away, cutting ears of jawar, collecting leftovers for cattle etc.³⁸ Therefore, men are eligible to be paid more as they work harder than women.

As a result of this burden of double work, dalit women hardly get any free time to engage in any type of political activity and in case, they don't pursue field work, their children would starve as the wages they get by working as an agricultural labourer or as an industrial worker are utilised to buy groceries and pay their children's school and tuition fees. There is also gender inequality in terms of the wages spent on the household expenditure like the wages earned by women are bound to be used for fulfilling domestic needs while men's wages can be spend by them in any way they like. Generally, dalit men spend their money in consuming liquor and other drugs. This shows that there are different norms and code of conduct for both dalit men and women and the burden of double work and the sole responsibility of feeding their children restrict their freedom to be politically active as they are occupied all the time in fulfilling their duties and moreover, they know that if one day they do not work in fields they are going to face monetary loss.

In the household, women are involved in consumption activities but not in decision making. Household income in most of the low income households is not pooled, and women's income is spent on the essentials of daily living. Thus, women have limited savings for economic independence and they are responsible for the sustenance of members of the household. Women's labour is subsumed in the household labour and subsistence activities. While it is essential for women to take up hired labour, they do not have the autonomy to participate in political activities.³⁹

Radhika Govindaalso argues that the gendered geography of social and political space in India has traditionally confined women to the home. Rural women are expected to work, fetch water and collect fuel. Such activities would be neglected if a whole day was spent in political activity.⁴⁰ So, they have to make a choice between politically active or managing their household and they chose the latter.

Manuela Ciotti argues differently on the low political activity of dalit women. She analysed the structural and cultural conditions of low caste women's agency in urban North-India. In Western Feminist political theory, the sexual division of labour is considered the primary constraint for

³⁸Omvedt, "Downtrodden among the Downtrodden: An Interview with a Dalit Agricultural Laborer."

³⁹Vijayalakshmi, "Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Participation."

⁴⁰Govinda, "Re-inventing Dalit Women's identity? Dynamics of Social Activism and electoral politics in rural north India."

women's political participation but in present context, it has a secondary role. She further argues that the division of labour is intertwined with and it's also subject to male consent and support for women's activities.⁴¹ As per her findings, it's the "oppressive" male dominated household boundaries rather than the availability of outer space for encouraging women's political activities.

In the Brahmanical social order, caste based division of labour and sexual division of labour are so intermeshed that elevation in caste status is preceded by the withdrawal of women of that caste from production processes outside the private sphere.⁴²

In a patriarchal state, women are disciplined and socialised to be obedient/submissive, fearful, good wives and bearers of healthy sons. In lower castes, working women are viewed as "sexual property" by men of all castes and are subjected to all kinds of violence. It is very interesting to look at Amartya Sen's explanation of the patriarchal nature of South Asian countries in terms of low sex ratio i.e. ratio of women to men. Sen calculated the number of women who could be alive today if such countries had NORMAL RATIOS (equitable to those of Europe and North America or South Asian Countries), that method gave us figures that denotes the meaning of patriarchy for women. In India, it's approximately 40 million; a major proportion of the estimated 100million was the cost of anti-women discrimination for the world.⁴³

On the basis of research conducted on Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, for the majority of Dalit women, the panchayat election process masks strong, caste-based patriarchal control over them and the enjoyment of their rights. Around 85% of Dalit women were pushed into panchayat politics primarily by dominant castes or their husbands, the former often working through the women's husbands. Dominant castes also for the most part sought to directly engineer elections by consensus, thereby making the reservation policy redundant. The primary tool for this, and the most significant factor drawn from this research, was *benamior* proxy politics.⁴⁴

On discussing the interrelationships between caste and patriarchy, Gabriel Dietrich (1992) in her article "Dalit Movements and Women's Movements" points out that caste should be looked at as a

⁴¹ Manuela Ciotti. "The conditions of politics: low caste women's political agency in contemporary North Indian Society," *Feminist Review* 91 (2009).

⁴²Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A critique of "Difference" and towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position," WS-44.

⁴³Omvedt, "Women in Governance in South Asia," 4746.

⁴⁴Mangubhai, Irudayam and Sydenham, "Dalit Women's Right to Political Participation in Rural Panchayat Raj: A study of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu", 3.

marriage circle and endogamy which is related to patriarchal controls over women. Women were and are the “gateways” of the caste system.⁴⁵

Vijayalakshmi argues that low levels of human capital, limits on time and demands for their labour by the household contribute to the disadvantages in political participation. As dalit women have multiple responsibilities of carrying out household and economic activities, the burden on time was greater and therefore, the political role received lower priority as their time was vital for reproductive and subsistence activities. Dalit women did not have the “surplus time” to effectively participate in political activity or carry out their responsibilities as representatives.⁴⁶

VIOLENCE AGAINST DALIT WOMEN

There are multiple layers of violence that pervade their lives. Dalit women endure violence in both the general community and in the family, from state and non state actors of different genders, castes and socio-economic groupings.⁴⁷

Dalit women are subjected to extreme forms of violence in day to day life and it ranges from verbal abuse, naked parading, being forced to drink and eat urine and faeces, branding, pulling out teeth, nails to extreme form of violence like murder.⁴⁸ Rape is also used to threaten dalit women to live in submission and subjugation. Rape of dalit women occurs within and outside their community. Within dalit community, rape is seen a way by which dalit men assert their “manhood” and also compensate for their lack of power in society. The sexual assault on dalit women has been used as a common practice for undermining the manhood of the caste.⁴⁹

There are some caste related practices that makes dalit women more vulnerable and their position in the society is also justified by these social customs and traditions.. These social and religious practices have lead to a high degree of sexual exploitation of S.C women in selected parts of India. Its referred as JoginiorDevadasi system (temple prostitution); it’s a system in which young dalit girls are sold to Hindu organisations and they are referred to as “servants of God” and are sexually exploited by the high caste hindus. When these young girls attain a particular age, they are sold to

⁴⁵ Sharma, “The status of Dalit Women in India: From Depravity to Supremacy,” 2.

⁴⁶ Vijayalakshmi, “Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Inclusion.”

⁴⁷ Aloysius Irudayam S.J., Jayshree P. Mangubhai and Joel G.Lee, “Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India,” *Overview Report of Study in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu/Pondicherry and Uttar Pradesh* (2006).

⁴⁸ <http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/IDSNAAnnualReport2006.pdf>. (September 28, 2009).

⁴⁹ Rege, “Dalit Women Talk Differently: A critique of “Difference” and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position,” WS-43.

urban “kothas” (brothels) and therefore, they spend their remaining life as a “prostitute” and as a result of multiple sexual-intercourses, they are infected with AIDS.

Within the dalit community, dalit husbands often act out their own oppressed position through violence against their wives. In cases, where a dalit husband is concerned, the violence takes place on a strong patriarchal dimension; women are tortured within home for not bringing enough dowry, for not bearing male children (same as upper castes), for being ugly or too beautiful or allegedly unfaithful, for talking back to the husband etc. The social norms and pressures of married life and duties of wives to their husbands ensure that they continue to endure this violence.⁵⁰

As far as electoral violence is concerned, there are two types of violence- Pre-electoral violence and post-electoral violence. In the life of Dalit women, violence starts from the time of filing nominations till the announcement of the election results. This is referred to as pre-election violence but this is not to say that violence ends at announcement of the results. The aim of pre- electoral violence is to weed out potentially independent thinking and acting dalit women from successful nomination⁵¹ while after, they are elected successfully, they still face discrimination at the hands of dominant castes. They are treated differently like they are not allowed to sit on chairs or have tea from utensils used by dominant castes. In order to silence dalit women from actively participating, they are denied information or subjected to “no confidence motions”.

Power politics meant that dominant caste males, and to a lesser extent Dalit males and political parties controlled by dominant castes, were the real authority bearers in the majority of Dalit women headed panchayats. Data on proxy representation reveals that a little less than one-fifth of elected Dalit women functioned as proxies for their husbands and/or male relatives out of a total of 59% proxy representatives, as compared to the one-third of elected women who were proxies for dominant castes and less than one-tenth for others including political parties. Thus the generally accepted assumption that Dalit women are mostly proxies for their husbands, like other caste women, was disproved through this research.⁵²

⁵⁰Aloysius Irudayam S.J., Jayshree P. Mangubhai and Joel G.Lee, “Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India.” *Overview Report of Study in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu/Pondicherry and Uttar Pradesh* (2006), 5.

⁵¹Jayshree Mangubhai, “Obstacles to the effective political participation of Dalit Women.” *Second Forum on Minority Issues*. (Geneva, Nov 12-13, 2009).

⁵²Mangubhai, Irudayam and Sydenham, “Dalit Women’s Right to Political Participation in Rural Panchayat Raj: A study of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.” 6.

The obstructions referred to by the women included: being silenced or ignored; caste and sexually-based abuse; having bribes demanded of her; no confidence motions; denial of information on panchayat activities; harassment, threats and assaults on the women or their family members; etc. Village panchayat President Leela in Madurai district in Tamil Nadu was pushed to contest the 2006 elections as a proxy for the dominant castes. After the elections, they demanded that she submit title deeds to her house and land to them, to ensure that she would remain under their control during her term in office. Further, her panchayat powers were auctioned off to the highest dominant caste bidder. While eventually government officials intervened to arrest those participating in the auction, no further action ensued and Leela continues to be a proxy President for the dominant castes.⁵³

As dalit women are subjected to violence within the dalit community, at the hands of upper-castes also; they are fearful to contest elections as they are fully aware of the consequences of standing for elections and they are aware of the fact that even if they win elections, violence is not going to vanish from their lives but is going to increase and will take new forms.

FEMINISATION OF POVERTY

If we analyse the data in terms of employment, the gender disparities across social groups is evident. According to 2001 census, S.C., S.T., OBC and Muslim comprise close to about three fourths of Indian population. Half of them are women. Most S.C women lack access to income earning assets (lands) and depend mainly on wage labour. In early 2000, only 21% S.C. women were cultivators as compared to 45% of non S.C/S.T women indicating that access to agricultural land is not equal within the category of women. As a result about 49% S.C. women workers worked as agricultural wage labour in rural areas as compared to 17% for non S.C/S.T. Further, a large number of S.C. women are engaged in so called unclean and polluting occupations such as scavenging.⁵⁴

A micro level study (2005) of three villages across Haryana, Gujarat and Orissa undertaken by Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, observed significant inter-social group difference in female unemployment. Higher caste females managed to get much higher employment in nonfarm sector compared to female from S.C groups. Example, the yearly employment for this group varies from a minimum of 148days for S.C as compared to 290 days for upper castes women.⁵⁵

⁵³Ibid, 7.

⁵⁴Sabharwal, "Dalit women and political space : status and issues related to their participation," 157.

⁵⁵Ibid., 159.

Haritas's findings on women councillors in urban India revealed that quotas for women's representation at the local level have not resulted in equitable access for women from all groups. Evidence of the higher poverty levels and marginalisation of certain groups highlights some of the obstacles that women face. India is witnessing high rates of feminisation of poverty and as per the Asian Development Bank; women and children account for 73% for those below the poverty line; while the ratio of female to males in India is 933:1000. Poverty is experienced differently by women and men and other aspects of identity also play a key role. (Sweetman 2002) While 22.7 per cent of India's population suffers poverty (2004-05), higher poverty rates prevail among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who have the highest poverty rate of 35 per cent, and Muslims who come second with 31 per cent. 42.35 per cent of people from Scheduled Castes in urban areas live in poverty, as compared with 23.91 per cent for other categories (in this context, other categories include other backward Hindu castes, and Muslims who fall within the OBC category). Muslims also suffer higher poverty rates in urban areas: 38.4 per cent are living in poverty, which is the highest rate of all groups, followed closely by Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes at 36.4 per cent, as against the national average of 22.8 per cent (Sachar 2001, 157).⁵⁶

SANSKRITIZATION

Violence, suffering, subjugation etc. are all considered as a part and parcel of a women's life. But one important difference between the lives of dalit women and upper caste women is that dalit women relatively have more freedom in terms of social mobility. Majority of dalit women work in the agricultural field and their movement is not restricted but this freedom can also be seen in terms of "economic necessity" as dalit men's earnings are low and not sufficient to fulfil the domestic needs while Sanskritisation was very much present in upper caste communities. Sanskritisation is a dominant model by which ideals and beliefs of Brahmanic tradition are practiced by the upper castes which restricted their women's freedom in the public domain and were restricted to the private domain (house).

But with time, Sanskritisation has penetrated in to the dalit community and as a result, Brahmanic practices are imposed on dalit women and their movement in the public domain has become restricted. Consequently, the alien principle of "Sanskritisation" has become a part of the lives of dalits which has acted as a catalyst in restricting dalit women's freedom in the public domain to a

⁵⁶Kaveri Haritas, "Poverty and Marginalisation:Challenges to poor women's leadership in urban India," *Gender and Development* 16, no.3 (2008): 462.

large extent. As politics is seen as a public domain, dalit women are controlled by these sanskritic practices from actively participating in politics.

Srinivas (1962, 1977) pointed out that the consequence of Sanskritisation among lower castes, particularly dalits, has neutralised liberal spaces within the household and marriage, and made gender relations rigid. There are restrictions imposed on dalit women's social mobility and private space has become more *proper* and *ritually* correct as seen by the dominant castes for dalit women, moving away from the earlier less restrictive practices, resulting in their subordination within the household. This has consequences for women's political participation because the emphasis on sanskritised restrained them from actively participating in public roles.⁵⁷

INSTITUTIONAL EXCLUSION

MINIMAL PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Our history is full of stories of heroic deeds of freedom fighters but there is hardly anything written on dalit women's struggles which is a clear indication of the fact that their voices, opinions, interests, perspectives have been marginalised in dalit movements as well as in upper-caste-class dominated women's movements. In dalit movements, their interests remain peripheral to the caste issues while in women's movement, their issues are not addressed and hence, their grievances remain unattended. Dalit-bahujan activists and others have criticised the women's movement for the lack of representation of women from marginalised communities and for the lack of its engagement with the caste identity of women.⁵⁸ As the women's movement has been dominated by middle class, urban class and caste hindu women, it has resulted in their perspectives dominating the movement often at the cost of women from marginalised communities and as a result, the experiences of high caste, urban educated, middle class came to be universalised as "women's experience".

Therefore, Dalit women's movements has explored the emergence of dalit-bahujan women as a politically collectivity that called for separate organisation and theorisation from both an elite feminist movement and from what has become a masculinist dalit movement.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Vijayalakshmi, "Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Inclusion," 4.

⁵⁸ Govinda, "The Politics of the Marginalised: Dalits and Women's Activism in India," *Gender and Development* 14, no.2 (2006): 183.

⁵⁹ Anupama Rao, "World Of Dalit Women: Gender and Caste by Anupama Rao Review by Rachel Shirman," *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no.50 (2004):5305-5306.

Gopal Guru also locates the need of Dalit women to talk differently in a discourse of descent against the middle class women's movements, by the dalit men and the moral economy of the peasant movements. It's a note of descent against their exclusion from both political and cultural arena. It is further underlined that social location determines the perception of reality and therefore representation of dalit women's issues by non dalit women was less valid and less authentic but to privileged knowledge claims on the basis of dalit experience or claims of authenticity may lead to narrow identity politics and this may limit the emancipator potential of the dalit women's organisations and also their epistemological standpoints.⁶⁰

His piece also drew attention to the formation of a dalit group known as the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW). The NFDW symbolised emerging critiques by dalit and lower caste women, who had problems with Indian feminists for being silent on the question of caste inequality and this was "politics of difference" from mainstream Indian feminism. This difference was essential for understanding the specificity of dalit women's subjugation, characterised by their experience of two distinct, if overlapping, patriarchal structures: a brahmanical form of patriarchy that deeply stigmatised dalit women because of their caste status as well as the more intimate forms of control by dalit men over the sexual and economic labour of their women. Even while organisations such as NFDW pressed for the inclusion of dalit women's concerns as properly feminist ones, they also challenged the reproduction of patriarchal norms within dalit communities. Thus, Dalit-Bahujan feminists critiqued both anti-caste and feminist movements for their particular forms of exclusion.⁶¹

Sharmila Rege opines that dalit women's organisations in the 1990's threw up several crucial theoretical and political challenges as they underlined the Brahmanism of the feminist movement and the patriarchal practices of dalit politics.⁶² As a result, the dalit women movements remain invisible and the invisibility of this lineage has led scholars to conceive the recent autonomous assertions by dalit women as "a different voice". The early 1990's saw the assertion of autonomous dalit women's organisations at both regional and national levels and this separate assertion by dalit women's organisations comes to be accepted as one more standpoint and within such framework of "difference"; issues of caste becomes the sole responsibility of the dalit women's organisation.

The problem with the dalit movement is that it has not been able to offer space to dalit women who have remained outside the movement's fold.

⁶⁰Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently : A Critique of "Difference" and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position." WS-44.

⁶¹Anupama Rao, "Sexuality and the Family Form," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40. no.8 (2005). 717.

⁶²Ibid.

One of the reasons for dalit women for not being able to pursue their voices and grievances is lack of the organisational strength because the category dalit is not a homogenous group as there are various sub-castes. In Radhika Govinda terms, there is no feeling of “collective identity” and “ownership”. Dalit women are still struggling to have its own *pehchaan*.

According to Vijayalakshmi, an important aspect of the marginalisation of dalit women in citizenship and political participation is their low participation in civil society associations. The bourgeois nature of the women’s movements is not adequately prepared to address issues of dalit women, their disadvantages and their marginality leading to the alienation of dalit women from the women’s movement and also the internal problems among dalits, at different levels, in organising dalit groups and expressing group identity, which are of greater concern in consolidating their position in the civil society. As far as the dalit movement is concerned, organisationally it continues to be andocentric. The participation of women in the activities and in the decision making bodies of the dalit organisations is marginal.⁶³

The above account shows how dalit women have been sidelined by elitist women’s movement and patriarchal dalit movement and as a result, dalit women have no platform to raise their issues and lack of organisational skills also makes them vulnerable to act as an important political lobby or contest elections.

RESERVATION BILL

There are some provisions given to Dalit women as they belong to both categories recognised as disadvantaged, namely S.C’s & women. In addition to legal safeguards against discrimination, equal access and participation in politics and governance is ensured through reservation of some seats in Parliament and state legislature for S.C’s and S.T’s and in the elected bodies of local government, seats are reserved for women. But at National level, reservation in political participation is confined to the S.C. social group and not separately for dalit women.

With the introduction of reservation bill for dalit women in politics, the scenario has changed as dalit women workers have begun to join politics. Clearly, there is a shift from activism to politics. They are using their caste-identity to make use of the Panchayati Raj Act, by which one third of seats in elected bodies are reserved for women and the marginalised community. Their identity as village-level activists makes it possible for them to gain the support of the villagers. Reservation is not helping womenfolk at all as dalit women after being elected use their caste identity alongside their

⁶³Vijayalakshmi, “Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Participation.”

identity as village level activists to further their interests beyond the realm of women activism. Thus, the argument made against quotas is that quotas for dalit women will segregate them from the mainstream and will further entrench them in their “caste” identity is becoming “true”.⁶⁴

It is true that 73rd Amendment had raised hopes that there will be rise in the number of women in local decision making bodies and consequently, women will become more politically active but the impact of this measure on women participation has been differential. Different case studies revealed different opinions on the effective participation of women in politics. Sudha Pai very rightly argued that in societies (states) where the social status of women has traditionally been better and level of literacy, participation in the work force and even in local politics higher; women have been able to take benefit of the reservations and have entered politics in large numbers e.g. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. On the other hand, in states, where women positions in the family and society and participation in public affair has traditionally been low; the reservation measure has not produced much change. (Uttar Pradesh) Her findings show that reservation alone cannot change the status of women in the family and society and thereby, ensured the participation in the local bodies. All the Pradhanis belonged to the better-off families in the village; they do not work outside the home. They had agreed to stand for election due to family pressure and decision of their community. The reservation had forced them to do so as there was competition among the dalit families for the post of Pradhan. Regarding panchayat matters, they preferred their ignorance and advised one to discuss with their husbands/ male relatives. They are illiterates and only able to put their signatures on official papers. All the Pradhanis looked upon the panchayat as a government organization run by officials and particularly by the villagers was seen as unnecessary. They do not attend meetings and when they attend, they were accompanied by their sons or husbands. While men, due to their superior social position, literacy and knowledge of local affairs played a dominating role, women, inspite of provision of reservation are marginalized to play a minimal role.

Sudha Pai further argues that the 73rd Amendment which gives women 33% of the seats at all levels of Panchayat system has been widely perceived as a crucial step for empowering women but field study denotes that unless reservations are accompanied by female literacy, independent voting rights and change in the status of family and society, women are going to remain as namesake representative of the male members of their household.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Govinda, “The Politics of the Marginalised: Dalits and Women’s Activism in India.”

⁶⁵ Sudha Pai, “Pradhanis in New Panchayats- Field Notes from Meerut District,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no.18 (1998).

Another field study on “other” Dalit women in North India by Ciotti, revealed that elected dalit women officials who have experienced upward mobility and a degree of self-realisation have taken place in conjunction with their husbands white collar employment and hence, they can be viewed as long term and unintended effects of affirmative action.

A Study conducted by Pritam Singh and J.K.Pundir throws light on the fact that politics has been a male dominated domain and if there are women legislators, they belong to well to do families. The study was conducted to analyse the background, role and involvement of women in politics in Uttar Pradesh from first election 1952 to 1956. The findings revealed that majority of women legislators had a political family background, are educated and economically well to do but as their numbers have been low, their participation in discussions and assembly proceedings have been low.⁶⁶

Kaveri Haritas examines the women’s quota at the local governance level in urban India and for this; she uses several case studies of women councillors to question the evidently low numbers of poor and marginalised women amongst them. It examines the issues of caste, class, gender and religion that have a direct impact on the access of poor women to quotas reserved for them at the local government level. Her objective has been to show the specific ways in which women are constrained at the pre-election stage resulting in an elite capture of the women’s quota in India.

One of the case studies she referred was Tawa Lama- Rewal 2001, which studied women municipal commissioners in Calcutta. The study revealed that Muslims constitute 7.5% of the total number of women councillors. Among the Hindu women interviewed, 87.5% belonged to higher castes, while the remaining 12.5% were Scheduled Castes.

Another case study she referred was Manuela Ciotti (2006) which studied dalit women councillors, analysing their agency and empowerment in building a political career for themselves. The study showed dalit women to be very politically active, but also noted the relative affluence of the successful women councillors. The author states that these women’s political activity was not associated with change in the sexual division of labour in their families- the women themselves assisted by other women or domestic help continued to do household chores.⁶⁷

All the above case studies revealed a general trend that dalit women in politics lack “agency” and possess no “negotiation skills” and therefore, they are not in defiance of their male family members. Mostly, they identify with their political views and act as per their wishes. Ciotti observed how the

⁶⁶Pritam Singh and J.K. Pundir, “Women’s Legislators in U.P- Background, Emergence and Role.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no.10 (2002).

⁶⁷Haritas, “Poverty and Marginalisation: Challenges to poor women’s leadership in urban India”.

husband and other male relatives of dalit women were often not only responsible for women's release into public life but also a source of advice, encouragement and financial support for women's political activities. Having a wife working in a party or elected to a municipal corporation is surely an asset in terms of power for husbands and relatives.⁶⁸

One of the popular trends in politics is the "biwi-beti brigade", by which the women councillors are "passively accommodated" into politics. As per this trend, women inherit the political seats of their husbands and fathers but this easy access to political power is not equally available to dalit women but this is not to deny the fact that this trend is completely missing when it comes to dalit women. Examples of this "biwi-beti brigade" are Mayawati, a dalit woman leader of B.S.P who came to power in Uttar Pradesh four times and the reason for her coming to power and reaching to such a high position goes to her friend and political guru Kanshi Ram and our dalit woman Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar is also a product of this "biwi-beti brigade".

Barry et al (2004) very rightly argues that women had entered politics at a later date than the male counterparts, and that they were more likely to have been asked to stand for office if they had no responsibility for dependents at home, thus explaining the weaker assimilation of party political values amongst women.⁶⁹

Engineering elections by propping up dalit women as proxy candidates has become a popular trend. Dominant castes use their caste-class power to exploit these women's vulnerabilities. Another method of electoral engineering is through determining consensus candidates under the guise of tradition or community harmony. In some states such as Gujarat, this is further legitimised by the State itself granting monetary rewards for local governments which forego the election process in favour of adopting consensus candidates.⁷⁰

Vijayalakshmi argues that dalit women in local government provide insights into the failure of the process of inclusion- the sites of marginalisation and subordination-as well as how they dealt with such situations in the political space.⁷¹

Looking at all the case studies (all studied the impact of reservation bill on dalit women's inclusion in politics) reveals one important point that still dalit women are excluded from politics and have no say in the public domain and are still in the in (visible) category.

⁶⁸Ciotti, "The conditions of politics: low caste women's political agency in contemporary North Indian Society."

⁶⁹Haritas, "Poverty and Marginalisation: Challenges to poor women's leadership in urban – India," 461.

⁷⁰Jayshree Mangubhai, "Obstacles to the effective political participation of Dalit Women." *Second Forum on Minority Issues*. (Geneva, Nov 12-13, 2009).

⁷¹Vijayalakshmi, "Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Inclusion."

PARTY'S INTEREST IN READY MATERIAL

One of the reasons for the low political participation of dalit women is the party's interest in recruiting "ready material". By ready material, I mean the literate dalit men who are active politically and can contribute to party's progress while dalit women who are mostly illiterate and politically passive are not offered any space to contest elections or hold important leadership positions. The party requires the support of dalit women as far as they can make up the numbers and works as "vote banks" but they are hardly given leadership positions.

Women in slums revealed that while poor women support political candidates by distributing leaflets and putting up posters, sometimes in exchange for pay, they do not campaign to be elected themselves. Poor women identify NGO's or political representation to address issues of access to basic urban amenities, without considering their own political activity as a possible solution.⁷²

If we look at a dalit party like Bahujan Samaj Party, despite the fact that it's party head is a dalit woman Mayawati, the party still doesn't have any dalit women leader, it doesn't even have a women's wing; dalit women are co-opted to make up the numbers but nothing important has been done so far to improve its image as a anti-dalit women party. If this is the case with a dalit party headed by a dalit woman leader; what can we expect from a non-dalit party?

COMPETITIVE NATURE OF POLITICS

Another obstacle to dalit women's passive political participation is the competitive nature of politics which offers no space for illiterate, politically passive dalit women. And in case they enter in politics they can't sustain the competition; as dalit women are seen as lacking "comparable capabilities" due to the lack of quality education. But the "comparable capability" argument is an attempt to hide the gender inequality that these politicians practice. The fact is that in a caste ridden traditional society, politics is seen as a male domain and therefore, they hesitate to share this space with other women and moreover, politics is seen as a lucrative source of income and power which men attempt control.

ZERO GENDER ACCOUNTABILITY

Data for India suggests that the reluctance of political parties to put up women's candidates is a crucial factor in barring women from a role in governance. A study of the 2004 parliamentary elections by Rajeshwari Deshpande shows that a major factor in women's low winning percentage

⁷²Haritas, "Poverty and Marginalisation: Challenges to poor women's leadership in urban India."

was at the political party level: the “success rate” of the women who contested was 12.4% compared to 9.8% for men.⁷³

Except in local government where there is sub-quota for women belonging to Scheduled Castes, dalit women are few in number in parliament and in the state legislatures. There is indifference towards supporting women (dalit or non-dalit) for electoral positions in most political parties. The opposition even to the tabling of the Women’s Reservation Bill in parliament is a pointer to the resistance to including women in electoral politics. Looking at the low number of dalit women in parties it’s very evident that gender accountability is not on the agenda of political parties including the major national parties. Dalit women occupy very little space within the political parties both at the national and regional levels. As far as dalit parties are concerned, they are also no more different.⁷⁴ All the above reasons have contributed to the invisibility of Dalit women in politics.

⁷³Omvedt, “Women in Governance in South Asia.” 4747.

⁷⁴Vijayalakshmi. “Citizenship, Differences and Identity: Dalit Women and Political Inclusion.”

Table I

PROPORTIONS OF FEMALE AND MALE CANDIDATES OF ALL POLITICAL PARTIES

Table-1 Proportions of Male and Female Candidates of All Political Parties

Election Year	percentage of all candidates who were men(excluding all independents)	Percentage of all candidates who were women (excluding all independents)	Percentage of Elected candidates who were men (excluding all independents)	Percentage of Elected candidates who were Women (excluding all independents)	Percentage of all candidates who were elected (excluding all independents)	Percentage of the women candidates who were elected(excluding all independents)	Percentage of male candidates who were elected(excluding all independents)	Percentage of independent candidates who were women
1984	95.5	4.5	91.8	8.2	33.5	61.8	32.2	2.5
1989	95.3	4.7	94.4	5.6	21.1	25.0	20.9	2.2
1991	95.1	4.9	92.1	7.9	16.9	27.2	16.4	2.8
1996	94.7	5.3	92.5	7.5	16.1	22.9	15.7	4.0
1998	93.3	6.9	92.2	7.8	18.9	21.3	18.8	4.0
1999	92.4	7.6	91.1	8.9	19.9	23.3	19.6	4.0
2004	92.2	7.8	91.6	8.4	17.6	18.9	17.5	4.9

Source: Niraja Gopal Jayal and Prathap Bhanu Mehta (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 172.

SOURCE- Niraja Gopal Jayal and Prathap Bhanu Mehta (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2010, pg-172.

The above table clearly shows that women are marginalised within the party structure and political parties hesitate to give them tickets. Political parties argue that women lack “comparable capabilities” to be in politics but the figure above clearly indicates that women are more likely to be elected than men and have more chances to win. This shows that parties are not interested in women candidates and this is the main reason for the underrepresentation of women in politics as they do not want to share the political power with women and wants to maintain male’s hegemony in politics.

To conclude, one could say that gender accountability is not on the agenda of political parties and this is one of the reasons for the low political participation of women in politics.

Table II

REPRESENTATION OF DALIT WOMEN IN INDIAN PARLIAMENT

From 1st to 15th Lok Sabha

Lok Sabha elections (yr)	Total number of seats	Number of total Women Mmembers	Number of Dalit Women	Percentage Of Women	Percentage Of Dalit Women
1952	489	24	6	4.91	1.23
1957	494	24	6	4.86	1.21
1962	494	36	6	7.29	1.21
1967	520	32	6	6.15	1.15
1971	521	27	8	5.18	1.54
1977	544	21	3	3.86	0.55
1980	544	32	7	5.88	1.29
1984	544	45	7	8.27	1.29
1989	529	28	5	5.29	0.95
1991	509	42	10	8.25	1.96
1996	541	41	14	7.58	2.59
1998	545	44	14	8.07	2.57
1999	543	52	12	9.58	2.21
2004	543	52	12	9.58	2.21
2009	543	60	17	11.05	3.13
Total	7903	560	133	7.08	1.68

SOURCE: Who's who- National Portal of India.

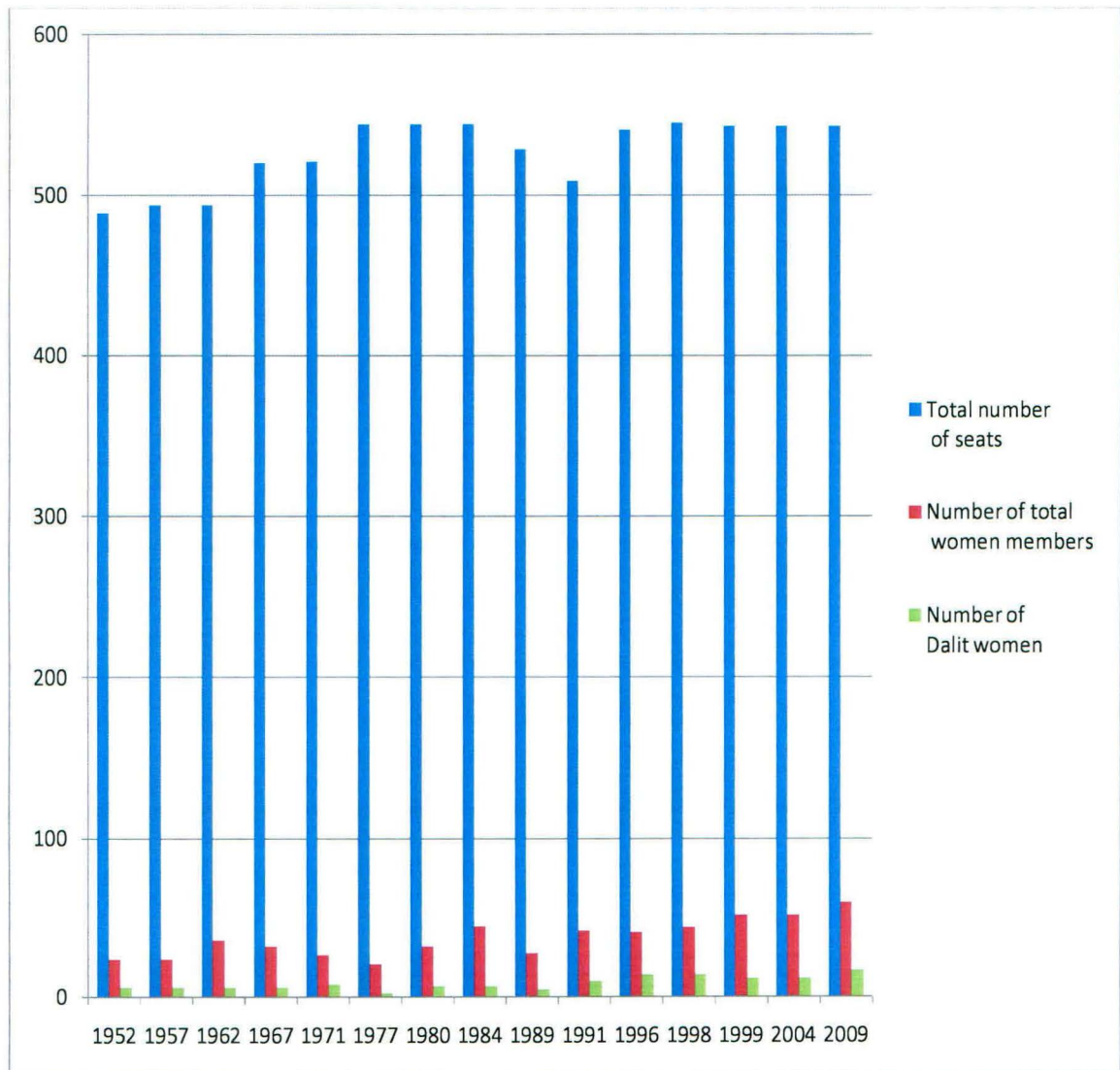
NOTE: It must be noted that all Dalit women have contested on reserved seats.

The table above indicates the representation of dalit women in National Parliament from first to fifteenth Lok Sabha elections from 1952 to 2009. It's evident from the data that there is a huge

difference among total number of seats, total number of women members and number of dalit women. In a Patriarchal set-up where politics is seen as men's forte and women's position seems to be confined to four walls of house; representation of women in Parliament testifies the fact that women have a negligible position in society which is the same when it comes to Parliament. And what is even more shocking is the representation of dalit women in Parliament; which is even lesser as compared to women. This shows that dalit women are even more disadvantaged than women members and have a low representation in Parliament. And another conclusion is that all dalit women have won on reserved seats which show that dalit women are restricted to contest elections only from reserved constituencies.

Table III

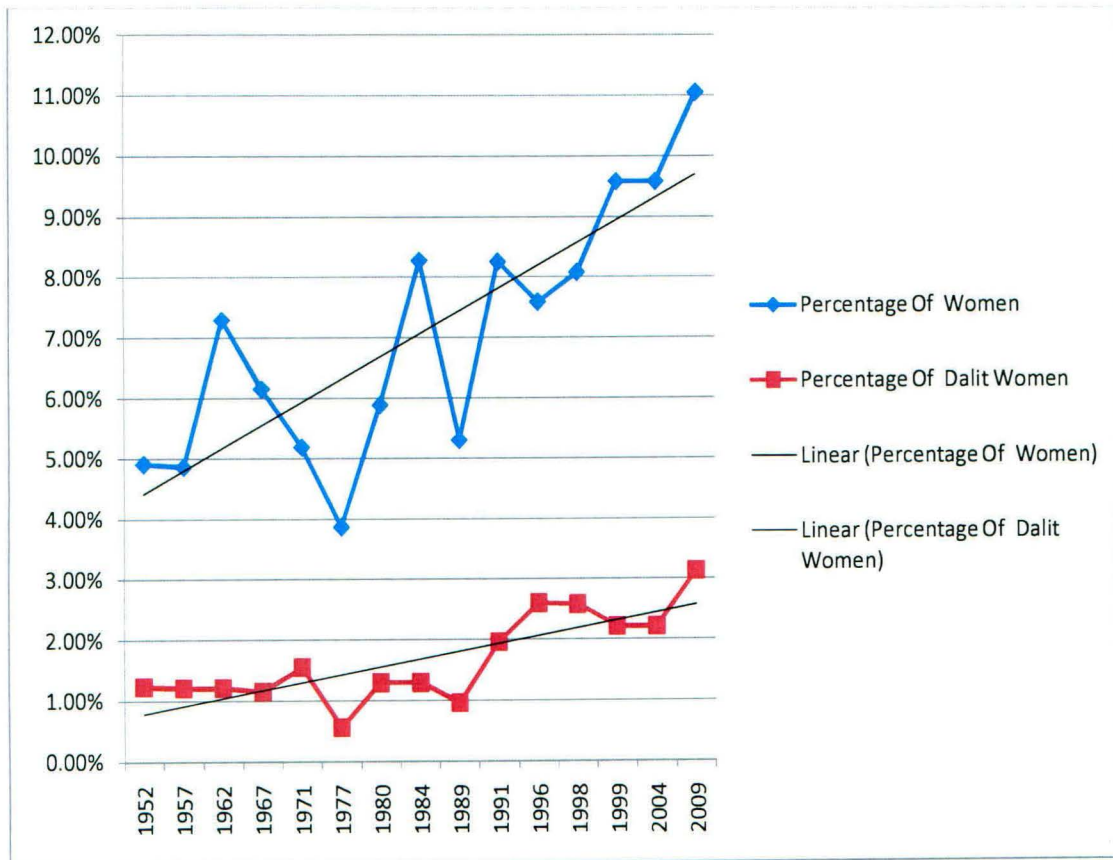
GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF ABOVE DATA TO SHOW THE INVISIBILITY OF DALIT WOMEN IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS



In above graph, it can be clearly seen that the green tab (i.e. no of dalit women) is not even visible, which clearly shows the very low representation of dalit women in the Lok sabha elections. This indicates the fact that the dalit women are completely missing from Parliament. Although the total number of women members is low but in comparison to dalit women; they still have a strong presence in Parliament.

Table IV

**COMPARISON BETWEEN WOMEN AND THE DALIT WOMEN IN
LOK SABHA ELECTIONS**



The above figure shows the comparative percentage of total number of women and dalit women in Lok Sabha from first Lok Sabha elections to fifteenth Lok Sabha elections (1952 to 2009). The graph clearly shows that there are more women members from upper-castes than dalit women in Parliament. In both the cases, there has been rise in their percentages but in the case of women members; the rise has been more visible but the rise in case of dalit women is very slow. In 1952, the women member's percentage was 4.91% and it has risen to 11.05% in 2009 elections while in the case of dalit women members, the percentage has increased from 1.23% to 3.13% .

CONCLUSION

India is a 'representative democracy' which requires that all those who are subject to its policy should have a say in the making of its policies but the reality is far different from this as our representative democracy is not accountable to its minorities. As far as dalit women are concerned; they are marginalised in socio-economic spheres like low level of education, poverty, the burden of double work, patriarchal structures, sanskritised practices and as they are at a disadvantaged position; state actors also use their "vulnerabilities" to perpetuate their marginalisation and exclusion from the public domain. They are kept outside the political space. So, the logic is simple; the discrimination and marginalisation that these dalit women face have multiple layers and the only motive of this discrimination is to make dalit women even more vulnerable.

The only practical solution to include dalit women in politics was seen to be "political reservations" as it was argued that the question of representation is very important as to who can best represent minorities' interests and as dalit women are triply discriminated on the basis of caste-class and gender⁷⁵ identity and they form a "distinct social category"; therefore, it was considered necessary that reservations for dalit women is an adequate measure for their effective participation in politics as reservations were viewed with the view that they have the potential to enhance a group's influence on policy making and evidence shows that minorities have used this influence to their advantage and have been able to have a say in the policy making and financial allocation.

But as far as dalit women are concerned; they have not been able to organise themselves and assert themselves in the political domain. There are many reasons for their vulnerable condition like low level of education, lack of political negotiation skills, poverty, lack of economic stability, burden of double work etc and as a result, they are dependent on the families support, consent of their husbands/fathers and families political contacts to contest elections but as they lack "agency", "independence to act" and "negotiation skills"; they are challenged and overpowered by their men and upper castes people.

The impact of reservation has been positive for dalit women as many of them are contesting elections and coming to power but when it comes to impact the policy making process; they are a way behind.

Thus, it's clear that both the forces i.e. deprivation- induced -exclusion and institutional exclusion walk hand in hand to perpetuate the marginalisation, subordination and exclusion of dalit women in the public domain.

⁷⁵Vivek-Kumar. http://www.ambedkartimes.com/vivek_kumar.html (accessed Aug 25. 2009).

This being the theoretical background; next chapters will be empirical in its approach. The subsequent chapters will look at the political parties like the Indian National Congress (the traditional party for dalits), BSP and the Liberation Panthers (dalit panthers) to see which identity gender or caste is important to them and whether they offer space to dalit women or not?

CHAPTER-2 REPRESENTATION OF DALIT WOMEN IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

In India, women were given equal political rights like the right to vote and the right to participate equally in politics at par with men. Indian women were given equal political rights without much struggle/ fight and much earlier than most western countries. This shows that there is a strong and overwhelming sentiment in favour of active women in politics and this sentiment have not been new but despite the fact, there have been very less active women leaders and the situation is still the same. And especially, when it comes to dalit women in politics; the numbers are really low.

The Indian National Congress, popularly known as Congress was founded in the year 1885 by the members of the occultist movement and Theosophical society - Allan Octavian Hume, Dadabhai Naoroji, Dinshaw Wacha, Womesh Chandra Banerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Manmohan Ghose, M.G. Ranade and William Wedderburn.⁷⁶ Founded in 1885, it was formed with the objective of attaining independence and Congress as a movement played a pivotal role in the Indian National Movement and helped the country to gain independence. After India got independence in 1947; it became the national dominant political party led by the Nehru- Gandhi family. The party remained in power for 30 continuous years after independence in 1947 and its first taste of electoral defeat at the national level was in 1977.

If we look at the history of Congress; we can divide it into two categories: - Pre - Independence period and Post- Independence period. In both the periods, the Indian National Congress played different but important roles. In the Pre-independence period (1885-1947), the Congress (as a movement) was at the forefront of the struggle for independence and was instrumental in the whole of India while in the post- independent phase (1947-till today); the Congress (as a Party) has enjoyed a prominent place in Indian politics and ruled the country independently for a very long time.

This chapter looks at the pre and post-independent phase of Indian National Congress and the question it tries to answer is whether it offers space to dalit women or not as it's considered as the umbrella party as well as the traditional party of dalits. In the process, the chapter would also look at how its image as a "catch-all party" has changed into a "catch none party".

⁷⁶http://www.Indian_national_congress.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE PHASE

BRITISH RULE AND THE CONDITION OF WOMEN

Looking at the representation of women in legislature; we found that women were first represented in legislatures in the year 1920.⁷⁷ Before independence, when Britishers were ruling India; at that time when Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, its role was to throw the enemy's out. So, the responsibility was little less on the Congress as it was a movement and was not accountable in any way to represent its masses but this is not to assume that the native Indians were ignorant and unaware of their rights.

Even women understood the overwhelming sentiment that the Britishers are the "common enemy". As Forbes notes (1982: 529) women rejected the label of "feminist" for fear of being condemned as unpatriotic; the enemy was not their male counterparts but foreign domination. While the nationalist leader M. K. Gandhi supported the notion of female suffrage, he emphasised the need for unity and solidarity against the British Raj (Forbes, 1998: 101).⁷⁸

Under British rule, there was a strong demand in favour of representative government from the side of native Indians as they strongly felt alienated from the British run government and its institutions. The agitation raised the question of representation as Indians felt that British run government and institutions are exclusive in nature and fails to represent the interests of the Indians. So, therefore they demanded that there should be provisions made to include them in the state apparatus so their people (representatives) represent them and they feel a part of the state machinery. (In recent times, the question of representation has become a topic of prime importance. This chapter is also debating the same question as who could best represent dalit women's interests. Is Indian National Congress, an umbrella party and traditional party of dalits can represent dalit women's interests or an exclusive ethnic party like BSP can best represent dalit women's interests?)

As a result of the strong agitation by Indians and on their demand that they should have representatives in the state apparatus; the British authorities established a committee under the chairmanship of Montague Chelmsford in the year 1919 to work out a proposal for constitutional reforms towards the inclusion of some Indians in government.⁷⁹ The committee was formed with the sole aim of making the British institutions more inclusive as well as more representative. The

⁷⁷Madhu Kishwar, "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no.43 (1996): 2867.

⁷⁸Carole Spary, "Female Political Leadership in India," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45, no.3 (2007): 259.

⁷⁹Kishwar, "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas."

committee decided to listen to various groups to see their cases for representation. Before the committee many groups presented their cases for representation.

There were variety of groups presenting their cases and among them was an all women group headed by Sarojini Naidu and Margaret. The All women group demanded that the women must be granted the same rights of representation in legislature as men. The British government thought that the demand is too forward for a traditional country like India whereas in western countries, women are still not given the right to vote. The British government acted diplomatically and didn't reject the demand as they didn't want to take the responsibility as well as the burden of rejecting the demand for women's empowerment through equal political rights. They left it to the individual provincial legislatures to grant or to refuse the franchise to women. Their argument was that as they are not well aware of Indian customs; it's best that the decision to extend franchise to women must be left to the respective provincial legislatures. They must have assumed as Indian society is so backward and most of the customs are anti-women; they would never accept this forward idea of equal political rights for women.⁸⁰

But their assumption was totally baseless; in contrast Indian provincial legislatures voted in favour of women's equal political rights and that too in the absence of any mass-based women's suffrage movement in India. The decision of Indian Provincial Legislatures to grant equal political rights to women was shocking for the British government. In the Karachi session of 1931 of the Indian National Congress; it took the historic decision committing itself to the political equality of women, regardless of their status and qualifications.⁸¹

This proposal met virtually no opposition. Consequently, women were granted equal political rights but the question that remains unanswered is why the granting of equal political rights has not resulted in more active women leaders? It was despite the fact that women participated actively in large numbers in the freedom struggle and showcased their strength that they can compete well in the public arena.

⁸⁰“Working towards solution”. Manushi Forum for women's rights and democratic reforms. http://www.manushi.in/articles_manushi.

⁸¹Kishwar, “Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas,” 2868.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

When we talk of women's empowerment or their role/ participation in the public arena; it becomes inevitable to talk about Mahatma Gandhi. He was the one who played a crucial role in encouraging the womenfolk to take part in the freedom struggle in large numbers and made the atmosphere also comfortable for them so that they do not face any obstacles while working for the freedom's struggle. He made it very clear that women's equality and empowerment is an important part and parcel of the freedom movement. He used non-violent methods like Satyagraha as the mode of struggle in the Indian Independence movement. As the movement was peaceful and non-violent in nature; the active participation of women was increased. This galvanised huge numbers of women into action. He made use of soft non-violent methods in order to feminise the movement so that the women could participate equally with men and they don't feel aloof from the programmes of actions undertaken to fight for the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi had firm faith in non-violent methods and he was sure that participation of women in Indian National Movement would humanise it and save it from destructive tendencies. It is significant that all of Bapu's symbols of struggle and protest were from the feminine realm. Spinning, for instance, has traditionally been a woman's activity. By exhorting men to spin he tried to inculcate feminine virtues in them. Similarly, picketing liquor shops related to the evil effect of liquor on women and the household. By picking on salt as a symbol of a countrywide Satyagraha, he brought the movement into every home and kitchen.

But despite women taking active part in the freedom struggle; there are very less active women leaders in politics. This is not to say that there hasn't been any active women leader. There have been some prominent women leaders like Annie Besant became Congress Party president as early as in 1919 while Sarojini Naidu was Gandhi's choice for President of the Congress party as early in 1925 and then, women's participation in politics enhanced dramatically in the 1930s and 1940s but soon after independence, there was a major decline in women's involvement in politics. Especially during Nehruvian era, there was massive decline in active participation of women in politics.⁸²

Carole Spary argues that women were welcome to join the resistance to British colonial rule, but their political activity was encouraged only insofar as to support the traditional gender hierarchy within Indian society. Generally, as long as their political activity supplemented but did not sacrifice their traditional duties as wives, daughters and sisters, their political activism was encouraged, although several male supporters backed women's franchise.⁸³

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Spary, "Female Political Leadership in India," 258.

The main cause for the marginalisation of women in politics is attributed to Gandhian legacy. It is true that Gandhi was the one who on the one hand, encouraged women to come out of kitchen and participate in the national movement at par with men but on the other hand, he didn't encourage women to fight elections and participate in active politics. In a way, he restricted women's role to activism, as selfless devoted social workers to work selflessly for cleansing the society of evils. He also wanted women to cleanse politics, to feminise it by bringing in the spirit of selfless sacrifice rather than compete with men in power-grabbing and thus prove their moral superiority even in the realm of politics.⁸⁴

In a way, we could say that Gandhi made use of women's selfless services but when it came to giving them the share in power; he refused it politely by asking them to work for the welfare of society and not indulge in power politics. After independence, many women worked for organisations like Sewa Dal while withdrawing themselves from active involvement in the Congress Party. However, even those who remained in the party began to systematically sideline as the party was taken over by power-hungry politicians who actually behaved like gangsters. This way, women with potentials were sidelined systematically and thus, politics was seen to be a male domain.

POST INDEPENDENCE PHASE

After Independence, the Indian National Congress's role was changed from a movement to a single dominant political party. The credit for the freedom movement is attributed to INC and therefore, soon after independence it became the party of the people as it represented the "historical consensus". The party had the most diverse social profile of voters and it was the party which ruled the country independently for the maximum time. It was the umbrella party as it gave representation to all the sections of the society and the traditional party of the dalits. The Congress party because of its mass appeal ruled the centre as well as the states. It was referred as the "Congress System" and gradually, there was a collapse of the Congress System and consequently, there developed political culture of coalitions and the emergence of identity-based parties which claimed to represent exclusively identity based interests but still, the dalit women remain peripheral in their politics; their active participation in politics remains significantly low.

Below is the detailed account of the trajectory of the Indian National Congress in post-independent phase;

⁸⁴Aditya Pandey, ed., *South Asia: Polity, Literacy and Conflict Resolution* (Delhi: Isha Books, 2005), 19.

THE CONGRESS SYSTEM

Rajni Kothari (1964) defines the Congress System. When the Indian National Congress was ruling at the centre as well as in the states; the Indian system was described as a system of one-party rule which is different from one-party system. It is a competitive party system but one in which the competing parts play rather dissimilar roles. It consists of a party of consensus and parties of pressure.⁸⁵ The parties of pressure are very important in the system and they function on the margins. And within the margin, there are various factions within the party of consensus and outside the margin, there are several opposition groups and parties, dissident groups from the ruling party and other interest groups and important individuals but these groups outside the margin do not constitute alternative to the ruling party. Their role is restricted merely to constantly pressurize, criticise, censure and influence the ruling party by influencing opinion and interests inside the margin and above all, exerts a balance of effective public opinion and if the factional system within it is not mobilised to restore the balance; it will be displaced from power by the opposition groups. Both the ideas of an inbuilt corrective through factionalism within the ruling party and the idea of a latent threat from outside the margin of pressure are necessary parts of the one party dominance system.⁸⁶ This makes the party of consensus to stay on its toes and remain accountable and sensitive to people's needs as the factions within the party and threat from the parties of pressure keep a check and balance on the ruling party. So, basically the parties of pressure and factions within the ruling party keep a check on the authoritarian and anti-people tendencies of the ruling party.

The consensus system sees the party of consensus as the only source of legitimate power, as it is accountable to public pressure and demands. There is faith in the party of consensus that it will cater to popular demands but simultaneously, there are some alternate groups that are kept ready to form the government in case the consensus party fails to respond to people's demands.

It is the consensus system which operates through the institution of a party of consensus that is of central importance in this scheme of politics. In India, the Congress is the party of consensus, functions through an electorate network of factions which provides the chief competitive mechanism of the Indian system.⁸⁷

The consensus system doesn't imply that there is only one party i.e. the party of consensus; it rather means that there are multiple parties and Congress is considered as the chief party because it

⁸⁵Rajni Kothari, "The Congress 'System' in India," *Asian Survey* 4, no.12 (1964).

⁸⁶Rajni Kothari, "The Congress 'System' in India," *Asian Survey* 4, no.12 (1964): 1162.

⁸⁷Ibid, 1163.

represents a historical consensus; it was considered as the umbrella party as this party enjoys support and trust of all people across all stratas.

During this time, political competition was not only external but was also internalised as there were many factions within the Congress at all political and governmental levels. There was competition within the party among various leaders; these factions were then built around a functional network consisting of various social groups and leader-client relationships. Therefore, a system of patronage was established in the countryside, traditional institutions of kin and caste were gradually drawn and involved and a structure of pressures and compromises was developed. These were mediated through two new tiers of political organisation, a managerial class of politicians occupying critical organisational positions in the state and district of the working of this system that political competition was intensified; changes took place, new cadres of leadership drawn from a more different social basis came to power and an intricate structure of conflict, mediation, bargaining and consensus was developed within the framework of the Congress.

At the national level, the Congress system got aggregated where individuals who had risen to power in the party sometimes constitutes the chief opposition to the government, would also provide an alternative leadership, exercised controls and pressures on it and in many instances overthrew it from power and replaced it. In this process, elections in the organisation played an important role, but also the general elections and the selection of party candidates for the general elections. Finally, the system of mediation and arbitration as well as an inter-level coordination in the Congress ensured active involvement of the central leadership in the factional structure. More recently, starting some time before Mr. Nehru's death, we find the operation of the same system at the top, through the activation of the central executive of the party, and the latter's firm and successful mediation in the determination of government succession after Nehru. The upshot of all this is the critical importance of the party organisation at all levels, the competitive relationship between the organisation and the government and between the factions within each of them.⁸⁸

THE ROLE OF THE CONGRESS IN POST-INDEPENDENCE

1. The Congress, when it came to power, assigned a positive and overwhelming role to government and politics in the development of society.

⁸⁸Ibid, 1164.

2. It made the power of the central authority the chief condition of national survival. This power was not only consolidated but greatly augmented.
3. It made legitimacy the principal issue of politics and gave to the government and the ruling party an importance of great symbolic value. "Only the Congress could be trusted". This is why only the Congress was the party of consensus. The political system got legitimised through identification with a particular leadership and its agents and heirs. This made the symbolism of the Congress so concrete and manifest.
4. The Congress in power made for a concentration of resources, a monopoly of patronage and a control of economic power which crystallised the structure of its power and made competition with it a difficult proposition.
5. By adopting a competitive model of development, it made mobilization and public cooperation a function of political participation rather than of bureaucratic control and police surveillance. Only the Congress, with its huge organizational legacy, its leadership and its control institutional patronage, could provide such a framework of participation.⁸⁹

LEADERSHIP OF THE CONGRESS PARTY

Congress (I) had committed to give 15 % of election tickets to women way back in 1957 but never implemented that resolve. Even after all the major parties had promised 33% reservation for women in legislatures, they all reverted back to tokenism when it actually came to giving party tickets for the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. The Congress (I) fielded only 49 women out of a total of 530 candidates.⁹⁰ This shows the double standards of the political leaders who speak actively in favour of women's causes but on the other hand, sideline women in their own parties by not offering them tickets. The Marginalisation of women in Indian politics is happening despite widespread social opinion in favour of women's active political participation.⁹¹

The attitude of the leadership of the Congress is also one important reason for the marginalisation of women in politics, as they kept women outside the purview of active politics and denied them any

⁸⁹Ibid, 1168.

⁹⁰Kishwar. "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas." 2867.

⁹¹"Working towards solution". Manushi Forum for women's rights and democratic reforms. http://www.manushi.in/articles_manushi.

important place in decision-making bodies. It is said that Nehruvian era and Indira Gandhi's regime were more responsible for marginalisation of women in Congress.

NEHRUVIAN ERA

After independence, Nehru was leading the Congress party. Instead of turning the party into a mass-party; he turned it into an instrument of authoritarian rule. As he was very impressed with the colonial state apparatus; he was in favour of continuing with the colonial state especially its education system as well as the bureaucratic set-up. This doesn't mean that the Congress party stopped undertaking the "constructive programmes" of social reconstruction (which were initiated by Mahatma Gandhi) but the constructive programmes were transformed into the "community development programmes". The "community development programmes" were run and controlled by bureaucrats. The Congress party became a party of power brokers/ local leaders/ local goondas. During Nehru's time, the people were kept aloof from the party's work and the party became more bureaucratic and more alienated from grassroots levels. The party was more "irresponsive" and was unable to represent people's interests. During this time, when the party was creating a new image for itself like anti-people; it was at the same time that the marginalisation of women was also taking place simultaneously. The twin processes of "marginalisation of women from politics" and "depoliticisation of society by snatching power from local communities" marked the Nehruvian era.

INDIRA'S REGIME

With the coming of Indira Gandhi, there was further decline in women's active political participation. When Indira Gandhi came to power; women across the country related to her and she was a symbol of inspiration and also saw her as "Durga" incarnate; but she did nothing to facilitate or encourage the entry of more women into politics. She was an authoritarian leader. She also introduced the practice of "nominations"; by which she nominated members to all the party posts and even distribution of party tickets for elections was based on her consent. She also undermined the democratic institutions and also obstructed panchayat and zilla Parishad elections wherever the Congress was not sure of being able to come to power. She put various states to president's rule where her authority was challenged by regional politicians/leaders. She kept all the power in her hands and undermined the federal structure of division of power between the centre and its units. Her authoritarian government was unaccountable to the people's interests and as a result of unaccountable government, over-centralisation of power and criminalisation of politics; the few women that were active in party politics were also sidelined. It was so difficult for devoted selfless women political workers to get a ticket and fight elections. Only people with power/influence/money

were getting easy entry into the party. For one to be a member of the Congress; the only eligibility criterion was that one should be influential and must be close to the “High Command”. This marked the beginning of “criminalisation of politics”, “use of money-muscle power” to be in politics. As a result of all these recent trends, most of the active women leaders turned away from politics as they were scared of entering into politics because it was no more clean politics.

During her time, elections were fought on the basis of money and muscle power; corruption also reached its peak. All the party tickets were sold and the highest bidder gets a better position. In her party, only those people were given space that would be dependent, lacked agency and autonomy to take decisions

Another important reason that is responsible for low women’s political participation was that Indira Gandhi was hesitant to share the limelight with other women politicians especially the ones who cultivated an independent political base. As a result, many capable women leaders like Tarkeshwari Sinha and Nandini Satpathi as well as women of Indira Gandhi’s own family (barring the corrupt and sycophantish Sheila Kaul variety) were deliberately eclipsed during Indira Gandhi’s regime. It was very shameful that India’s first woman Prime minister made all efforts to keep women outside the public arena. She made politics as “survival of the corrupt” and few women who were there in the party were as corrupt as her or they were the daughters or wives of the powerful male politicians who facilitated their smooth entry into the party. Thus, the phenomenon of “biwi-beti” brigade also became popular. So, basically Congress used women as “vote banks”, in mass protests, demonstrations and campaign during elections to make up the numbers by denying them any position in the party organisation.

RAJIV GANDHI’S TIME

After Indira Gandhi’s assassination, her son Rajiv Gandhi came to power in 1984. When he occupied power; he tried to project a pro-women image for his party. He fielded a slightly larger number of women candidates (40 out of 492) and made pro-women speeches. After Gandhi’s assassination, there was a sympathy wave that helped Congress party to win by landslide victory. Even new women candidates won and 37 out of the Congress (I) women candidates were elected to the eighth Lok Sabha. There were 44 women MPs during Rajiv’s first tenure as prime minister, the highest ever in Lok Sabha. Yet they constituted no less than 7.9 percent of the total.⁹² But these women who won were the elitist/glamorous women who were aloof from the common women’s problems.

⁹²Ibid, 2870.

The number of women MPs dropped slightly to 39 and 36 in the next two elections. The National Perspective Plan (NPP) was introduced during his time. The plan proposed 30 percent reservation for women, but suggested that the reserved seats in all elected bodies – from gram panchayat to Parliament- be filled through co-option but this was firmly rejected by women’s organisations since it was evident that the Congress wanted to use women’s reservations to subvert the democratic process and co-opt its own members.⁹³

COLLAPSE OF THE CONGRESS SYSTEM

The decline of the Congress is in many ways the story of Indian politics in the 1990’s. Like most entrenched parties of long standing democracies, the Congress too has lived to read many of its obituaries. It survived not only the death of Nehru but also survived the virtual dismemberment of its organisational structure under his daughter. It survived the loss of power at the centre and then even the death of Indira Gandhi.⁹⁴

When we talk about the collapse, the collapse is not just of the Congress as the ruling party at the Centre as well as in the states and with it, there was the collapse of the entire party system. The collapse of the one party dominance marked the emergence of the “hung parliament”. Hung Parliament implies that no single party was able to form the government as it was unable to get a majority.

POLITICAL CULTURE OF COALITION GOVERNMENT

In the case when there is no party getting majority in Lok Sabha, they are left with no options but to form coalitions with other smaller parties in order to run the government. For the first time, it started in the year 1996 and the trend still continues and this is the reason that has led to the rise and success of the smaller regional parties and no national party could afford to ignore these small regional parties. Thus, Kumar rightly argues that Indian politics has moved from an era of single party rule with the absolute dominance of the Congress from 1952-1989 (with a brief exception 1977-80) to an era of coalition politics.⁹⁵

Regional parties have played an important role in Indian politics at both the State and national level for a little over a decade and will continue to in the coming years. The regional parties have made

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Anthony Heath and Yogendra Yadav, “The United Colours of Congress: Social Profile of Congress Voters, 1996 and 1998,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no.34/35 (1999): 2518.

⁹⁵Sanjay Kumar, “The turbulent rise of regional parties: A many-sided threat for Congress.” http://www.lokniti.org/pdfs_dataunit/S.Kumar.pdf

important inroads in the traditional support base of the Congress amongst Muslim, Dalits and Adivasis. With its declining popularity amongst traditional supporters (dalits, Muslims, Adivasis), the Congress is heavily dependent upon the OBC and the upper castes for electoral success. While the Muslim, Dalits and Adivasis do vote for Congress in selective states depending upon the type of electoral contest, their support base has certainly declined compared to the past.⁹⁶

The collapse of the party also challenged the historical consensus that the Congress represented for so long after independence also when it was in the opposition. Congress collapsed internally as well as it was split into so many parts and there were so many factions and this was the saddest part of its decline.

It's true that the electoral success of the Congress party depended heavily on the dominant castes and the landed gentry, local mafias etc. From the very beginning, Congress maintained healthy relations with the dominant and influential castes; which helped the party to garner support from the masses as the dominant/ influential people with the aid of money and muscle pressurised the people to vote for the Congress and made it the party of consensus. While with the eclipse and gradual decline of the party; these local goondas became more powerful and were in a position to bargain and this led to caste based politics. As a result of this, we see the dalits, muslims, tribes are forming their own separate political organisations and they are moving out of the social coalition of the Congress.

Another reason that led to the decline of the Congress was the wide change in the social profile of the Congress voters. One reason for its success was that the Congress support was its evenness, both geographical and social. It was an umbrella party representing all social classes equally and there were no distinctive social cleavages. The Congress was always seen as a pro-poor party and when the socially disadvantaged classes went to other parties; then Congress lost its all-India character.

According to them, the decline of the Congress illustrates the failure of a catch all party to handle cleavage based pressures. A careful analysis of this failure needs to take into account another autonomous dimension, namely that of regional differentiation. The last decade or the "third electoral system" has seen an increasing geographical fragmentation of the Indian electorate, with major regional parties' strengthening their position. State, rather than the nation, has emerged as the effective arena of political choice.⁹⁷

⁹⁶Sanjay Kumar, "The turbulent rise of regional parties: A many-sided threat for Congress." http://www.lokniti.org/pdfs_dataunit/S.Kumar.pdf.

⁹⁷Anthony Heath and Yogendra Yadav, "The United Colours of Congress: Social Profile of Congress Voters, 1996 and 1998," 2518.

The significance of regional parties lies in the fact that they influence the national politics as well. As regional parties cater to regional aspirations and ethnic tendencies; their vote-base has suddenly increased and as a result of huge electoral support, they have managed to win elections and form state governments, they have influenced the national politics. If we look at two national parties like Congress and BJP together, they have roughly polled a little less than 50 percent votes. The vote share of Congress has declined sharply during last few elections, from 39.5 percent in 1989 to 28.6 percent in 2009.⁹⁸

The emergence of regional-based politics, encouraged by India's vast diversity and the federal structure of the polity, has also contributed to this fragmentation of the national political agenda and has given rise to a fickle and unstable coalition politics sometimes based more on expediency than ideology or policy agenda.⁹⁹

They argue that the decline of the Congress is linked to two aspects, the social and the regional.

There has been a change in the social profile of voters of Congress. The image has been changed from a "catch-all party" to "catch-none party".

Congress was termed as a "catch all party" because of its vote banks as people belonging to all castes and classes used to vote for Congress. Since its inception, Congress's social profiling of voters varied from Upper Castes to lower castes, adivasis to dalit people and was also popular among religious minorities like Muslims. It was considered to be the traditional party of Dalits. But now with the coming of the ethnic parties, its popularity among dalits has decreased significantly. An important question to ask is why Congress has transformed from a "catch all party" to "catch none party"? Is it the question of "representation" and "legitimacy" that has gained importance? Do the dalits feel that only an exclusivist dalit party have legitimacy to represent their interests?

Another important development is that Congress is no more the traditional party of dalits.

Till early nineties, Congress was the party of the Dalits; dalits used to relate with Congress, its policies and programmes but during last two decades; there has been change in the voting patterns of Congress. During last two decades, dalit voters vote for regional parties than Congress. There is no doubt that with the coming of regional parties, dalit votes of Congress have diverted in different directions and has been captured by BSP, TDP and other regional parties.

⁹⁸SanjayKumar, "The turbulent rise of regional parties: A many-sided threat for Congress." http://www.lokniti.org/pdfs_dataunit/S.Kumar.pdf.

⁹⁹Spary, "Female Political Leadership in India." 260-262.

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE MARGINALISATION OF DALIT WOMEN

Madhu Kishwar talks about how Congress played an instrumental role in the decline in women's participation in politics but this is not to assume that the other parties are pro-women; as the Congress culture is emulated by virtually all of them. A majority of women contest from the Congress party even when the overall percentage of party tickets given to women remains shamefully low. The first Lok Sabha had 14 Congress women MPs out of a total of 23; in the second Lok Sabha it had 21 out of 27 women MPs, with CPI and Jan Sangh claiming two each. The ninth Lok Sabha had 19 Congress women MPs. The 10 Lok Sabha also had 22 out of 37 women MPs from the Congress.¹⁰⁰

Looking at the above numbers of women in Parliament; one might think that these women were an effective presence but this is not true as they only have token representation as they are hardly in a position to either influence party's programmes or decisions. One thing must be kept in mind that most of the women politicians have emerged largely from among urban castes, especially among Brahmins of all regions, Khatri of Punjab, Bhadrakols of Bengal and Kayasthas of North India because these castes had initiated powerful movements for internal social reform from the 19th century onwards, especially with regard to women's rights and status within these communities. This makes it very evident that there hasn't been any representation of women of lower strata in the Congress. Congress hasn't been able to offer space to dalit women.

As the social reform movements to remove social evils were undertaken by upper caste people; most of the well known and renowned women politicians have emerged from upper castes. Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Sarladevi Chaudhrani, Sucheta Kriplani, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Tarkeshwari Sinha- all came to exercise a great deal of influence in public life and symbolised the spirit of breaking through. This shows that the upper caste reform movements have helped upper caste women to break away from the barriers of social customs and participate equally with men in political arena. But as far as backward castes and dalit castes are concerned; there hasn't been any movement to uplift the status of women of these castes and as a result; dalit women are nowhere to be seen today also in the public arena. Although there has been political assertion of backward / dalit castes; their leaders are more concerned with the caste question

¹⁰⁰Kishwar, "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas," 2870.

rather than the gender dimension of caste. They seek social justice vis-a-vis upper castes but they are neglecting the gender dimensions of social equity.

Despite successful mobilisation of women's organisations such as the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), these organisations largely benefitted middle-class women by providing experience of working within organisational structures.¹⁰¹

It is true that women of all castes can stand from general constituencies but the evidence shows that women from Scheduled Castes and tribes hardly contest from general constituencies; they restrict themselves and contest from reserved constituencies. There is no doubt that if violence and crime becomes the norm of politics; women as a group become automatically marginalised and mostly, choose to move out of the party.

Kishwar argues that where connections to powerful patriarchs is an important requirement for women in politics and where thugs dominate politics, only women like Benazir Bhutto, Indira Gandhi and Jayalalitha can survive to demonstrate that at least some women can be as ruthless, corrupt and vicious as the worst of male politicians.

For instance, in the 1952 elections the Congress party had only 14 women members elected to parliament. In the first Lok Sabha, women constituted no more than 4.4 percent of the total strength.¹⁰² The less number of women representatives in the Parliament doesn't indicate that there is dearth of great women in the country irrespective of the fact that they had participated actively in the freedom movement but still they were kept outside the purview of active politics; which is a very shameful incident in Indian politics. The Indian National Congress; an umbrella party had a women's front, called the Mahila Congress. The presence of "Mahila Congress" didn't even make any space for women leaders and they were kept outside the purview of decision-making. The Mahila Congress further declined in its capacity to encourage women leaders and active women activists especially after the "reformed" Hindu laws in the mid-1950s.

Madhu Kishwar argues that the societies which have less of a tradition of public acceptance of women's political mobilisation have witnessed an increasing participation of women in politics; India's history has taken a surprising turn. It is surprising that after independence, women have

¹⁰¹Spary, "Female Political Leadership in India," 259.

¹⁰²Kishwar. "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas," 2868.

become marginalised in politics and during 1930s/1940s; there were more women leaders at all levels in the Congress party alone than are found today in all the parties put together.¹⁰³

She raised questions like why has our democracy failed to include women in its purview even while the representation and involvement of various other disadvantaged groups, such as the scheduled and backward castes, has grown substantially? Why were a whole generation of women leaders who were active at the forefront of our freedom struggle denied a substantial presence in parliament and state assemblies, especially considering that the social opinion in India has been in favour of women's participation?¹⁰⁴

To analyse whether Congress is pro-women and more importantly, pro-dalit women, we will see Congress views on the women's reservation bill.

CONGRESS'S VIEWS ON WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL

Women's reservation bill was first presented in the year 1996 as the 81st Amendment Bill by the Indian Government. The bill proposed that 33percent of seats in Lok Sabha in state level assemblies is reserved for women but the bill couldn't be passed. It was again passed several times in 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008 and finally, the bill appeared recently in Rajya Sabha in 2010 and it was passed. But the bill is still pending in the Lok Sabha.

In order to understand why the bill has not been passed and not being able to become a law in the past 14years is to understand the politics surrounding the Women's Reservation Bill. Various political parties have different views on the women's reservation bill. While mainstream political parties like Indian National Congress and Bhartiya Janata Party are in favour of passage of women's reservation bill while the ethnic minority parties comprising of the "socialists" like Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Bahujan Samaj Party are against the present form of the bill (In the present form, the bill proposes 33percent of seats to be reserved for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies) as they are demanding "quota within quotas" for women belonging to the backward community as they feel that without quotas it would be an elite (women) capture of seats.¹⁰⁵

WRB is seen as a smart move of the Congress to deflect the attention from the failure of the second UPA regime as its government fails to control price hike which has united its political opponents

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 2869.

¹⁰⁵ Minal Mhatre, "Women in Electoral Politics: A case study of Women's political participation in Maharashtra," *Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism* (2009).

against the party. Therefore, the government is under tremendous pressure from Sonia Gandhi in the context of the recent demand for women's safety and to ensure women's empowerment. The thinking in the Congress top brass is that the only way the UPA government can salvage its position is to ensure ways that can empower women. Despite the fact that the majority in the Congress are opposed to it; Sonia Gandhi wants that the government should at least try to bring it in Lok Sabha once more.

In May 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress and the BJP fielded 43 and 44 women respectively. That is less than 10% of the lower house's strength of 544. And that is not even one fourth of the one third marks while if we look at the other ethnic parties like Samajwadi Party fielded 28, Samajwadi Party fielded 15, JD (U) fielded 3, RJD fielded 2. Since these political parties claim to represent the interests of the OBCs, Dalits and the minorities, it should be safe to assume that they would have chosen at least some among the women contestants from these categories. But in such pitifully woeful numbers?¹⁰⁶

We have to look at the Congress's consent on Women's Reservation Bill critically as the party has never announced its commitment to social justice and never offered to field women from the subaltern strata and the number of women's representatives in Congress also shows that the party has not given tickets to women from subaltern strata.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTION MANIFESTOS OF CONGRESS

Election manifestos are a way by which political parties convey its policies and programmes periodically to the voters of the country in order to get their votes and win their support. Through election manifestos, they highlight their achievements and discuss their future plans. In today's time, election manifestos are also used to criticise the other opposition parties. Election manifestos are also a pledge that a political party takes to fulfil its promises. Looking at the election manifestos, one comes to know of the party's ideals and principles and what are its future plans.¹⁰⁷

In all its manifestos, the Indian National Congress promises to give stable, purposeful; and result-oriented governments. The Congress has remained true to certain values like unity and integrity, democracy based on the Parliament system, secularism, an independent judiciary, freedom of speech and expression and freedom of the press and also stability, social harmony and development.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Subrahmaniam, Vidya, "Politics of Women's Reservation Bill," *The Hindu*, March 16, 2010.

¹⁰⁷<http://aicc.org.in/index.php/manifestos/detail/1998>.

¹⁰⁸<http://indiaabroad.com/news/1996/Cong.html>

Through its manifestos, it has announced time and again that it's the party that belongs to all irrespective of caste, religion, colour or race and especially it belongs to the poor, the neglected and the disadvantaged.¹⁰⁹

A look at the election manifestos of the Congress makes it very clear that it has no separate section dealing with dalit women. Dalit women do not constitute a distinct category for the party (the party has separate sections addressing the problems of Scheduled Castes and a separate one dealing with "women"; which makes it see the women as a homogenous category).

Now we will look at the policies and welfare schemes designed by Congress for dalit women:

The party has constituted the National Commission for SCs and STs and it has been conferred constitutional status¹¹⁰; which works for the welfare of people of these sections.

The National Commission for Safai Karmacharis has been constituted and it looks into the specific problems of the Safai Karmacharis and recommends specific programmes for elimination of inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities for them. A national scheme was launched in March 1992 for liberation and rehabilitation of Safai Karmacharis so as to eliminate the inhuman practice of carrying rite soil and filth on head.¹¹¹

The SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was passed and amended several times to make it more effective and end the atrocities against the SCs and STs.

The Congress government has set up the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh to develop a network of credit services for women working in the informal sector and to support self-employment ventures.

The Mahila Samridhhi Yojana has been launched for the welfare of women. By this scheme, a woman who deposits Rs.300 in the post office will get Rs.375 after one year. A sum of Rs.1000 crore has been set aside for the scheme which will make women self-confident, self-reliant and independent.

The Congress government has established the National Commission for Women. Besides, there is a commissioner for women's rights to promote the social well being of women and check atrocities and violence directed at women.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid.

Congress believes in a strong centre, in strong states and a strong panchayats and nagarpalikas. Each of these three builds on and draws sustenance from each other. Panchayats and Nagarpalikas are not the third tiers of democracy¹¹³ but they are the first tier of democracy and therefore, since 1993 33percent of seats are reserved for women which has helped women to attain agency and autonomy.

It was the Congress that launched the Indira Awas Yojana to provide houses free of cost to SC and ST below the poverty line.¹¹⁴

There have been other such schemes and policies as well that indirectly deals with the empowerment of dalit women. The only time when manifestos mentions dalit women is when it makes it clear that education at all stages will be free for the girl child belonging to SC and ST community.¹¹⁵

Recently, the National Commission for Congress has established a Special Cell for Dalit Women in an effort to fight injustice against this section of society. There is also the Dalit Women's Congress (the Abhaya Jeevan).

All the above schemes show that the Congress has no achievements as far as welfare of dalit women are concerned as it doesn't have any specific schemes dealing with their specific problems. It's an irony that dalit women who are triply marginalised are bracketed in the same category of women.

¹¹³<http://aicc.org.in/index.php/manifestos/details/1999>.

¹¹⁴<http://aicc.org.in/index.php/manifestos/details/1998>.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The Indian National Congress founded in 1885 is the oldest political party of India. Before independence, it was a movement that mobilised millions of people into fighting for the cause of its country's freedom. Some thought that the aim of INC is country's freedom and when it's fulfilled, it would cease to exist but after independence, it became the dominant political party of India which helped in rebuilding India. After independence, it was more than a political party as it encompasses the diverse interests of every section of India's polity.¹¹⁶

It represented a historical consensus as it represented all the sections of the society; the rich and the poor, the landlord and the landless, the dalits, the muslims, the adivasis etc. It was ruling at the centre as well as in the states; it was considered as the Congress System but it collapsed with the coming of the coalition government, hung parliament and regional parties. With the coming of the regional and ethnic parties, the social profiling of the voters also changed and the votes of the minorities like the dalits, muslims and adivasis also diverted in different directions.

Despite having a legacy of powerful women leaders like Sonia Gandhi and Indira Gandhi; the party has been anti-women. The reason for marginalisation of women in Congress has been attributed to Gandhian legacy. Women were at the forefront in the freedom struggle and were part of various social service organisations like Sewa Dal; but when it came to include them into politics by assigning them a pro-active role in politics, they were denied tickets to contest elections as women were considered to be fit in the "private realm" and the public domain (political life) was not seen safe for them. In a way, Gandhi used women's power to throw Britishers out of India and when it came to acknowledging their sacrifices and assign them position in the political life, he asked them to denounce power grabbing and be the "support system" and work behind the veils. This led to marginalisation of women in Congress politics.

And during Rajeev Gandhi's time, when there were women in the Congress; these women were elitist and had no connection with the grassroots problems and therefore, failed to represent the problems of the women of the weaker sections and thus, there was representational crisis in Congress politics as far as dalit women are concerned.

Analysis of election manifestos and schemes specifically for dalit women shows that Congress has failed to offer space to dalit women in its priorities and makes a mistake of homogenising the category women.

¹¹⁶<http://www.aicc.org.in/new/manifestos/details/1998>.

Thus, it's very clear that dalit women are peripheral occupants in Congress politics.

CHAPTER-3 REPRESENTATION OF DALIT WOMEN IN IDENTITY BASED PARTIES

Over the years, the Indian Political Party System has evolved and passed through several stages. It has changed from a single dominant party system to multi-party system. In contemporary times, multiple-parties have come on the political front to contest elections and mobilise people in order to win their support and gain votes. Political parties like The Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party are “national parties” as they claimed to cater to all sections of the society and have tried to build a broad social base. But despite this, multiple/ diverse interests remained unattended and these unfulfilled desires of various sections of people (especially of the lower strata of the society as they felt left-out from the mainstream nationalist parties) led to the discontentment of the people. Coupled with this, the long process of democratization and rising levels of political consciousness led to the formation and growth of identity-based parties. Here it becomes important to mention that for dalits; the question of representation is very important as they assert for “self representation” instead of being represented by other parties. They want their own party to represent them as they strongly feel that the other parties co-opted them by giving them patronage but not the fair due of their commitment and loyalty.

In this chapter, we will look at three major identity based parties the BSP, the Dalit Panthers, and the DPI, their formation, their working, their representation style, their election manifestos, welfare schemes in order to see whether it represents dalit women or not in equal measure as dalit men?

As this chapter talks about identity-based parties, it's important to know what identity politics is. Identity means different things but in this context, identity is seen as a source of mobilization used by the identity-based parties in order to construct their vote-banks and win support. Here we are talking about politics of caste, whereby caste is the identity by which people identify themselves and form associations. In this context, dalit people have formed their own political associations in order to represent themselves. Caste being one identity; we are also talking about gender as the other identity. So when we talk about identity, we are looking at both *Gender* and *Caste*. As we know dalit women suffer on both counts- caste and gender. As Dalits they face domination and oppression by the upper and middle castes and as women they are placed lower than dalit men who have more opportunities to play a greater role in politics and hence, have more power in decision- making. Dalit women also

encounter patriarchy within dalit communities. Hence, they face dual oppression and both these forces work hand in hand to keep dalit women out of politics.

Mainly, there are two views regarding dalit women's exploitation: whether they are exploited more on the basis of caste or gender. This is not to say that they are exploited by one factor only but one factor which exploits them more becomes the important factor on the basis of which they organise themselves. For those who consider caste as the important factor organise anti-caste movements; these movements calls for abolition of rigid caste based structures while others, who consider gender to be more exploitative are likely to organise movements that challenge the patriarchal notions of the society and see women as a homogeneous category cross cutting caste and class alliances. But in reality, it's difficult to see dalit women at equal par with general women as dalit women are triply exploited on the basis of caste, class and gender¹¹⁷ and face much more hardships than the general women.

Bela Malik also argues that whilst women in general suffer from oppression on the basis of gender, upper-caste women discriminate against Dalits on the basis of caste. In this context, a purely dalit women's forum seems natural.¹¹⁸ As we see today, on the one hand, anti-caste movements gives importance to caste dimension while on the other hand, Indian women's movement commits the mistake of considering the category of women as a homogeneous one but has not been adequately sensitive to dalit women's issues.

In this chapter an attempt is made to examine whether rise of explicit dalit based parties i.e. parties whose social base and leadership is from the dalit community has helped dalit women? Have they been given space? Do they get representation within their "own" parties or do they remain invisible? And one important thing, in the case of dalit women which is more important- gender or caste or do both come together to oppress them or they work independently? In this regard, three important Dalit parties, the BSP, the DPs (Maharashtra) and DPI (Tamil Nadu) are analyzed to understand their attitude to Dalit Women and whether dalit women have been able to play a role in these parties.

¹¹⁷Vivek Kumar, Vivek Kumar, http://www.ambedkartimes.com/vivek_kumar.html (August 25, 2009).

¹¹⁸Bela Malik, 1999. *Untouchability and Dalit Women's Oppression*. Quoted in Hugo Gorringer, 2005. *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratisation in Tamil Nadu*.

As this chapter will look at the important dalit parties i.e. BSP, the DPs and the Dalit Panthers lyakaam and their attitude towards dalit women; it becomes imperative to look at their definition of dalits to see whether they see women as a separate category or not?

DEFINING DALITS

There are differences in the manner in which DPs conceptualised the term Dalit. The Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra (influenced by Marxism) conceptualised dalits in terms of class and therefore, included members of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who were exploited politically and economically.¹¹⁹ As DPI (Tamil Nadu) is highly influenced by the Dalit Panthers movement; it also included all socio-eco and politically exploited sections of the society. Both DPs and DPI mentioned women as an oppressed category so they recognised them and included them in their definition of dalits.

On the other hand, BSP used the term strictly and only included those who were exploited on the basis of caste (influenced by Ambedkar). For BSP, caste is the only reality. Thus, we can clearly see that there is a caste/class divide that clearly differentiates their definition of dalits.

Ideologically different, these two parties are also different in its style of working as DPI is more militant and dominating than BSP. Sudha Pai very rightly argues..... the BSP is not a revolutionary party of change for the lower orders, as the Dalit Panthers professed to be at its inception. In contrast, it represents a reformist strand that has adopted the Parliamentary path of gradual social transformation.¹²⁰

A look at the above definitions makes it very clear that DPI and DPs have included women (as a separate category) in its definition of dalit while BSP has ignored the gender dimension in its definition.

Vivek Kumar gives two reasons of why women do not form a part of dalit category. Although, women in India are exploited on class and gender basis but it's not a homogeneous category as caste plays an important role and low caste women are treated differently from

¹¹⁹Lata Murugkar, *Dalit Panthers Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991).

¹²⁰Sudha Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), 12.

upper caste and also because the Indian Women's movement has not addressed dalit women's question.¹²¹

NORTH- SOUTH DIVIDE

Before we look at Dalit parties and their relationship with Dalit Women; it's important to look at the culture in North and South region with regard to Dalit Women. There is considerable difference between cultures in these two parts of India. While the South has a culture which is pro-women and North has a culture against women and this culture has accordingly shaped the Dalit movements and the political parties.

SOUTH INDIA

Women occupy a better position in South than in the North. The reasons are historical as well as socio-economic in nature. Tamil Nadu has witnessed a long anti- Brahmin movement beginning in the 1800s. However it was RS Naicker and Periyar who radicalised the movement and gave greater importance to dalits as well as women. The Self Respect Movement was started in order to bring radicalism in society. The Self- Respect Movement – *Suyamariyatai Iyakkam*- was dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmans a sense of pride based on their Dravidianist past, which also meant a denial of the superiority of the Brahman and of the Brahman's implicit faith in the system.¹²²

In Tamil Nadu, the role of Periyar in the empowerment of women cannot be underestimated. He revolutionised the Tamil society by initiating the "Self Respect Movement" which emphasised on equality and autonomy of women. Self-Respect weddings were celebrated without the assistance of Brahman priests. His Self Respect Movement brought many changes in the way women were viewed in TN. He disinvested the reproductive role of women within the endogamous/monogamous family and gave it a material viewpoint as he propagated marriage to be an extension of property relations. He also gave importance to women's choice by using contraception that helps them to exercise control over their bodies and could also escape them from male domination. The movement challenged the "patriarchy" prevalent in Tamil Culture which restricted women to the domestic sphere by making men the sole bread-winner who has the capability of earning money. The movement demanded that the domestic work should be accorded

¹²¹Vivek Kumar, "Locating Dalit women in the Indian caste system, media and women's movement," *Social Change* 39, no.1 (2009): 69.

¹²²Eugene F Irschick, *Political and Social Conflict in South India: The non-Brahman movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 330.

the same respect as wage labour and must be a paid service. It also initiated Self Respect Marriage where individual's choice was given preference over social and familial preferences and also encouraged cross-cut alliances and widow remarriage. Contemporary dalit politics is still dominated by Periyar's ideals but its radicalism seems to be sidelined.

Hugo Gorringe study provides an example. In his meeting with Katherine, a Dravida Kazhagam activist in Melavassel. He was introduced to her in a friend's flat where she was ensconced on the only chair in the room. She spoke boldly about the need to escape the patriarchal aspects of society and emphasised that she was not wearing a *thali* (marriage thread that must not be removed) because she saw it as a symbol of oppression.¹²³

The Dravidian movement began Self Respect marriage. Self Respect Marriages are still prevalent in Tamil culture and has the state's approval. The state also promotes them and gives financial benefits to the couples in order to encourage them. But the Dravidian movement has lost its radical edge and as a result, dalits have moved out to form their own parties. Within them, the role of women is no longer as important.

NORTH INDIA

In the Northern states, upper caste women were historically kept within the purdah and socially secluded and kept at a distance from the outside world. She spends all her life within the four walls of the house and the public space is out of her reach and considered as a male domain. It's the socio-cultural norms that justify patriarchy in the northern region. Land, which is considered to be the main asset, is always in man's name that is transferred from a father to his son and so on. In this way, women are generally kept away from inheritance rights. This shows that women are given a secondary place in the society as compared to men folk. The inferiority of women to men is accepted in all the castes but there are differences in the degree to which this is the case. Differences in region, caste and class significantly affect the status of women, and these need to be considered.¹²⁴ One important thing is that in the North, the position of even upper caste women is poor and reasons are historical as well as socio-economic in nature.

¹²³Hugo Gorringe, *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit movements and Democratization in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005)

¹²⁴Ibid, 222.

As far as gender index is concerned, it is better in the south than in the north. Women in the south have better literacy rates, health and low sex ratios. As per Miller's analysis of sex-ratios, infant mortality rates and fertility figures, he calls the culture in north as "culture against women".¹²⁵ On the other hand, Dyson and Moore conversely argues that southern and eastern states have lower marital fertility, a later age of marriage, lower infant mortality and also low sex ratios which are the indicators to suggest "culture pro-women".¹²⁶ In the north, there are exogamic marriages whereby women are married outside families to far-off places and this is the reason that they are not given property inheritance rights while in south, generally marriages are held within family like with cousins and close relatives and in most cases women inherit property. In north India, cultural practices serve to limit the contact between a woman and her natal village. Indeed, after the marriage and the costs incurred during that ceremony, many parents regard their work as complete.¹²⁷ On the other hand, in the south, east and lower castes, "bride-price" is a common trend and as they are married in nearby villages; their family remains the primary source of support.

Another reason of why women in south are accorded a better status than north is because they play a major role in agricultural production. As in south, there is more rice production where there is higher demand for female labour as compared to wheat producing northern areas. This shows that economic independence provides women with some sense of autonomy and agency. Thus, economic independence is one of the reasons that have led to the comparatively better position of women in south than north.

Below are the tables given to show the health rates, infant-mortality rates and literacy in different states to show the favourable condition for women in South as compared to North.

¹²⁵B. Miller, 1981. *The Endangered Sex*. Quoted in Hugo Gorringe, 2005. *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit movements and Democratization in Tamil Nadu*.

¹²⁶T. Dyson and M. Moore, 1983. *On Kinship Structure, Female Autonomy and Demographic Behaviour in India*. Quoted in Hugo Gorringe, 2005. *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit movements and Democratization in Tamil Nadu*.

¹²⁷*Ibid*, 223.

Table V

NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE IN TERMS OF HEALTH

Demographic Indicators - Health (State-wise)

Sr No.	States/Union Territories	C.B.R. (Crude Birth Rate)			C.D.R. (Crude Death Rate)			Natural Increase (CBR-CDR)			IMR (Infant Mortality Rate)		
		(2009)	(2010)	(2011)	(2009)	(2010)	(2011)	(2009)	(2010)	(2011)	(2009)	(2010)	(2011)
	INDIA	22.5	22.1	21.8	7.3	7.2	7.1	15.2	14.9	14.7	50	47	44
1	Andaman Islands	16.3	15.6	15.1	4.1	4.3	4.6	12.2	11.3	10.5	27	25	23
2	Andhra Pradesh	18.3	17.9	17.5	7.6	7.6	7.5	10.6	10.2	10.0	40	46	43
3	Arunachal Pradesh	21.1	20.5	19.8	6.1	5.9	5.8	15.0	14.6	14.0	32	31	32
4	Assam	23.6	23.2	22.8	8.4	8.2	8.0	15.2	14.9	14.8	61	58	55
5	Bihar	28.5	28.1	27.7	7.0	6.8	6.7	21.5	21.3	21.0	52	48	44
6	Chandigarh	15.0	15.0	15.0	3.0	3.9	4.1	12.0	11.0	11.0	25	22	20
7	Chhattisgarh	25.7	25.3	24.9	6.1	8.0	7.9	17.6	17.3	17.0	54	51	48
8	D&N Haveli	27.0	26.6	26.1	4.8	4.7	4.6	22.1	21.9	21.4	37	38	35
9	Daman & Diu	19.2	18.8	18.4	5.1	4.9	4.9	14.2	13.9	13.5	24	23	22
10	Delhi	18.1	17.8	17.5	4.4	4.2	4.3	13.8	13.6	13.2	33	30	28
11	Goa	13.5	13.2	13.3	6.7	6.6	6.7	6.8	6.6	6.6	11	10	11
12	Gujarat	22.3	21.8	21.3	6.9	6.7	6.7	15.4	15.1	14.6	43	44	41
13	Haryana	22.7	22.3	21.8	6.6	6.6	6.5	16.0	15.7	15.4	51	48	44
14	Himachal Pradesh	17.2	16.9	16.5	7.2	6.9	6.7	10.0	10.0	9.8	45	40	38
15	J & K	18.6	18.3	17.8	5.7	5.7	5.5	12.8	12.6	12.3	45	43	41
16	Jharkhand	25.6	25.3	25.0	7.0	7.0	6.9	18.6	18.3	18.1	44	42	39
17	Karnataka	19.5	19.2	18.8	7.2	7.1	7.1	12.3	12.1	11.7	41	38	35
18	Kerala	14.7	14.8	15.2	6.8	7.0	7.0	7.9	7.8	8.2	12	13	12
19	Lakshadweep	15.0	14.3	14.7	5.8	6.4	6.4	9.2	8.0	8.3	25	25	24
20	Madhya Pradesh	27.7	27.3	26.9	8.5	8.3	8.2	19.2	18.9	18.7	67	62	59
21	Maharashtra	17.6	17.1	16.7	6.7	6.5	6.3	10.9	10.6	10.3	31	28	25
22	Manipur	15.4	14.9	14.4	4.7	4.2	4.1	10.7	10.7	10.3	15	14	11
23	Meghalaya	24.4	24.5	24.1	6.1	7.9	7.8	18.3	16.6	16.3	59	55	52
24	Mizoram	17.6	17.1	16.6	4.5	4.5	4.4	13.0	12.5	12.2	38	37	34
25	Nagaland	17.2	16.8	16.1	3.6	3.6	3.3	13.6	13.2	12.8	25	23	21
26	Odisha	21.0	20.5	20.1	8.8	8.6	8.5	12.2	11.9	11.6	65	61	57
27	Puducherry	16.5	16.7	16.1	7.0	7.4	7.2	9.5	9.3	8.9	22	22	19
28	Punjab	17.0	16.6	16.2	7.0	7.0	6.8	9.9	9.6	9.4	33	34	30
29	Rajasthan	27.2	26.7	26.2	6.6	6.7	6.7	20.6	20.0	19.6	59	55	52
30	Sikkim	18.1	17.8	17.6	5.7	5.6	5.6	12.3	12.3	12.0	34	30	26
31	Tamil Nadu	16.3	15.9	15.9	7.6	7.6	7.4	8.6	8.3	8.5	28	24	22
32	Tripura	14.8	14.9	14.3	6.1	5.0	5.0	8.7	9.9	9.4	31	27	28
33	Uttar Pradesh	26.7	28.3	27.8	8.2	8.1	7.9	20.5	20.2	20.0	63	61	57
34	Uttarakhand	10.7	19.3	18.9	6.5	6.3	6.2	13.2	13.0	12.8	41	38	36
35	West Bengal	17.2	16.8	16.3	6.2	6.0	6.2	11.0	10.7	10.1	33	31	32

Source - 2: Col. 6-11 = SRS Estimates, 2010 (SRS - October, 2012);
NA: Not Available

TABLE-VI

NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE IN TERMS OF INFANT MORTALITY RATES

% Change in the Average Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) between 1998-00 & 2008-10									
India and Bigger States	Total			Rural			Urban		
	1998-00	2008-10	% Change	1998-00	2008-10	% Change	1998-00	2008-10	% Change
India	70.0	50.0	-28.6	75.3	54.7	-27.4	44.3	33.7	-23.9
Andhra Pradesh	65.7	49.0	-25.4	74.7	54.3	-27.3	37.0	34.7	-6.2
Assam	75.7	61.0	-19.4	79.0	63.3	-19.9	35.7	37.3	4.5
Bihar*	64.0	46.3	-27.7	65.0	47.5	-26.9	53.0	34.9	-34.2
Gujarat	63.0	47.3	-24.9	70.0	54.7	-21.9	45.3	32.7	-27.8
Haryana	68.3	51.0	-25.3	70.3	54.3	-22.8	58.0	40.7	-29.8
Himachal Pradesh	62.0	43.0	-30.6	63.7	44.0	-30.9	37.7	28.0	-25.7
Karnataka	57.7	41.3	-28.4	69.0	46.7	-32.3	24.3	30.7	26.3
Kerala	14.7	12.3	-16.3	14.3	12.7	-11.2	15.7	10.3	-34.4
Madhya Pradesh*	91.7	59.5	-35.1	97.7	62.8	-35.7	55.0	42.0	-23.6
Maharashtra	48.3	30.7	-36.4	57.3	37.0	-35.4	32.0	21.7	-32.2
Odisha	96.7	65.0	-32.8	100.0	67.3	-32.7	65.7	46.0	-30.0
Punjab	53.0	37.7	-28.9	57.0	41.3	-27.5	39.0	30.7	-21.3
Rajasthan	81.0	59.0	-27.2	84.7	63.0	-23.3	59.0	34.7	-41.2
Tamil Nadu	52.0	27.7	-46.7	57.7	29.7	-48.5	39.0	25.3	-35.1
Uttar Pradesh*	84.0	59.3	-29.4	88.0	62.2	-29.3	65.3	44.2	-32.3
West Bengal	52.0	33.0	-36.5	55.0	34.3	-37.6	39.3	27.0	-31.3

* Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh include Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand respectively.

SOURCE- Planning Commission of India, Planning Commission.nic.in/

TABLE-VII
NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE IN TERMS OF LITERACY

Education

TABLE 11.1 LITERATE PER 1000 POPULATION LITERACY RATE AMONG SCHEDULED TRIBES AND SCHEDULED CASTS DURING 1961, 1971, 1981 AND 1991 CENSUS.

Sl.No	State	←General→				< Scheduled Tribes >				←ScheduledCastes→			
		1961	1971	1981	1991	1961	1971	1981	1991	1961	1971	1981	1991
1.	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Andhra Pradesh	21.19	24.59	29.94	44.09	4.41	5.34	7.82	17.16	8.47	10.66	17.65	31.59
2	Assam	26.99	28.72	--	52.89	23.58	26.03	--	49.16	24.41	25.79	--	53.94
3	Bihar	18.40	19.94	26.20	38.48	9.16	11.64	16.99	26.78	5.95	6.53	10.40	19.49
4	Gujarat	30.45	35.79	43.70	61.29	11.69	14.12	21.14	36.45	22.46	27.74	39.79	61.07
5	Haryana	--	26.89	36.14	55.65	--	--	--	--	--	12.60	20.15	39.22
6	Himachal Pradesh	21.26	31.96	42.48	63.86	--	15.89	25.93	47.09	8.46	18.82	31.50	53.20
7	Jammu & Kashmir	11.00	18.58	26.67	--	--	--	--	--	4.72	11.97	22.44	--
8	Karnataka	25.50	31.52	38.46	56.04	8.15	14.85	20.14	36.01	9.06	13.89	20.59	38.06
9	Kerala	48.85	60.42	70.42	89.81	17.26	25.72	31.79	57.22	24.44	40.21	56.96	79.68
10	Madhya Pradesh	17.23	22.14	27.87	44.20	5.10	7.62	10.68	21.54	7.89	12.49	18.97	35.08
11	Maharashtra	29.82	39.18	47.18	64.87	7.21	11.74	22.29	36.79	15.78	25.27	35.56	56.46
12	Manipur	30.42	32.91	41.35	59.69	27.25	28.71	39.74	53.63	22.37	26.44	33.63	56.44
13	Meghalaya	--	29.49	34.08	49.10	--	26.45	31.55	46.71	--	20.38	25.78	44.27
14	Nagaland	17.91	27.40	42.57	61.65	14.76	24.01	40.32	60.59	--	--	--	--
15	Orissa	21.66	26.18	34.23	49.09	7.36	9.46	13.96	22.31	11.57	15.61	22.41	36.78
16	Punjab	--	33.67	40.86	58.51	16.46	--	--	--	9.64	16.12	23.86	41.09
17	Rajasthan	15.21	19.07	24.38	38.55	3.97	6.47	10.27	19.44	6.44	9.14	14.04	26.29
18	Sikkim	--	17.74	34.05	56.94	--	--	33.13	59.01	--	17.42	28.06	51.03
19	Tamil Nadu	33.41	39.46	46.76	62.66	5.91	9.02	20.46	27.89	14.66	21.82	29.67	46.74
20	Tripura	20.24	30.98	42.12	60.44	10.01	15.03	23.07	40.37	13.42	20.51	33.89	56.66
21	Uttar Pradesh	17.60	21.70	27.15	41.60	--	14.59	20.45	35.70	7.14	10.20	14.96	26.85
22	West Bengal	29.28	33.20	40.94	57.70	6.55	8.92	13.21	27.78	13.58	17.80	24.37	42.21
	Union Territories:												
23	Andman & Nicobar	33.63	43.59	51.66	73.02	11.10	17.85	31.11	56.62	!	!	!	!
24	Arunachal Pradesh	--	11.29	20.79	41.59	--	5.20	14.04	--	--	36.28	37.14	57.27
25	Dadra Nagar Haveli	9.48	14.97	26.67	40.71	4.40	8.90	16.86	28.21	26.60	33.18	51.20	77.64
26	Chandigarh	--	61.56	64.79	77.81					--	24.38	37.07	55.44
27	Delhi	52.70	56.61	61.54	75.29					20.86	28.15	39.30	57.60
28	Goa, Daman & Diu	30.80	40.75	56.66	71.20	--	12.73	26.48	52.91	N.A.	26.14	38.38	79.18
29	Lakhsadweep	23.27	43.66	55.07	81.78	22.27	41.37	53.13	80.58	!	!	!	!
30	Mizoram	--	--	59.88	82.27	--	--	59.63	82.73	--	--	84.44	77.92
31	Pondicherry	37.40	46.02	58.85	74.77	--	--	--	--	11.11	18.70	32.26	56.26
32	All India	24.00	29.45	36.23	52.21	8.53	11.35	16.35	29.60	10.27	14.57	21.38	37.41

SOURCE- Planning Commission of India, Planning Commission.nic.in/

Now we will look at the important dalit movements one by one to see which identity (gender or caste) is prominent over the other. One thing to be noted is that these movements have transformed into political parties now.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN DALIT PARTIES

DALIT PANTHERS

Dalit Panthers was founded in 1972 in Maharashtra by Namdev Dhasal. It was a revolutionary social organisation that made use of the arms and weapons to fight for the rights of the Dalits. It was inspired by the Black Panthers that fought for the rights of the Africans-Americans in United States. This movement was very different from other dalit movements because of its militant nature. The movement questioned the efficiency of the political system that has failed to achieve the objective of social equality and economic justice.

The movement revolutionised the society by over-emphasising the importance of man and making him the creator of his destiny and giving him the power of making decisions and bringing change in society. It stressed that man is a rational and an independent being not bounded by religion and God. The movement aimed at structural change and not in reformist agenda and was against the system of reservations and concessions. The Dalit Panthers have rightly perceived that what the oppressed in India need are not concessions, facilities and reservations, but the establishment of Dalit Raj.The social system cannot be revolutionised by mere demands for concessions, elections and Satyagraha.¹²⁸

Lata Murugkar in her book "Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal" has looked at the history, structure, leadership, ideology and program of the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra during the period 1972-1979. She has discussed how the socio-political, cultural and economic changes in Indian history have made untouchables more politically consciousness. As they were disillusioned with Hinduism, they converted to Buddhism and rejected the Gandhian patronizing term *harijan* and adopted the casteless term "Dalit" (downtrodden) and entered the political arena. The most important contribution of its members has been revolutionary literature like plays, short stories and poetry that directly attacked the caste system and cultural hegemony of Brahmins.¹²⁹

¹²⁸Moin Shakir, "Beyond the System," *Economic and Political Weekly* 9, no.16 (1974): 3.

¹²⁹Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal*.

The Dalit Panthers is widely known for its violent nature. The party is against Hinduism and therefore, made violent attacks on Hindu deities and popular heroes like Shivaji. Their violent activities have always met with state repression. Thus, it was clear from its activities that Dalit Panthers as a political force is focused on overthrowing the present social and political system.

There was a strong connection between the movement and dalit literature.the movement is the political expression of the spirit of protest and rebellion being consciously developed through the medium of literature. The source of inspiration of dalit literature is real life, the experiences of the dalit community, in its totality. Believing that the entire socio- economic structure has to be overhauled, it refutes and rejects Hindu religion and its legacy, but not the humanist tradition.¹³⁰

As we know that the party has strong relation with the dalit literature that is popularly known as protest-literature; which depicts a counter-ideology to the mainstream literature. It's important to have a look at the dalit sahitya in Maharashtra which is an important part of the Dalit Panthers organisation.

DALIT SAHITYA IN MAHARASHTRA

At the outset, it must be noted that the organisation Dalit Panthers has emerged from a group of young revolutionary writers and poets. The prominent among them are Namdeo Dhasal (founder of the organisation), Raja Dhale and J.V.Pawar etc. All of them were protesting against the corrupt, self-seeking, faction-ridden and poor leadership of the RPI. To start with, Namdeo Dhasal has been writing poetry and also published a small magazine known as *vidroha* and was affiliated with their left faction. His work is noted for its intricacy of language, fancifulness of theme, and an explicit identification with the world revolutionary tradition.¹³¹

Both the Dalit Panthers and Dalit Sahitya have reflected the advent of new mahar- Buddhist elite who are much beyond the parochialism of the Ambedkar movement. As most of the Dalit Sahityiks have studied in People's Education Society institutions; they are highly influenced by the principles of Ambedkarism. Their sole source of inspiration for writing dalit literature is Babasaheb.

Dalit Sahitya as a literary genre began as a revolt against mainstream Marathi literature.¹³² It is a counter-ideology that aims to represent the interests of the Dalit masses irrespective of caste or community. Therefore, whenever the Marathi Sahitya Sammelan is organised, the dalit sahityiks

¹³⁰Shakir. "Beyond the System." 3.

¹³¹ Francine Frankel (ed.), *Dominance and state power in modern India- decline of a social order* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹³²Ibid.

protested against it as they see the sammelans as an insult to dalit literature and attack them for upholding the caste system.

The aim of Dalit Sahitya is to expose the naked reality of Indian society that is the reality of the poor, the exploited sections of the society that constitute the majority. It has also been observed that the relationship between the dalit political leaders and the masses is less authentic and weaker than the bond between the dalit writers and the dalit masses. The masses don't feel connected with the leaders as they become corrupt and self-serving in nature and fails to fulfil its promise of serving the poor. Dalit Sahitya as a counter-ideology is intended to represent the interests of the Dalit masses irrespective of caste or community.

The Dalit Sahitya movement has met the same fate as dalit panther movement in terms of splits and factions. The Dalit Sahitya movement has been riven by splits and the growth of factions. There are three major associations: the Dalit Sahitya Parishad, which is ostensibly Marxist in its orientation and is led by Baburao Bagul, the Asmita Darsha group led by Gangadhar Panatawane, and the Bauddha Sahitya Parishad led by Bhausahab Adsul.¹³³

BAHUKAN SAMAJ PARTY: AS A MOVEMENT TO A PARTY

Started in 1985, it began as a movement than party. Today, BSP is a well known strong dalit party and comes only next to Congress and BJP but it was not the case before. In its earlier phase, BSP was a movement for social change and it has launched social organisations like BAMCEF, DS4. Kanshi Ram, popularly known as 'Saheb' or 'Mannyavar' among the BSP cadres, is the founder of BSP movement.¹³⁴ As BSP has evolved through various phases; it's important to look at its journey from a social movement to a strong dalit party.

THE ALL INDIA BACKWARD AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES EMPLOYEES FEDERATION

In 1971, Kanshi Ram and his colleagues established the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities Employees Welfare association under Poona Charity Commissioner.¹³⁵ With the "welfare of employees" as the purpose in mind; it led to the formation of BAMCEF (The All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation) as an

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Vivek Kumar, *India's Roaring Revolution: Dalit Assertion and New Horizons* (Delhi: Gagandeep Publications, 2006).

¹³⁵Vicziany Marika and Oliver Mendelshon, *The Untouchables Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

employee's organisation. This organisation was significant in the sense as it provided material and human resources in the formation of BSP.

There are several interesting trends about BAMCEF: *Firstly*, BAMCEF made the beneficiaries of positive discrimination "morally responsible" to help the movement gain momentum by extending support in all ways especially financially. BAMCEF, in its own words, was conceived as a 'think-tank, a talent bank and financial bank' of the oppressed and exploited society, to pursue its mission ahead.¹³⁶

Secondly, BAMCEF kept its functions under closed doors and let no one know about its moves and meetings were also held at unknown destinations only known to its few important members. These important strategies helped in its success. But as everything has an expiry date; BAMCEF also got fragmented as one group was not satisfied with the decision of Kanshi Ram to launch BSP. Consequently, this led to the split with one group headed by Kanshi Ram supporting the party BSP in electoral mobilization while the other group (the anti-political one) worked in the process of mobilizing dalits for non-political but social welfare.

The stated objectives of BAMCEF are very broad and non-political in nature. As described in a BAMCEF publication by a senior functionary:

1. To provide hope and help to one's own downtrodden society- which has been made to feel as hopeless and helpless through the centuries-old tyrannies committed on it by the exploiters and oppressors in India.
2. To build, lay and strengthen the non-political roots of the oppressed and exploited society in the fields of social, economic, educational, cultural, scientific, trade, commerce and industry, which have been completely destroyed by the tyrant class.
3. To become a perennial source of inspiration for the oppressed and exploited society, by way of developing moral values for self and by exhibiting those values to the society as a model.
4. To create capable, committed and genuine leadership.
5. To generate, develop and operate direction centres to guide the oppressed and exploited society.
6. To develop and provide resources and skill to the society for its amelioration.¹³⁷

¹³⁶The New Messiah 1988: 5 Quoted in Pai, 2002.

¹³⁷Mool Chand, 1992. The Bahujan and their Movement. Quoted in Sudha Pai, 2002. Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution.

DALIT SHOSIT SAMAJ SANGHARSH SAMITI

DS4 (Dalit Shosit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti) was established in 1981¹³⁸. Through this organisation; Kanshi Ram thought of expanding its social base by including dalits other than government employees. It aimed to educate the bahujans and made them conscious of their plight so that they can struggle for their rights and become politically active. Within three years, BSP was launched in the year 1984 which makes it very evident that DS4 was used as a platform to make dalits politically conscious so that they could play a more active role in BSP. Thus, one could say that Kanshi Ram was a strategist who made all efforts for dalits to be politically assertive. In this light, it would not be wrong to say that BAMCEF and DS4 were the tactical tools that were used to ready the dalits to fight for the bigger cause independently without the support of upper-caste parties.

It is true that after long time of being exploited as “vote-banks” by mainstream nationalist parties, the formation of BSP has given the dalits a new hope. With its formation, Kanshi Ram also gave dalits, OBCs and Minorities a new nomenclature ‘Bahujans’. This also helped in creation of new identity for these sections, especially for the dalits. To concretize this identity he floated the argument that Bahujan constitute 85% of the country’s population. They have been suppressed, oppressed and exploited by 15 per cent of the upper castes.¹³⁹

In the recent past, the BSP in Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the major mobilising force among the Dalits in northern India. It has developed a confederation of OBCs, Dalits, Tribals and minority communities under one title, Bahujan, conceived to bind them under one identity, aiming to establish ethno-cultural unity and a wider political base. The terms Bahujan and Dalit are now being used in parallel to represent the cultural meaning of the newly emerging Dalit identity in northern India. Some 6,000 castes and communities are now included within the Bahujan category.¹⁴⁰

BSP is considered to be the most important development in the politics of Uttar Pradesh as it gave the dalits a new identity and never before its formation, dalits thought of contesting independently as whenever they contested; it was from upper caste parties. BSP was the first independent dalit party (composed and run by the dalits). For Kumar, the dalit movement that was reduced to BSP is a roaring revolution that drastically altered the political landscape of U.P. as dalits have come out from isolation to assertion.

¹³⁸Kumar, *India's Roaring Revolution: Dalit Assertion and New Horizons*.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Badri Narayan, “Demarginalisation and history: Dalit Re-invention of the Past.” *South Asia Research* 28, no.2 (2008): 172.

However, neither BAMCEF nor DS4 provided space to dalit women as they viewed them as a weak and an oppressed category capable of doing nothing. But on the other hand, we see Kanshi Ram selecting Mayawati, a dalit woman to head a dalit party as he was highly impressed by her oratory skills and her fiery speeches. This has not happened in any other party but BSP but the question that still remains unanswered is whether coming of Mayawati has helped in more dalit women in politics?

SHIFT FROM BAHUJAN TO SARVAJAN

When BSP was established, it was a dalit party that only included ex-untouchables as its social base but soon it realised the limitation and expanded its base by including SCs, STs, OBCs, and Muslim Minorities and gave them the nomenclature of “BAHUJAN” as it accounted for 85% of Indian population and they form the party while the remaining 15% that includes the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas are the enemies of the party and hence excluded them from its party’s organisation. The party in its beginning specified that the party do not need the votes as well as the support of these 15%. Under the electoral compulsion, when the party reached its stagnation point; it made a pragmatic decision of reviving its social base by mobilising the upper-castes. The party changed its ideology as earlier it mentioned that the party is against Brahman/Brahmanism and called them Manuvadi but with time, it changed its stand that the party was never against Brahmin but against Brahmanism that excluded the Bahujan Samaj from socio-economic, cultural and political sphere. The party declared itself as a Sarvajan party- a party that is open to people of all castes; the party not only welcomed the upper-castes in the party but also gave them leadership positions and provided them with adequate representation. In order to woo the upper-castes, especially the Brahmins, the BSP became more open as well as democratic and arranged “Brahmin jodo sammelans” in many states and also formed “bhaichara-committees” with the aim of developing harmonious relationship between the Brahmins and dalits.

Looking at the current state of BSP, Sudha Pai rightly said that instead of breaking the caste system and bringing a social change; it has made compromises with the same forces. She very rightly questions whether BSP is a movement with an agenda for radical social change, or a political party driven solely by the compulsion of achieving power?¹⁴¹

For Kanshi Ram, political power is the most important element that could help in the economic upliftment of dalits and provide them with dignity/ self respect. The Dalit-Bahujan state can prevent

¹⁴¹Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*, 1.

Dalits from being oppressed and provide them a sense of self-respect, carry out 'social engineering' from above by introducing policies favourable to them, and prevent caste-based atrocities on Dalits and improve their condition in villages. What the BSP wants, therefore, is not reform of the system, or more social welfare policies, as in the past, but a share in political power.¹⁴²

BSP has entered into temporary electoral alliances with parties like SP, BJP and even Congress shows that in order to capture state power, it was ready to compromise with its ideals which shows BSP as an opportunistic dalit party and is no more interested in destroying the caste hierarchy but satisfied in replacing Manuvadi forces (upper castes) with the Dalit-Bahujan Samaj in the state machinery.

BSP AND DALIT WOMEN HEROES

During the initial campaign and the formation of the BSP in 1984, a grand Dalit political discourse was established. After 1990, changes were brought in the political language of the party. Apart from the old symbols and icons of dalit movements, local traditions, caste histories and myths came to dominate its hustings. A Cultural Awakening Squad was formed to present this discourse of the past through songs, theatres and poetry to common people, performed just before a political meeting to gather a large crowd to listen to the political discourses that will follow.¹⁴³

In the 1990s, BSP tried to gain grassroots support of all Dalit groups. BSP, a strong dalit based party uses multiple mobilisation strategies to form strong vote banks. One of its important mobilisation strategies is to revive its past and give it a new powerful meaning. BSP has used individual female heroes and their heroic past stories to unify not only the dalits but also the other sections of the society that could help them win elections and come to power. It's a well known fact that the marginalised communities have always used myths, histories and heroes of their past in order to challenge their present position in the society and invoke feelings of worth, pride among its members. These myths, heroes of past etc help the marginalised communities to gain self-respect and assert themselves politically.

The BSP was the first to understand the significance of heroes as resources..... From the multitude of heroes of the various castes the BSP picked out a few women heroes of the 1857 rebellion who were projected as symbols of dalit identity and who were then used to build up the image of Mayawati, the leader of the BSP. The success of the party's political strategy can be judged

¹⁴²ibid.

¹⁴³Narayan, "Demarginalisation and History: Dalit Reinvention of the Past," 179.

by the fact that Mayawati was the first Dalit woman to become the chief minister of the feudal, patriarchal and caste-ridden state of U.P..¹⁴⁴

Use of the heroic female figures of Jhalkaribai in the Bundelkhand region and Udadevi in the central region of Uttar Pradesh are examples of how local figures and histories are used for political mobilisation by the BSP.¹⁴⁵ These historic female figures have been invoked time and again to construct the image of Mayawati as a dalit women icon who could revolutionise dalit politics and especially bring a social change in dalit women's lives.

The question that becomes important to ask is these myths, legends, heroes etc so powerful? Do they invoke feelings of pride and worth among its people? Do they really help the people to mobilise and vote en-masse? The answer to all these questions is YES. By glorifying the past; they feel pride and connect with their past as they feel that they were not like this in the past; the glorious past helps them to come out from humiliation they had a past full of heroes and it also gives them the hope that the notion of pollution and untouchability might diminish with time and they will soon become a part of the mainstream society. In other words, using their own "cultural resources", they are challenging the cultural hegemony of the upper castes and asserting themselves. It is these songs and past stories that has provided the dalit women the spiritual strength.

The above account very clearly shows that the Bahujan Samaj Party has used dalit women heroes to construct the image of Mayawati as an icon of dalit women. But it has not given them party tickets or important positions in the party organisation. The party has just used the dalit women heroes as cultural resources so that the dalit women could relate to the party and support the party.

DECONSTRUCTING THE IMAGE OF MAYAWATI AS AN ICON OF DALIT WOMEN

In India's most populous state i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Dalits have revolutionised politics and have elected a popular dalit woman i.e. Mayawati as its Chief Minister. It was for the first time in 1995 in the history of UP that a woman (particularly a dalit woman) had come to occupy the most important post in the state. Since then she became an icon for dalits especially dalit women and emerged as a symbol of their dignity and aspirations after years of oppression at the hands of the caste hindus.¹⁴⁶ Since then, she had come to power three more times but still Mayawati has done little for women of

¹⁴⁴Badri Narayan. *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 15-16.

¹⁴⁵Narayan. "Demarginalisation and History: Dalit Reinvention of the Past," 179.

¹⁴⁶Radhika Govinda, "The Politics of the marginalised: Dalits and women's activism in India." *Gender and Development* 14, no.2 (2006).

her community. This reveals the fact that the caste identity is more important than the gender identity. My claim is that in contemporary dalit politics, the issue of dalit women is not adequately addressed. This raises the question of credibility on Mayawati's leadership as when she said "*Mei Dalit Ki Beti hoon.....*" on the national scene; what's actually important for her? Is it the dalit or beti identity?

A look at the welfare schemes makes it very clear that there were hardly any welfare schemes for dalit women as such which denotes the fact that Mayawati did nothing substantially to politically empower dalit women. She shattered the hopes of dalit women by not giving them adequate representation and positions of responsibility in the party.

In order to keep its social base with the party; BSP channelled the government funds to give some kind of material rewards to its people by designing some welfare programmes aimed at the welfare of its people. One such programme was the Ambedkar Village Development Scheme in the villages with maximum dalit population. Under AVDS, there were total 37 programmes like the construction of link roads, rural electrification, construction of brick-paved roads, drains, rural sanitation programme, opening of primary schools/ building construction, and free boring, Integrated rural development programme, Indira housing scheme, making clean drinking water available, Kisan pension scheme, Widow pension scheme.

Pai states..... the party has introduced a series of exclusively Dalit-oriented policies of social justice in the fields of education, social welfare, employment generation, etc., the most important being the Ambedkar Village Programme into which a large amount of state fund was channelized.¹⁴⁷

Although, the party has helped the dalit men but dalit women have been neglected in spheres of empowerment. It has also been the case that mostly, the beneficiaries of the positive discrimination have been dalit men. Mayawati, in the party has not given importance to the gender dimension and has always raised and addressed the caste question. This shows that the party has been playing on gender lines throughout i.e. using dalit women heroes to construct the image of Mayawati as an icon of dalit women, using them as vote-banks, seeing their political activity in terms of SEWA etc.

BSP AND DALIT WOMEN ACTIVISTS

It becomes important to see how dalit women of BSP associate themselves with the organisation. Manuela Ciotti very interestingly argues that a number of low-caste women activists that she

¹⁴⁷Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*.

interviewed (within the BSP) showed resistance to the usage of the Dalit label for self-representation.¹⁴⁸ For them, Dalit is not the preferred term by which they want to be identified as; they prefer the term Scheduled Castes (S.C.). They don't consider themselves as "asli dalits" (true dalits) as most of the interviewees were from Chamar caste (it is considered as the better-off caste than other low castes) and are married to government employees and this makes them feel that they are better than dalits as they no more live in slums, they own some electrical appliances like car, air conditioner, washing machine etc, their children go to schools or colleges. they live in mixed neighbourhoods. As a result of all this, there is a total transformation of class and they are no more dalits as they are wise and educated.

Ciotti very rightly states.....Dalit as a subaltern ontological condition is denied by women on the grounds of this term's *disempowering* connotations. More importantly, women's narratives convey the idea of them being 'non-suffering subjects' while they often make remarks about their community's improvement.¹⁴⁹

Another reason of their refusal to associate with the term Dalit shows their anti-caste feelings. Moreover, they want to move beyond caste and want to be known as local leaders working with a political organisation for the welfare of the *asli* dalits.

The above account makes one to wonder about the use of the term dalit as the self-chosen term by the low-castes. Is the term dalit really the preferred term for all? If caste is not the problem for dalit women; then what is it?

DALIT WOMEN AND THEIR WRITINGS

There has been a debate going for a long time about who has the right to write about dalits miseries? Whose writings will be considered as dalit writings? The answer to this question is a bit complex. It is said that writing by dalits based on dalit consciousness will reflect the painful lived experiences of dalit people. The fact of being born a dalit alone is not enough to write dalit poetry. Dalit consciousness is a critical factor in dalit writing..... Writing by upper castes that expresses dalit reality in terms similar to that by dalit writers can be called sympathetic poetry. There is a unanimous view that only those who suffer oppression can adequately represent that oppression.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸Manuela Ciotti, "Futurity in words: low- caste women political activists' self-representation and post-Dalit scenarios in north India," *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no.1 (2010).

¹⁴⁹Ibid. 47.

¹⁵⁰Challapalli Swaroopa Rani, "Dalit women's writing in Telugu." *Economic and Political Weekly* 33. no.17 (1998).

In the literary world, the entry of dalit's writings has come a little late in the late 1980s and as far as Dalit women's writings are concerned; it's a very recent phenomenon. It has taken a lot of time for dalit women to come out of its miseries and exploitation and use their pens as a weapon to fight the oppression that they face because of caste-class-gender nexus.

With the coming of BSP; we see the rising political consciousness among dalits and consequently, increase in the publication of Dalit books, journals, articles in newspapers and magazines. Most of the dalit writers have started their literary career by writing their autobiographies which made them reading sensations in a day.¹⁵¹ Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (1997) and Surajpal Chauhan's *Tiraskrit* (2002) are the two well known dalit autobiographies of hindi while there have been no autobiography written by dalit women., like many other marginalized groups, autobiography is not simply a kind of literature but is a flow of assertion and resistance in its own right.¹⁵²

In these two well-known autobiographies, dalit women are totally absent. One example is the case of Dalit women, who are almost entirely absent in *Joothan* and considerably so in *Tiraskrit*. Though the protagonist associates himself with other Dalit friends and the Dalit community as a whole, the 'We' that has come to mean 'all Dalits' is also decidedly male. The silence regarding Valmiki's wife's own agency is one obvious example; Chanda only appears for brief moments in the narrative, once when she asks 'you're not joking, are you?' in response to Valmiki's marriage proposal, again when she receives a theatrical award, and once more when the narrator describes her refusal to use the name 'Valmiki' herself. No insights into this character's own reasoning, nor the different circumstances and restraints faced by Dalit women in general, are given in the narrative. *Tiraskrit* is an even more complex case since the examples of women exhibiting their own agency are interspersed in the narrative with derogatory comments questioning the moral character of 'women' in general.¹⁵³ This makes it very clear that dalit women have no place in dalit autobiography and when dalit women are mentioned, they are mentioned without any personal agency.

¹⁵¹Sarah Beth, "Hindi Dalit Autobiography: An Exploration of Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no.3.

¹⁵²Sarah Beth, "Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi: the transformation of pain into resistance." <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/easas/papers/4SarahBethpdf>. (Sep 24,2010).

¹⁵³Ibid, 6.

WELFARE SCHEMES FOR DALIT WOMEN

BSP is a strong dalit party with the aim of social transformation and economic emancipation. In its appeal booklet, it has very clearly specified that the Party will specifically focus on the special needs of the SCs, STs, OBCs and the minorities and will organise them in order to improve their condition.

The party also declared its aim to work for these downtrodden masses –

- a. to remove their backwardness.
- b. to fight against their oppression and exploitation.
- c. to improve their status in society and public life.
- d. to improve their living conditions in day to day life.¹⁵⁴

A look at the election manifestos of the party also makes it clear that the party has several welfare schemes specifically for the dalit women. We will look at these schemes one by one to have a better view of them like Mahamaya Garib Balika Ashirvad Yojna. Thethen Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Ms. Mayawati launched the Mahamaya Gharib Balika Ashirvad Yojana at her official residence on 15 January, 2009. This scheme would benefit girls born on or after January 15, 2009. In the year 2009, Rs.900 crore was invested in the scheme to cover 4.5 lakh girls. This scheme is important for the empowerment of poor girls and helps them in making self-reliant and independent. This scheme is basically for the BPL families of Uttar Pradesh. Under this scheme, the lump sum amount would be put as a fixed deposit or invested in the NSCs for a period of 18 years after the birth of the girl. The beneficiary girl would get an amount of Rs. 1 lakh only if she remained unmarried till the age of 18 years. Only the first girl is eligible for the scheme. Second girl child would also be eligible but not more than two. If the eligible family has legally adopted an orphaned girl and it completes all the conditions, then the girl would be taken as first girl and given the benefit of the scheme. The only condition that's important is that the birth of the girl child should be registered.¹⁵⁵

Based on the principle of “Sarvajan Hitai, Sarvajan Sukhai”, the scheme aimed at checking the decreasing female ratio, girl foeticide, giving girls respectability and making them self-reliant. This

¹⁵⁴Vote BSP Elephant for Change. <http://sarvajan.ambedkar.org/> (March 16, 2012).

¹⁵⁵ http://www.bspindia.org/bsp-gov_scheme.php (May 27, 2012).

will also help create constructive thinking towards the birth of the girls, in society discouraging the child marriage.¹⁵⁶

Another scheme is Savitri Bai Phule Balika Shiksha Madad Yojna. Under this, the government will give Rs 25,000 and a bicycle each to the girls from the families living below poverty line, for their education in Classes XI and XII. In order to improve the literacy rate among dalit girls, it also distributed 52,082 cycles so that it becomes a little easier for dalit girls to cover long distances in less time.

Mayawati wanted that the above schemes must be effectively implemented so that the girls are not considered a burden on their families. These schemes have been made with the special purpose of making the condition of dalit girls respectable and also to ensure education of poor girls.¹⁵⁷

The above schemes make it clear that although there were schemes for dalit women but these schemes did nothing to include them into politics. These schemes only gave them financial incentives but did nothing substantial to make them politically active. Under Mayawati's regime, dalit women are underrepresented in its government and the decision-making process. Despite the positive discrimination, we hardly see dalit women in politics as the main beneficiaries have been dalit men. It is dalit men that take advantage of these reservation policies.

Now we will look at the other ethnic party i.e. DPI in South. Before we look at the party; it's important to look at Tamil politics which have always been dominated by backward caste politics.

POST- INDEPENDENCE TAMIL POLITICS

The post-independence Tamil politics is marked by dominance of Backward Caste (BC) politics in terms of parties representing their interests. This makes one suspicious that if there were parties representing backward caste interests; why the marginalised communities formed other parties like DPI? Harris answers the question by arguing that the egalitarian rhetoric has not translated into practice, and the incorporation of marginal groups into a system of state patronage does not equate to an extension of democratic participation.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸J. Harris, "Whatever Happened to Cultural Nationalism in Tamil Nadu?," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 40, no. 3 (2002).

The dominance of BC politics doesn't mean that there was a total absence of other parties. Although Congress was strongly present in TN politics; its vote share was eroding and regional party like DMK (riding high on language nationalism) was taking over. The year of 1967 was an important one as Tamil Nadu became the first Indian state to elect a regionalist party by removing the so-called Congress as the party of consensus. The outcome of this result made everyone believe that the regionalism has taken over the "Brahmin era".

DMK came to power and ruled the state for almost 10 years but with time, the party lost its track and became highly conservative and personalised and consequently, this led to its split and formation of another party called AIADMK. In the coming elections, both the parties dominated Tamil politics but these parties became highly centralised and personalised and finally lost its radicalism and compromised with the Brahmanic forces. Over time both parties abandoned their anti-centre and anti-Hindi positions, softened their anti-Brahminism....and failed to implement meaningful redistributive policies.¹⁵⁹

As both the parties became highly conservative, the dalits were disillusioned about their future so they chose an alternative path and entered the mainstream politics and this as per Gorringe was the biggest mistake of dalit movements as it made them weak and ideologically bankrupt. He says "the radical possibilities suggested by the initial foray into electoral competition have evaporated. Rather than reforming the institutions they entered, Dalit movements have been institutionalised."¹⁶⁰ There are two Dalit Parties in Tamil Nadu i.e. Puthiya Tamizhagam (PT) and DPI. This chapter will look at DPI as it's the largest Dalit party in Tamil Nadu.

DPI

Under Thirumavalavan, highly influenced by the Dalit Panthers movement of Maharashtra, the DPI was formed in the year 1982. Since its inception, the party was assertive and militant in its approach. The party believed in "A hit for a hit".¹⁶¹ The movement stayed away from mainstream politics for a decade or so and survived on grassroots mobilisation and focused on its goal by following the ideal of radicalism. But soon, the movement took a pragmatic decision to enter the mainstream politics and contested elections in 1999. The leaders emphasised that the decision was for the betterment of the dalits as they will be represented by their own people and will have their own party. It was also

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Hugo Gorringe, "Taming the Dalit Panthers: Dalit Politics in Tamil Nadu," *Journal of South Asian Development* 2, no. 1 (2007): 52.

¹⁶¹DPI lacked resources to sustain the movement and this sense of powerlessness attracted them to violent methods to make their presence felt in the areas. So the use of "violent rhetoric" was used to raise consciousness. In this way, there was a strong connection between violence rhetoric and presence of their movement.

argued that the electoral boycott not benefited the dalits as the dalits were voting for the other parties and these parties were doing nothing for them but just exploiting them as vote banks. In other words, the reason that the leaders put forward in favour of entering electoral arena was that as the dalits were already voting for other parties; it's better if we (the DPI) contest elections and win elections and also because they thought choosing the democratic path would help them in the future. In other words, DPI realised that the dalits are making a mistake by casting their votes for the Dravidian parties as they would never protect them forget about pursuing their interests.

In order to widen its social base, like BSP it also started welcoming the other castes by offering them seats. The trend was initiated by PT. Hugo Gorringe argues that both the DPI and PT have attempted to broaden their social base by appealing to "Tamils" and dropping caste terminology from their titles (the DPI renamed itself the Liberation Panthers in 1999).¹⁶²

However, the decision was not welcomed by the movement activists and the party lost many of its dedicated members and their alliance with other parties like DMK and AIADMK at different points of time made dalits suspicious of its intentions and therefore, the party lost its mass appeal as well as its radicalism and the party is finding it extremely difficult to justify its decision of entering into politics. The party is also not able to maintain the balance between its grassroots politics and state politics. The grassroots mobilisation that was so effective in challenging local practices of untouchability and bringing the DPI to prominence risks being overlooked in the face of political compulsions.¹⁶³

DPI AND WOMEN

DPI as a movement has always supported the women's issues and promoted self-respect marriages and inter-caste marriages and has always given preference to women's choices and desires over socio-cultural norms. After entering mainstream politics, DPI has become institutionalised and more bureaucratic and lost its radicalism. Both PT and DPI entered into Tamil Protection Movement (TPI). TPI firmly believes in moral conservatism and ethnic chauvinism that is in direct conflict with DPI's commitment to women's rights. Addressing the Women's Struggle Committee's protest against poll violence he went further still: "Woman" is taken to mean being the handmaid of her husband;

¹⁶²Hugo Gorringe, "Taming the Dalit Panthers: Dalit Politics in Tamil Nadu," 56.

¹⁶³Hugo Gorringe, "Beyond 'Dull and Sterile Routines'? Dalits Organising for Social Change in Tamil Nadu," *Cultural Dynamics* 22, no.2 (2010):114.

women have yet to enter politics. Whether it be the Communist party or the Dravidian parties they see women as objects to be kept within boxes' (speech, 1 November 1999).¹⁶⁴

But now TPI that believes in "chastity of women" has started imposing "moral policing" and in a way, started restricting women's choices and independence. This confirms the sense that the demand for women's rights was a symbol of tokenism. It is pertinent, here, that none of the DPI candidates in 2006 were women. Thirumavalavan said he would 'sacrifice anything for the cause of Tamil' (My-Tamil.com 2004), but if the Tamilian 'solution' to exclusive identity neglects Dalit interests it constitutes a 'dramatic dilution of its [DPI's] radicalism' (Anandhi 2005: 4876). There is also a question mark over the extent to which an appeal to a transcaste identity can be mobilised given the extent to which the political sphere has been colonised by caste concerns. Indeed, in April 2005 the joint PMK/DPI protests against the erosion of Tamil culture faltered in the face of two bye-elections (Venkatesh 2005). If the DPI's radicalism is confined to nationalist chauvinism, what has political engagement gained?¹⁶⁵

As the cases of violence against dalit women is really high, there was felt the need for protection of dalit women. In 1999, the Women's Wing of the Dalit People's Front, thus, called for Dalit women to be armed for self-protection- a call that was taken up by other movements.¹⁶⁶

Most of the movements have a women's wing that addresses the problem of dalit women only. But it is seen that the women's wing is also subsumed in the work of the party and dalit women's issues are sidelined and neglected. '*We are not a separate movement*', Pandiyammal of the Tamil Nadu Women's Liberation Movement insisted, 'we are in the Liberation Panther Movement and we attend their meetings in groups of one hundred women or so'..... 'we campaign on women's issues too' (interview, 28 March 1999).¹⁶⁷

It has always been the case that women's issues have been accorded a secondary place in the party's decision; these are the issues of "low-priority". Despite the centrality of women's rights in the ideological manifestos of the various Dalit movements it was evident that the women's wings were effectively an after-thought rather than a systematic attempt to raise the voices and profile of Dalit

¹⁶⁴Hugo Gorringe, "Taming the Dalit Panthers: Dalit Politics in Tamil Nadu," 61.

¹⁶⁵Ibid, 67.

¹⁶⁶Hugo Gorringe, "Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratisation in Tamil Nadu."

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

women.....Women's wings were more embedded in localities and sought to address immediate concerns and issues.¹⁶⁸

As far as dalit women's writings are concerned, mostly they write on patriarchy prevalent within the society and against the discrimination that the upper castes practice against them but none of the writings reflects their desire to be a part of decision/policy making which affects them directly.

Thus, all the dalit movements accept the liberation/ empowerment of women in principle but when it comes to giving them positions of responsibility they hesitate to give them. Most of the dalit activists want their women to stay at home and support their men from behind. As far as DPI is concerned, their women's wing is very active in its working and provides women with the spaces of negotiation and discussion but has no welfare schemes for its women.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE LIBERATION PANTHERS¹⁶⁹

The Liberation Panthers is a dalit party in Tamil Nadu. The main aim and objective of the party is to uplift the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes and also Muslims and Christians. It is a party that believed in caste annihilation and socialist politics. Before Liberation Panthers became a party, it was very militant and aggressive but with its entry into electoral politics; it adopted the parliamentary method to resolve its problems.

Liberation Panthers is one of the main supporters of "Tamil Eelam" and has been continually staging protests, demonstrations, hunger strike etc in order to pressurise the government to support its demand of a separate homeland. It is continually struggling in connection to Eelam Tamil Politics in Tamil Nadu. Its famous slogan is "Tiger means Eelam; Eelam means Tiger" and has been going to Jaffna and delivering speeches and participating in conferences. As far as the Women's Liberation Panthers is concerned; it also conducted "a just war hunger strike" in support of the Tamil Eelam.

As the party continues to support Tamil Eelam; people feel disillusioned with the party and receives criticisms from its growing distance with the grassroots problems. They feel that the party is no more interested in dalit issues and remains non-interested in their problems.

The party also believes in "Tamil Nationalism" which makes the party conservative in its approach towards women which also widens the gap between the leaders and its members.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹It must be noted that DPI changed its name to the Liberation Panthers in 1999 when it entered into electoral politics.

Thus, it could be said that the party started with the purpose of caste annihilation but under electoral compulsions, made compromises with the same enemy forces and diverted its attention from grassroots problems and also changed its stand on the women's question.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary politics, identity based parties have come to play an important and determining role in national politics. Generally, these parties are the outcome of the discontentment of a particular section of people and thus, they are formed with the sole purpose of exclusively serving its own people at the cost of others. All the parties i.e. BSP, DPI and The Liberation Panthers have evolved from social movements aimed at social transformation and breaking the caste-system to strong political parties dominating the electoral politics.

One thing that is of prime importance is how these parties have defined dalits. As far as Dalit Panthers and the Liberation Panthers are concerned, they have defined dalits on the basis of *class* while BSP defines dalits on *caste* basis. Therefore, DP and the Liberation Panthers have included women as a distinctive separate category in its definition of dalits while BSP has not considered women to be a separate category in its definition.

The above parties have undergone major changes in order to widen its social base and gain votes as they thought gaining political power would help them achieve its aim. But the reality is far different from this. As they entered into mainstream politics, they changed their ideology and made compromises with the enemy forces. The parties have become highly institutionalised and bureaucratic and have lost its radicalism over time.

In terms of representation, they gave representation to dalit men and committed the mistake of homogenising the term dalits. Under electoral compulsions, in order to appease the other castes, they have adopted the “policy of accommodation” and have given share to its enemy forces.

As far as dalit women are concerned, it's not that they are completely missing from the party. They have been given party membership so that they can make up the numbers. In other words, they are exploited as “vote-banks” and are hardly given any positions of leadership and responsibility.

Although, the parties have women's wings but they are hardly seen as a separate, autonomous movement. They have been assimilated in the wider dalit movement which has a wider purpose of fighting the caste-inequalities. In the party meetings also, dalit women are discriminated by their party male members and the gender issues that affects dalit women are hardly given any importance. Women's wing of the Liberation Panthers is stronger than the BSP and has more politically active

dalit women but in terms of welfare schemes for dalit women; BSP is in a better position than the Liberation Panthers.

In order to gain support among dalit women, BSP and the Liberation Panthers have used different mobilisation strategies to woo the dalit women voters. BSP used the glorious past and its female heroes to construct the image of Mayawati as an icon of dalit women. It constructed the image of Mayawati as a fearless, courageous hero who will fight for the rights of dalit women and will enhance their strata in society. But when she came to power, she didn't work at all for their upliftment. For her, the caste question was more important than the gender question. She didn't give them any leadership positions but gave them party membership so that they could make up the numbers in protests, demonstration, rallies, dharnas etc. This is not to say that there were not any specific welfare schemes for dalit women but these schemes were to keep dalit women in its place. On the other hand, DPI supported self-respect marriages and also encouraged them but when it came to giving equal importance to women's issues in the party; it gave them a secondary role. The party as such has no welfare schemes for dalit women. Both the parties didn't succeed in implementing social change.

Over the years, BSP has become an opportunistic political party only interested in gaining power while the Liberation Panthers has lost its radicalism and has become more accommodative in its approach. Both the parties have compromised their ideals and there is an existing patriarchy prevalent in the party which hinders the growth of dalit women leaders and their interests acquiring a prominent role.

This leaves us with an important question about gender in politics. The question is whether these parties do not promote dalit women in politics or they promote them into politics but do not empower them? The answer seems a bit complex as we see that dalit women are not completely missing in these parties, they are there in the party organisations, and there are welfare schemes for them but the question that remains unanswered is that are these parties empowering dalit women? This question demands more research to look at the internal functioning of parties, how they are treated within the party organisation etc.

In other words, it becomes very clear that the dalit women's rights is not of primary concern to the dalit movement and also the dalit women struggle goes almost unmentioned.

Thus, one could say that in contemporary times, we see greater participation of women in politics like in Panchayats and social movements where we see women challenging their subservient position in society and exercising their autonomy. The participation has been more at the local level than the national level. Now, women panchayat members are seen more focused on women's problems that affect them on daily basis and make them vulnerable. However, we hardly see dalit women in leadership positions; but we see them all over when it comes to making up numbers. They are seen in large numbers taking part in demonstrations and protests and this seems to be the only way by which they can make their opinions heard while the parties use them as "vote-banks" and do not offer those spaces of discussion and negotiation.

I strongly feel that the general argument made against dalit women that dalit women are recipients of oppression everywhere is not true. The powerlessness that they face is due to the lack of resources not because of the fact that they are weak and vulnerable. The truth is that in contemporary dalit politics, dalit women's issues and concerns are not adequately addressed and the dalit parties do not empower them at all.

CONCLUSION

India is a democracy in which elections are conducted after every five years and representatives are elected by the people of the country through the process of voting. Voting rights are given to all citizens above the age of 18 years so that the citizens feel involved with the government. In India, political parties are central to the electoral process and they field their own candidates in every election and the evidence shows that candidates fielded by political parties have more chances to win as compared to independent candidates. This clearly shows the dependence of candidates on the political parties in order to contest and win elections.

This study is an attempt to look at the reasons for the invisibility of dalit women in politics and as candidates are largely dependent on the political parties; the dissertation also looks at the role played by the political parties in promoting dalit women in politics by offering them tickets and by designing schemes to politically empower them.

The dissertation has looked at the reasons for the low participation and representation of dalit women. Why they are still not visible in Indian politics? Are the reasons for their low representation socio-economic in nature or institutional? Whether the state actors are responsible or the non-state actors responsible or are they equally responsible? In order to investigate the hypothesis, the study has also looked at national as well as identity-based parties like the Congress, BSP and the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra and the Liberation Panthers in Tamil Nadu in order to see which party offers more space to dalit women and also to see which identity- *gender identity* or *caste identity* is more important to the political parties?

The first chapter has looked at the reasons for the passive political participation of dalit women in politics. The reasons are socio-economic as well as institutional. One can divide the reasons into two broad categories: *deprivation-induced exclusion* and *institutional exclusion*. As the term suggests deprivation induced exclusion signifies the exclusion caused by the deprivation of quality education and leisure time to pursue politics while institutional exclusion indicates the exclusion exercised by the institutions like political parties. Deprivation induced exclusion is caused by the low socio-economic status in society which is marked by low quality of education, multiple responsibilities, the burden of double work etc and in this, non-state actors are involved. While institutional exclusion is

due to the zero gender accountability of political parties, reservation bill, elite capture of seats etc and this is due to the discrimination exercised by the state-actors.

The chapter argued that the reasons for low political participation of dalit women are embedded in the socio-cultural norms of the society which marked the public domain completely as a male domain and restricted the dalit women to the private realm (kitchen). In the private domain as well, dalit women lack agency, autonomy, negotiation skills and are therefore, excluded from the decision-making process. The above account shows the patriarchal state of the society.

The present study has revealed that the category of women is not a homogenous one as dalit women are triply exploited on the basis of caste, class and gender¹⁷⁰ and they form a social distinct group. Their low socio-economic status like low levels of literacy, poverty, feminisation of labour, the burden of double work makes them politically vulnerable as they lack the resources to contest elections independently and as far as political parties are concerned, they do not give those tickets as they argue that dalit women lack “comparable capabilities” to be in politics.

It also argued that reservations not always ensure representation in the real sense as the evidence of introduction of 73rd amendment shows that on one hand, it increased the political participation of dalit women in panchayats and politically empowered them while on the other hand, the survey of background of elected women representatives reveals that majority of them are from dominant political class and their numbers still remain low that they do not form the “critical mass” and are therefore unable to impact the policy outcomes. It has also been seen that most of the elected women representatives make use of their caste identity as well as their position as local political activists in order to further their own interests and as most of them are passively accommodated they lack the capacity to act independently and are very rarely in defiance of the male members of their family. Most of them are “namesake representatives” and always look up to their husbands, brothers or fathers for political advice and suggestions.

The second chapter has looked at the Indian National Congress in order to see how it represents dalit women? The chapter has looked at the pre-independence and post-independence phase of the party and how it transformed from a movement to a political party. It has been seen that in the pre-independence phase, Congress played an instrumental role in India’s independence and women played a pro-active role in the movement against foreign rule. Gandhi asserted that the principle of women’s equality is an important part of the Indian National Movement. The use of non-violent

¹⁷⁰Vivek Kumar, http://www.ambedkartimes.com/vivek_kumar.html (August 25, 2009).

methods made the movement more feminine and encouraged the active participation of women. After independence, when the movement was transformed into a political party, women were systematically marginalised within the party and all leadership as well as office positions were handed over to men and politics was made an all a male-dominated sphere.

The leadership of the Congress especially the Nehruvian era and Indira's Regime were responsible for marginalising women within the party. In the Nehruvian era, the party became more bureaucratic and institutionalised. The party maintained distance from its grass-roots and sidelined women within the party. During Indira's time, there was further decline in active women's participation. There was authoritarianism and over centralisation of power. Her era was marked by violence and criminalisation of politics. As tickets were given to the wealthy people, women candidates were further marginalised as they lacked the resources (money and muscle power) to influence the party. After Indira's assassination, Rajiv Gandhi projected pro-women image and comparatively fielded more women candidates but all these women were upper castes, elitists, educated, glamorous urban-based who were aloof from grassroots problems of women. Thus one could say that women's marginalisation in politics is attributed to Gandhian legacy.

Even Congress's views on women's reservation bill raises doubt about its intentions to politically empower the women from the subaltern strata as it wants to pass the bill in its present form which reserves 33percent of seats for women in Lok Sabha as well as state legislative assemblies which would be naturally dominated by the upper-castes, urban educated women and in this way, WRB will be of no help to the dalit women. Another important thing to be noted is that the party has never fielded dalit women candidates and has always been an upper caste, class party. The party has no schemes also to politically empower dalit women. The party's manifesto has no separate section on "dalit women"; it only provides free education to dalit girls. The party's dalit women congress known as the Abhaya Jeevan has not been able to give more representation to dalit women within the party.

The chapter concludes with the argument that the Indian National Congress, which has been the traditional party of dalits has not been able to offer space to dalit women in the party structure. Abhaya Jeevan has also not been able to work independently and in a way, furthered the interests of the harijan elites. The idea behind launching "Abhaya Jeevan" has been to project a pro-dalit women image and it was only done with the intention of exploiting dalit women as "vote-banks", so that the vote share of dalit women does not get diverted to other identity-based parties.

The third chapter has examined the identity based parties like the BSP, the Dalit Panthers and the Liberation Panthers and the space it has offered to dalit women. The significance of the chapter lies in the comparative analysis of national party vs. identity based parties to see which party offers more space to dalit women? In contemporary politics, Identity based parties have become important as they exclusively cater to the particular interests of the group and are more accountable to its people and are considered to be more representative of its people's interests as compared to national parties. It must be noted that for dalits, the question of representation is very important as they feel better represented when their own party represents them. And this is the sole reason for the sudden rise and success of identity-based parties.

It has been seen that many identity based parties gives more importance to caste identity than other identities and therefore, underestimates other identities. In case of BSP, the caste identity is of prime importance and therefore, defines dalits as those who are exploited on the basis of caste while DP and the Liberation Panthers defines dalits on the basis of class and thus includes women in the category of dalits. Thus, by including women as a separate category in its definition of dalits, DP and the Liberation Panthers have given importance to the gender identity while BSP overestimated the caste identity.

To pause for a moment, it's such an irony that the two parties i.e. the Congress and the BSP are headed by women leaders and have come to power riding high on the notions of *Stree Shakti*, *Maa Durga* etc and projected a pro-women image of the parties have been restricting the entry of women into politics and thus, have shattered the aspirations and hopes of millions of women who have voted for Sonia Gandhi and Mayawati with the hope of being heard (of their demands) and empowered.

The chapter analysed the culture of North/South India and concluded that the North has anti-women culture while south has pro-women culture and therefore, the dalit movements and parties are also different in these regions. While the movements in south are more open to dalit women and movements in north are not so open to dalit women. The North/South divide in terms of socio-economic indicators like health, literacy rates etc has been shown through tables which gives one a clear picture of the fact that the conditions for political empowerment of women are not favourable in North while South India has a more pro-women culture that is marked by high literacy rates for women, better health, low infant mortality rates etc. And this has accordingly shaped the dalit movements in North and South.

Self Respect movement initiated by Periyar in Tamil Nadu challenged the patriarchal norms of the society and accorded equal respect to domestic work conducted by women. South has better health

rates, later age of marriage, low sex-ratios etc and therefore, ranks higher on gender index as compared to north where patriarchy is embedded in its socio-cultural settings.

DP is a revolutionary party which aims at overthrowing the political system rather than reforming it. The party has developed its own sahitya (protest literature) in order to attack the mainstream literature for upholding the caste-structure. While on the other hand, BSP is a dalit party in north-India that has a reformist strand. The party has made use of women heroes and their heroic deeds in order to construct the image of Mayawati as the leader of the party. Using women heroes, Mayawati came to power and she was viewed as an icon of dalit-women but after coming to power, no tickets have been offered to dalit women which reflect that dalit women have been used by the party as “cultural resources” but no party positions has been offered to them. A look at welfare schemes show that there are some schemes for dalit women which gives financial assistance to the dalit girls but has not offered them space within the party structure. The attempt to give financial assistance to dalit girls is done not in order to politically empower them or promote them into politics; it is offered so that the vote share of dalit women do not get diverted in different directions. All these welfare schemes are implemented with the view of keeping dalit women in its place and this will also solve two purposes: it will make the party look pro-women as the presence of dalit women in large numbers in rallies, dharnas etc will make the party look more “colourful” and also their association with the party will help the party in winning elections.

As far as DPI is concerned, as a movement it promoted self-respect marriages and fought for women’s equality but in 1999, when DPI contested elections, it became institutionalised and lost its radical edge and compromised on its principles of women’s empowerment.

One important thing to note is that all the parties mentioned above have women’s wings but no autonomy is granted to these women’s wings and thus, they do not consider themselves as a separate unit and are involved in the work of the party and hardly work on women’s issues and women’s issues are always considered as of secondary importance.

The findings of the study are such that the category of women is not a homogenous one. Dalit women are triply exploited on the basis of caste-class and gender¹⁷¹. The dalit movement and the women’s movement have not been able to address the dalit women’s question adequately as for dalit movement, caste is the only reality while the women’s movement is organised on the basis of gender and is dominated by the upper-caste, urban educated women and their own experiences are seen as

¹⁷¹Ibid.

universal. Consequently, the lack of organisational strength is the reason for dalit women's sufferings and therefore, they are unable to influence the policy outcomes of the government's policies but on the other hand, other minorities on the basis of their organisational strength act as pressure groups and are able to influence the policy outcomes. It has also been seen that most of the political parties do not see dalit women as a distinct social group and fails to look at the specificities of dalit women's status and therefore, have not been able to do anything constructive for their empowerment.

One important thing that was observed during the study was that the political parties have no idea of the grassroots politics. In case of local women activists of BSP (an interview conducted by Ciotti in north-India) it was revealed that these dalit local women activists do not prefer the term dalit; they prefer the term Scheduled Castes and do not like to be known as dalits as they do not associate the term dalit with respect or dignity. For them, they are SCs women who were satisfied being the beneficiaries of the reservation policy and welfare policies. This shows the lack of connection between the party bosses and the local political activists.

As dalit women lack resources to contest elections independently; they are dependent on the political parties to offer them tickets but the political parties are highly patriarchic and are against the entry of women into politics. As politics is male-dominated, the entry of women in politics is facilitated by the male members of their family and thus, all the political activities they perform are guided and supervised by the male members of their family.

Another important thing to note is that in contemporary dalit politics, the caste identity is more important than the gender identity and women's issues and interests are accorded secondary place in the party. Dalit women are used by the parties as "vote-banks" in order to win elections and they are seen in large numbers in protests, rallies, demonstrations etc and their political activities are seen in terms of *sewa* and they are systematically marginalised within the party as no leadership or party positions are offered to them as their work is seen in terms of "*sewa*" (social welfare activities) and thus, kept beyond the realm of "public-domain."

A look at the data on the number of women candidates fielded by the political parties suggests that gender accountability is not on the agenda of political parties including national parties like Congress. The opposition regarding the passing of Women's Reservation Bill also show the reluctance of male politicians in order to share the political power with women and the argument that the present form of WRB would lead to "elite capture of seats" holds true but it seems to me that the parties i.e. BSP, SP, RJD etc raised this argument not because of the fact that they are concerned

about the political empowerment of its women but because they do not want women of other castes to control the power. Congress, BJP and other parties who want to pass the bill in its present form are also thinking on the same lines. Thus, for them women's empowerment is not the issue; the main issue is the number of seats that will influence their winning and losing in elections.

Survey of the background of elected women candidates show that majority of them are from dominant castes and have links with influential political leaders and most of the women beneficiaries of 73rd amendment are just "namesake representatives" and do not influence the policy outcomes. This raises serious doubts on the efficiency of reservations as the implementation of 73rd amendment has not resulted in empowerment of women as majority of women representatives act as "proxy representatives" and fails to make any impact on the lives of women.

Thus, the above account very clearly indicates that the main reason for the invisibility of dalit women is the marginalisation that they face within the party structure. First and foremost, parties prefer male candidates over female candidates and therefore, give no tickets to women and in case, they give tickets it's always given to the educated upper caste women candidates who have strong influential familial links and a look at the case of entry of dalit women into politics is concerned, we see the same trend. Meira Kumar and Mayawati are no exceptions as their entry is regulated by influential political leaders and this is the main reason that they have been able to acquire such high positions in politics.

In India, elections are famous for the exorbitant use of money power; which makes space only for the rich-elitist class to contest elections. As dalit women rank lowest in the society on socio-economic scale; it becomes all the more difficult for them to contest elections independently and also, political parties are not interested in giving them tickets as they argue that women are not competent enough to be in politics because of the competitive nature of politics and lack the comparable capabilities but the evidence (table no.1) shows that as compared to men; women are more preferred and are more likely to get elected in elections. This shows that the logic given by political leaders holds no truth.

It was also observed that both the forces i.e. deprivation-induced exclusion as well as institutional exclusion are equally responsible for the marginalisation, subordination and exclusion of dalit women in politics. They are related in the sense that as they rank lowest on socio-economic indicators; they lack agency, autonomy to act independently and thus, remain politically vulnerable.

The study proves the hypothesis correct as broadly, there are three reasons that excludes dalit women from politics. They are excluded from politics because of their caste and gender identity, their low

socio-economic status and also because gender accountability is not on the agenda of political parties as they hesitate to give tickets to dalit women. Data shows that only reserved tickets are given to dalit women and they are not treated at equal par with other party members.

It is such an irony that all the parties and their leaders speak for women's empowerment all the time as they see the issue of women's empowerment the key to political power but on the other hand, they deliberately keep women outside from the political arena by not providing them tickets and positions of power. As far as dalit women are seen they are seen in large numbers in protests, rallies, demonstrations, dharnas etc and are exploited as "vote banks". This is the main reason that the right to vote for women has not resulted in active political participation of women.

It's also revealed during the study that all the political parties are playing on caste lines and using different mobilisational strategies in order to woo the different classes of voters. All the political parties that have been studied have widened their social base in order to win elections and gain power and among different classes of voters, dalits seems to be the winning bet for all the parties so they try their best to be in the good books of dalits. As a result of this political development, dalits have come to dominate the political scene and have formed their own political parties so that their people vote for their own party and not be exploited as "vote-banks" but as per electoral compulsions, dalit parties have become institutionalised and have made compromises with their enemy forces and have even given tickets to the upper castes. The above account shows that all political parties are opportunistic and wants to gain political power at all costs. As far as dalit women are concerned, they are marginalised within the dalit movements as well and are not given important positions and this is due to the lack of organisational strength which makes them politically vulnerable as they have no organisation to fight for their rights. They have no *pehchaan* of their own.

The condition of dalit women in India is shocking where there have been and are such famous and strong women leaders like Sonia Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Mayawati, Mamta Banerjee, Jayalalitha etc but there are no sincere efforts done by the political parties or by any famous women leaders to facilitate the active political participation of women into politics. The above account clearly demonstrates that the root cause for low political participation of dalit women in politics is the marginalisation that they face within the political parties so the reservations within the political parties will promote more dalit women into politics that will also make the party functioning more democratic and thus, will also improve their socio-economic status in the society.

All the above observations help one to reach a conclusion that dalit women are not passive recipients of oppression; it's the state as well as non-state actors that makes them political vulnerable but it

would be wrong to say that they have accepted their position; they are challenging their position in society and fighting back for their rights. And during the study, it has also been revealed that dalit women are more concerned with the gender identity rather than the caste identity as they are more concerned with the patriarchy prevalent within the dalit community and the double work (household work and field work) they have to do as a woman is what bothers them the most.

The study leaves us with an important question to ask: do the political parties promote dalit women or not or do they promote them but do not empower them? This will require further research in the internal functioning of the political parties as how do they treat dalit women in the party and are they given the space to speak their mind? How often do they ask questions Also to see what kinds of women are politically active and are they active participants in politics or remain as "mute spectators" and also whether "critical mass" is important for impacting the policy outcomes are the issues that needs further research.

Another important aspect that needs to be analysed and researched is how dalit women view the reservation policy? Whether they have been the beneficiaries of the reservation policy? Whether the new measure has brought change in their lives? And how do they see their political activity? Do they see it in terms of "sewa" (social activism) as argued by most of the political parties or not? Do they think that political reservations are the only practical solution for their problems? Do they think that they are exploited as "vote banks" by the political parties? These are the questions that needs to be answered and requires further research.

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