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**DAUGHTERS OF THE LESSER GOD:  
DALIT WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN POSTCOLONIAL PUNE**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction – An Education for the Oppressed

Without knowledge, intellect was lost; without intellect, morality was lost; without morality, dynamism was lost; without dynamism, money/finance was lost; without money Shudras were degraded (demoralized), all this misery and disasters were due to the lack of knowledge!

Jotirao Phule, the pioneer of women's education in Maharashtra.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation examines the many hurdles that lie in the path of Dalit women who have over the years sought education. Focussing on the city of Pune in Maharashtra, it will attempt to show how a combination of caste and patriarchy creates for Dalit women a system of double oppression. It will seek to reveal the physical and mental violence, the indignities and humiliations to which Dalits in general, and Dalit women in particular, are subjected. As a subordinated people, Dalits share something with the struggles of the marginalized in other parts of the world. Yet, central to this study are the specifics of the life of Dalit women: what caste and patriarchy means in their everyday life, their vulnerability, their denigration, their insecurity, their erasure of personhood and a sense of self-worth, all seen through the lens of education.

At the outset, I would like to clarify that I shall be using the terms 'untouchable,' 'Scheduled Castes' (SC), and 'Dalits' interchangeably to refer to the untouchable communities in India.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, I shall limit the term 'education' to that of institutionalised education. I therefore aim to focus on the specificities of the experience of undergoing formal education rather than education as a process inclusive of all contexts of socialization – as expounded by

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<sup>1</sup> Jotirao Phule, in his introduction to 'Shetkaryacha Asud,' (Cultivators Whipcord), in Dhananjay Keer and S.G. Malshe (eds), *Mahatma Phule, Samagra Vangmay* (Mumbai, 1969), p. 189. I have translated this quote from Marathi, and I am responsible for all errors and inaccuracies. Also see Phule, as in G.P. Deshpande, *Selected writings of Mahatma Phule* (New Delhi, 2002), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> For a reading on the position of the untouchables in India under the Hindu social order, see B.R. Ambedkar, 'What it is to be an Untouchable,' and 'The Indian ghetto – the Centre of Untouchability' in Vasant Moon (compiled) *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* (hereafter referred to as BAWS), Vol. 5, Chapters 1 and 4 (Bombay, 1989), pp. 3-27.

theorists like Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron.<sup>3</sup> Here, I would like to follow Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's definition, namely that:

institutionalised education is characterized not only by the form of the setting where education is imparted, but also by the fact that it carries a social or governmental mandate and, in consequence, recognition of the individuals' completion of designated stages of education, and hence a possible claim to employment or other kinds of engagement as part of what demographers call 'the economically active population.'<sup>4</sup>

Formal education entails systematic instruction for a particular purpose and also provides an experience that may lead to the development of character and mental powers. Furthermore, education ought to enhance a person's capacity to change, creating a willingness to accept new ideas and help people to adapt themselves to a rapidly changing world. In sum education must aim at developing all the faculties of the individual – physical, mental and moral.

Since World War II in particular, many nation states have had a stated commitment to achieving greater social equality through a combination of political democracy, corrective legislation, and education. The constitution of UNESCO thus holds that: 'the State parties to this constitution, [...] believe in full and equal opportunities in education for all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge'<sup>5</sup> It is held that education should be provided without regard to economic, social, racial, sexual or any other distinctions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, (London, 1977), pp. 5-6. Bourdieu and Passeron define education to include pedagogic action as exerted by all the educated members of a social formation as well as family education in course of uprising within the family structure.

<sup>4</sup> Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India* (New Delhi, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Art.1 para 2(b), of the Constitution of the UNESCO adopted in London on 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1945 as in Yves Daudet and Kishore Singh, 'The Right to Education: An Analysis of UNESCO's Standard Setting Instruments', Published by UNESCO in 2001 and from <http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php>

<sup>6</sup> Art. 1, 2 (b) and also see Jean Piaget, 'The right to education in the modern world' in *Freedom and Culture*, Compiled by UNESCO, Wingate, London, pp. 69-116; World Education Report 2000-the right to education: towards education for all throughout life, UNESCO, Paris, 2000; Jean Debieesse,



The programme adopted since 1952 of working towards compulsory and free education for all has culminated now in an initiative to achieve 'Education for All' by the year 2015. India, a member of UNESCO, similarly has a strongly expressed commitment to educational democratisation and development.

In this dissertation we shall examine the extent to which this modern ideal has been and is being realised. Has the expansion and democratisation of educational opportunities drawn the underprivileged sections of the population into educational institutions? Does such education 'empower' the masses? Or, rather, does it tend to stifle creative and independent thought? Furthermore, if the state proclaims 'education for all,' to what extent do Dalits get an equal opportunity to access this formal education, how in particular have Dalit women fared? How have Dalit women articulated themselves in relationship to this discourse? In this dissertation, I seek to answer some of these important questions through the analysis of an archive that I have created through interviews with Dalit women.

In an earlier research project on women of six Dalit communities of Pune, I found that there was a profound silence on the question of caste and gender.<sup>7</sup> This led me to my present research, which seeks to address this academic, social and cultural silence on gendered forms of caste oppression. It entails an investigation of the educational experiences of three generations of Dalit women in Pune. In response to my focused questions in interviews, these woman remembered boarding the 'school bus' and reflected on their past life. I shall ask whether education brought about any

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'The right to free and compulsory education,' in the UNESCO courier (July-August, 1951), p. 14 as in Yves Daudet and Kishore Singh, 'The Right to Education', 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Shailaja Paik, 'A study of the educational experiences of Scheduled Caste women in Pune,' sponsored by ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship Programme, 2000-2002. I interviewed SC women from six castes, viz. Mahar, Matang, Chambhar, Dhor, Khatik, and Valmiki.

profound changes in the position of these women within their families, as well as within the wider society.

### **Hegemony and Power in Education**

This section will focus on some theoretical conjectures about the connections between education, power and knowledge, drawing upon and inter-linking the writings of Jotirao Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. In the Maharashtrian context, Phule (1827-1890) and Ambedkar (1891-1856) placed great importance on education as a weapon for Dalits, in order to resist Brahmanism, as a metastasis, or for a subversion of the regime of privileges in order to empower Dalits: 'they sought to bring the Dalits into the ambit of institutionalised education to agitate them in order to posit a challenge to the system of privileges.'<sup>8</sup> Phule underscored that with education came the *tratiya ratna*<sup>9</sup> or the 'critical consciousness/thinking' which was necessary to bring about a cultural emancipation of the lower classes. Phule believed that with education Dalits would be able to see through the whole knowledge-power structure of caste society and thus be able to fight to dismantle the Brahmanical apparatus.

Ambedkar reinforced Phule's agenda, also viewing education as a means for an enlightenment that would recognize and unmask the lies that underpinned the caste system, and thus provide a base for resistance to oppression. For Ambedkar,

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<sup>8</sup> Bhattacharya, *Education and the Disprivileged*, p. 19. Bhattacharya has articulated three stages between the system of privileges and the education system: passive acceptance of hegemony in homeostasis, to attaining agency by attaining upward social mobility and in exacting co-optation into the rank of the privileged, or in positing metastasis by challenging the system of privilege itself.

<sup>9</sup> Phule exposed the exploitation of ignorant and superstitious peasant by cunning Brahman priest, and their subsequent enlightenment through education, in a polemical play, entitled '*Tratiya Ratna*.' *Tratiya ratna*, literally means the 'third eye,' which is opened, rather awakened after acquiring education. It is possible that Phule referred to the third eye of Shiva, in the centre of his forehead, whose opening implies great fury. 'Priestcraft exposed' in *Collected Works of Mahatma Phule* (hereafter referred to as CWMP), Vol. 2, pp. 67-68, a poem about the crafty and cunning books of the Brahmans, and a contrast between the comfortable lives of the Brahmans and the miserable lives of the Shudras, CWMP, Vol. 1, p. 81.



untouchables had consistently to strive to acquire education and political power. For him 'without power on one side it is not possible to destroy power on the other side.'<sup>10</sup> How can one think of Dalit women's education in relationship to such plays of power?

For Phule, the first battle was to gain education for Dalits. This struggle had to be waged on two fronts, one internal, the other external. On the one hand, many Dalits believed that there was no place for them in schools. As a well-known proverb stated: '*brahmana ghari ved-purana, kunbya ghari dana, ann mahara ghari gana*' (education is for Brahmans, fieldwork for peasants, and singing for Dalits). This mentality had to be broken down. On the other, they had to fight for the right to even attend school, something resisted strongly by the high castes at every level. I categorise this as the first-stage struggle. In a similar way, Antonio Gramsci likewise understood that the first stage in raising subaltern consciousness was through schooling for all classes.<sup>11</sup> Today in India this battle of the first stage of access to education has been, for all intents and purposes won; Dalits believe that they have a place in schools, and the elites have largely conceded the right of Dalits to education. Now, the second stage of the struggle moves to the fore, namely the right of Dalits to have a good education on par with high caste pupils and to be given equal opportunities to use their qualifications to the best advantage.<sup>12</sup> Ambedkar was also engaged in the first-stage struggle. However, he himself was a Dalit who had obtained education, and his agenda took this into account. In particular, he knew how he had been discriminated against as a pupil. He therefore bridged the stages, taking the

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<sup>10</sup> Ambedkar, 'A warning to the Untouchables,' BAWS, Vol. 5, p. 399.

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Gramsci, as in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1971), pp. 30-31.

<sup>12</sup> Both Ambedkar and Gramsci underline the importance of 'common schools' for all classes in order to undercut rank and hierarchy.

agenda towards the second stage. Ambedkar not only extended the agenda of Phule, but revised it and implemented it on a wider scale under the aegis of the 'People's Education Society,' established on 8 July 1945. I will engage at length with the Phuleite and Ambedkarite 'inverted Brahmanism' later in this chapter and their postulates on formal education in Chapter 4.

Ambedkar stood for the emancipation of the Dalits and he thought that education was a primary factor in order to achieve it. Hence he raised his slogan-- 'Educate, Organize, Agitate.'<sup>13</sup> Ambedkar and his ideas were not easily incorporated within the movement of the Indian National Congress, for he and his followers resented what they saw as the patronising tone of Gandhi and other high caste Congress leaders. In all of this, Gandhi is an important, though paradoxical figure. On the one hand he condemned the way that Dalits were discriminated against, and sought to gain for them a respected place in Indian society, but on the other hand he tried to achieve this primarily by changing the sentiments of the high castes rather than by empowering the Dalits themselves. Although he advocated education for Dalits, he also claimed a right to speak for them. Gandhi's influence will be examined in a critical light in Chapter 4.

Ambedkar's teacher in America was John Dewey, whose theory of inquiry aimed at producing independent thinkers, rather than imitators or mere repositories of information.<sup>14</sup> Ambedkar underlined his teacher's stress on the need to disturb and unsettle pupils. In an analogous manner concerning education, Gramsci placed great emphasis on the support and encouragement of free, creative thinking among all

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<sup>13</sup> This slogan was promulgated by Ambedkar in establishing of his first organization, the *Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha* (Society for the welfare of the excluded), in July, 1924. This slogan is still used by Ambedkarites.

<sup>14</sup> Dewey as in Christopher Queen, 'Reflections in the light of Ambedkar's philosophy of Education,' in *Pravartan-Siddharth College at Fifty, Siddharth Collge Magazine* (2000), p. 40.



citizens as vital to future society and government.’<sup>15</sup> Paulo Freire, the famous Brazilian educationist, borrowed the concept of developing a ‘critical consciousness’ and of ‘banking education’ from Gramsci.<sup>16</sup> Like Ambedkar, Gramsci advocated that the pupil should criticize the curricula and the disciplinary structure of the old system and thus participate actively.<sup>17</sup> Both understood also the difficulties of the task – the ‘extra effort’ that has to be made for self-discipline and self-control, in order for the subaltern to compete successfully with more privileged classmates.<sup>18</sup> Gramsci also understood how education frequently endorsed structures of power, stating that the ‘new type of school appears and is advocated as democratic, while in fact it is destined not merely to perpetuate social differences but to *crystallize* them.’<sup>19</sup> Thus, they sought only to ensure that a ‘labourer can become a skilled worker.’ Gramsci, whose philosophy pivots on the significance of ‘praxis,’ deals extensively with the application and management of education in a future society.<sup>20</sup> In this, he moved from his inspirational tone to a thoroughly practical exploration of what constituted a more egalitarian and liberating system of schooling. He clearly recognised, though, that schooling constitutes only one form of social activity within a broader network of

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<sup>15</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 31-3. Gramsci believes that children should first acquire and learn the basic tools of free intellectual thought and understand the cultural assumptions and systems necessary to express ideas in the society. Learning spelling, reading, arithmetic, basic history, and some common morals and ethics would equip each child with the fundamentals of ‘intellectual inquiry.

<sup>16</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 30; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, 1970).

<sup>17</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 37, 42.

<sup>18</sup> According to Gramsci there was a dynamic tension between self-discipline and critical understanding. For Gramsci, education was a prerequisite for anyone in the society, is a right for all its members, and does not truly occur unless the pupil is led to his own, free discovery of knowledge. For Gramsci this ‘special’ training/discipline is necessary for the disadvantaged [...]. For further details see *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 37, 41-43.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30. In describing how a school system should function, Gramsci details how the age of first attendance should be set and the various ages at which students should embark on the different phases of their education.

experience, history and collective struggle.<sup>21</sup> The school is thus one important site of struggle, which will enable the subaltern to govern and not simply be governed.

There is thus a tension between state provision of education that might have such a potential, and the desire of ruling groups to maintain subordinate groups in a state of subordination. Education can implant in people ideas that further the hegemony of the ruling classes in subtle ways, e.g. the belief in the naturalness of social hierarchy, in which only those with high educational qualifications deserve to succeed in life, and in which the majority drop by the wayside and deserve their subordinate status. The ways in which hegemony operates are often very pernicious; hierarchical notions are instilled as a matter of 'common sense.'

The concept of 'hegemony' of the dominant classes was first theorised by Gramsci, who showed how people inculcate dominant values in ways that are hard to resist. He revealed the ways in which political structures of power reproduced themselves through pedagogical practices, relations and discourses. In this, culture cannot be separated from systemic relations of power, or politics from the production of knowledge and identities.<sup>22</sup> He thus affirms the inter-linkage between political hegemony and pedagogic practices. For Gramsci the 'pedagogical was inextricably grounded in a notion of hegemony, struggle, and political education articulated through a normative position and project aimed at overcoming the stark inequalities and forms of oppression suffered by subaltern groups.'<sup>23</sup>

In *The Making of the Boy: Mediations on What Grammar School Did with, to and for my Body*, Philip Corrigan argues that: 'pedagogy works on the mind, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp.12-13, 53-56 as quoted in Henry Giroux, 'Rethinking Cultural Politics and Radical Pedagogy in the work of Antonio Gramsci,' in Carmel Borg, Joseph Buttigieg, Peter Mayo (eds), *Gramsci and Education* (Lanham, Md.; Oxford, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 103-4 and in Giroux, 'Rethinking Cultural Politics,' p. 56.



emotions, on the unconscious, and yes, on the soul, the spirit, *through the work done on, to, by, with, and from the body.*'<sup>24</sup> He says of bodies, 'they/we are the subjects who are taught, disciplined, measured, evaluated, examined, passed (or not), assessed, graded, hurt, harmed, twisted, re-worked, applauded, praised, encouraged, enforced, coerced, condensed.'<sup>25</sup> My own experiences and those of other Dalits often suggest such open sores/wounds. I seek to investigate such mental corrosions in the processes of schooling of the Dalit women I interviewed.

The focus on the disciplinary element in schooling owes much to Foucault's analysis of the ways in which the bourgeoisie have exercised their power through various institutions of governance, such as the prison, the penitentiary, army, and the hospital. Unlike Gramsci, Foucault did not focus so much attention on the school, though it is clear that this is a prime institution for such governance. Foucault, however, offered critiques of institutions that resonate for this study.<sup>26</sup> According to him, the state and elites adopt their own disciplinary mechanisms that do not speak of a juridical rule but of *normalisation*.<sup>27</sup> Thus, I will also apply a Foucaultian lens to study pedagogy and push to delineate Dalit 'spaces for resistance' within such hegemonic bodies.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers us the notion of 'cultural capital.' He argues that inequalities of privilege and power persist intergenerationally

<sup>24</sup> P.R. Corrigan, 'The Making of the Boy: Mediations on What Grammar School Did with, to and for my Body, in Henry A. Giroux (ed.), *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics: Redrawing Cultural Boundaries* (Albany, c1991), pp. 196-216. A similar argument is engaged with by Gore, Jennifer, 'On the Limits of Empowerment through Critical and Feminist Pedagogies' in Dennis Carlson and Michael Apple (ed.), *Power/Knowledge/Pedagogy: The Meaning of Democratic Education in Unsettling Times* (Colorado, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> Corrigan, 'The Making of the Boy,' p. 211,213.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York, c1972), Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (New York, c1977).

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 106-108.

without conscious recognition and public resistance. He brings out how cultural resources – especially educational credentials, selection mechanisms, and cognitive classifications – can be used by individuals and groups to perpetuate their positions of privilege and power. Extending the Gramscian argument,<sup>28</sup> he saw social hierarchy being consolidated in the formal school system, arguing that in any given social formation the different ‘Pedagogic Actions’ tend to reproduce the culture of the privileged, thereby contributing to the reproduction of power relations which put that such cultural characteristics into the dominant position.<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu foregrounds the various binaries employed for students. Indeed, he found a whole series of bipolar oppositions, such as brilliant/dull, gifted/motivated, distinguished/vulgar, cultivated/academic, eloquent/awkward, and refined/crude that both students and teachers employ to differentiate success in the various academic disciplines. He argues that schools consecrate social distinctions by constituting them as academic distinctions (‘you are a worker’s son,’ ‘you are crude’). Because actors believe these classifications to be academic, they employ them as legitimate labels without full awareness of their social consequences.<sup>30</sup> He also gives us the concept of *habitus*, which states that educational choices are dispositional, rather than conscious and rational calculations that lead individuals to reproduce status distinctions.<sup>31</sup> The question will therefore be asked as to whether or not schooling in India also tends to perpetuate and crystallize such social differences for Dalit women? Do Dalit parents

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<sup>28</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 31, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in education, culture and society*, Translated from French by Richard Nice (London, 1977); *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA., 1984).

<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction of Taste*, p. 465.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Bourdieu as in David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, (Chicago and London, 1997), p. 187.



come to regard their children's future in lower jobs as natural and inevitable and teach their kids to labour?<sup>32</sup> Do Dalit women themselves accept such cultural norms?

Gramsci, who had a strong political agenda, was centrally concerned with the issue of delineating areas of resistance in order to facilitate the proletariat revolution. Foucault and Bourdieu, on the other hand, foregrounded the overwhelming hegemony of the system and were pessimistic about the ability to resist something that was so internalised by those subject to such power. In this they failed to grant agency to the subordinated. In his later work, however, Foucault did address this issue, arguing that resistance was possible within each sphere of power. In a scholarly article entitled, 'On the Limits of Empowerment,' Jennifer Gore elaborates on Foucault's framework that would lead to the identification of what Foucault (1988c) called 'spaces of freedom.'<sup>33</sup> He said (1984), 'this work done at the limits of ourselves must [...] put itself to the test of [...] contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take.'<sup>34</sup> I venture to look for these spaces in the Dalit girls' classrooms and also to work on points of change. The point of my work is not to expose the paralysing limits of the state or the hegemonic powers therein; rather the aim is to seek 'effective interventions' by teachers and parents, and to advance towards an analysis of the

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<sup>32</sup> I am following Paul Willis, another influential writer on pedagogy, who bleakly inverts the Bourdieuan hypothesis of 'cultural capital' and suggests that it is the partly 'autonomous' counter-cultures of the working class at the site of the school which 'behind the back' of official policy ensure the continuity of its own under privilege through the process. He further says that this process achieves the reproduction of under-privilege much more systematically than could any directed state policy. Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How working-class kids get working class jobs*, (Farnborough, England, c1977), Willis, 'The class significance of school counter-culture,' in M. Hammersley, et al. (ed.), *Process of Schooling: A sociological reader* (London, 1976), p. 195.

<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Gore, 'On the Limits of Empowerment through Critical and Feminist Pedagogies in Dennis Carlson and Michael Apple (eds), *Power/Knowledge/Pedagogy: The Meaning of Democratic Education in Unsettling Times* (Colorado, 1998), p. 281 and original in Michel Foucault, 'Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault' In L.H. Martin, H. Gutman, & P.H. Hutton (eds), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with M. Foucault* (Amherst, 1988), pp. 9-15.

<sup>34</sup> Gore, 'On the limits of empowerment,' p. 281 and original in Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' In Paul Rainbow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, c1984), pp. 32-50.

matrix of social differences, oppression, justice, and equality, in order to re-think about Dalit women's education.<sup>35</sup> I interrogate the spaces of emancipation for the Dalit women and try to delineate some transformational interventions by teachers.

For Ambedkar, political education was an urgent need for people of all castes and communities, and in particular the untouchables.<sup>36</sup> Instead of leaving untouchables to the mercy of higher castes, Ambedkar wanted political power for Dalits, in order to assert their rightful place in society.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the nature and purpose of schooling must be addressed as part of a broader comprehensive politics of social change for Dalit communities. In an analogous manner, schooling for Gramsci, was always part of some larger ensemble 'of relationships headed and moved by authority and power.' He talks of a 'subaltern cultural sphere' in which resistance can be rooted.<sup>38</sup> This is analogous to the concept of 'counter public spheres' as analysed by Nancy Fraser.<sup>39</sup> There are numerous meetings, speeches, documentaries and songs recorded on audio, videocassettes, and CDs that are a testimony to the growing and strengthening counter public spheres of Dalits.<sup>40</sup> Following this, I submit that resistance for the lower classes and for Dalits has also to be rooted in public counter-spheres. The struggle over schooling must be inextricably linked to the struggle

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<sup>35</sup> I am following Jennifer Gore in her own, 'On the limits of empowerment,' pp. 281-82.

<sup>36</sup> Ambedkar, 'Evidence before the Southborough Committee, 27 January 1919,' BAWS, Volume 1, p. 265.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Giroux, 'Rethinking cultural politics,' p. 56, and original in Edward Said, *The world, the text, and the critic* (Cambridge, MA., 1983), p.169.

<sup>39</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy' in Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (eds), *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Practice of Cultural Studies* (New York and London, 1994), pp. 74-80.

<sup>40</sup> I myself experienced the power of such a Dalit counter-culture on a visit to Nagpur in October 2005 on the day of the anniversary of Dalit conversion to Buddhism, i.e. 14<sup>th</sup> October. Sharmila Rege and Pravin Chavan are working on a SARAI project covering the activities of such Dalit counter publics over a period of five years.



against abusive state power and to the battle for creating 'more equitable and just public spheres within and outside the educational institutions.'<sup>41</sup>

An educationist, Henry Giroux, has also engaged with this concept, arguing that 'by emphasizing the pedagogical force of culture, Gramsci expands the sphere of the political by pointing to those diverse spaces and spheres in which cultural practices are deployed, lived, and mobilized in the service of knowledge, power and authority.'<sup>42</sup> For Gramsci learning and politics were inextricably related and took place not merely in schools but in numerous public sites: 'he did recognize the political and pedagogical significance of popular culture and the need to take it seriously in reconstructing and mapping the relations between everyday life and the formations of power.'<sup>43</sup> Clearly, Gramsci recognized that the 'study of everyday life and popular culture need to be incorporated strategically and performatively as part of a struggle for power and leadership.'<sup>44</sup> Gramsci believed in continuing education inside and outside schools. Gramsci was a journalist before his imprisonment, and his principles of producing newspapers, journals, magazines, reviews and other media explain his pre-occupation with free and creative thinking for citizens. Such activities occupy citizens' intellectual acuteness and keep them abreast of the latest ideas and debates in the society.<sup>45</sup> Giroux goes on to ask whether school and classroom practices can:

Be organized around forms of learning in which the knowledge and skills acquired serve to prepare students to later develop and maintain those counter public spheres

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<sup>41</sup> Giroux, 'Rethinking cultural politics,' p. 56; also see Chandra T. Mohanty, 'On Race and Voice: Challenge for Liberal Education in the 1990s', *Cultural Critique*, 14, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division II (Winter, 1989-1990), pp. 179-208, esp. p. 192. This article has been published in many versions.

<sup>42</sup> Giroux, 'Rethinking cultural politics,' pp. 58-60.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>45</sup> Antonio Gramsci, in David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (eds), *Selections from Cultural Writings*, Translated by William Boelhower (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985), p. 414.

outside of schools that are so vital for developing webs of solidarity in which democracy as a social movement operates as an active force?<sup>46</sup>

One scholar, Maxine Greene, speaks to the need for educators to create such public spaces in their own classrooms, as a pedagogical precondition for educating students to struggle in an active democracy.<sup>47</sup> How do such spheres function in the Dalit case? Is there any possibility for schools to function as democratic public counter spheres-- as places where students learn the skills and knowledge needed to live in and fight for a viable democratic society?

I extend this argument by asking if parents and teachers have reinforced domesticity for girls through the process of schooling. I explore this by taking into consideration the feminized subjects and jobs that the Dalit girls were supposed to take up. This is a worldwide phenomenon where girls are basically trained for family life. At the same time, I would like to point out the lack of research about girls' education and their occupational destinies in the monumental works of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis<sup>48</sup> and Paul Willis.<sup>49</sup> This lacuna continues in the Indian context and we have less research on these aspects among Dalits.

While the persistence of the 'internal colonisation' of minorities by the majority, and the deployment of 'internal racism' – despite the establishment of formal democracy – has been discussed by scholars,<sup>50</sup> I am interested in extending the idea of the 'internal colonisation' of Dalits by the upper castes to include the 'symbolic/mental' violence perpetuated on them through the day-to-day exercise of a

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<sup>46</sup> Henry Giroux, *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, Culture and Schooling, A critical reader*, (Boulder, Colo., 1977), pp. 105-6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in capitalist America: educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (New York, c 1976).

<sup>49</sup> Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs* (Farnborough, Eng., c1977)

<sup>50</sup> This has been discussed earlier and most recently by Gyan Pandey in 'The time of Dalit conversion', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41: 18 (6-12 May 2006), pp. 1779-1788.



hegemony that is expressed through language, dress, food, education, cultural and political processes. I shall define this as a 'symbolic casteism' that is like a thousand needles that constantly prick and pierce the Dalit mind, intellect, and identity. I shall try to delineate how such an effect is produced and reproduced. Partha Chatterjee has stated that 'caste attaches to the body, not to the soul.'<sup>51</sup> Against this, I submit that caste in fact penetrates to the heart of Dalit minds and souls, marking them indelibly. Although many have struggled to gain a sense of self-respect and dignity, their denegation is continually reinforced in new and subtle ways, making it hard ever to win a battle that is both external and internal.

### **India and Caste Oppression**

We may now go on to look in more detail at the way that caste operates in India so as to create the conditions for the oppression of Dalits. There is a vast literature on caste, and also on caste and gender. Here, I shall focus on the writing that is pertinent to the present discussion.

Brahmanism is said to hold to the theory of *varna*, with the Brahmans at the top of the society and the Sudras at the lowest end. This is depicted as an 'ideal division' with its own logic (which Louis Dumont associated with *dharma*) with many beneficial aspects which have sustained Hindu civilization over the centuries. It is argued that low caste groups, and particularly Dalits, internalised such values and largely accepted their subjugation as natural and rightful.<sup>52</sup> This approach was found in modified forms in some nationalist constructions that sought to valorise caste not in terms of its hierarchy, but in terms of its non-competitive division of labour that

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<sup>51</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'Caste and subaltern consciousness,' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian history and society* (Delhi, 1989), p. 203.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Moffatt, *An Untouchable community in South India* (New Jersey, 1979), pp. 3-5, 148; Sunanda Patwardhan, *A Change Among India's Harijans: Maharashtra, A case study* (New Delhi, 1973).

helped to dissolve class strife, and its creation of a strong civic life that allowed for a healthy dispersal of authority and a strong civil society.<sup>53</sup> This helped to legitimise the caste system, along with its patriarchy.

Scholars have critiqued such arguments extensively.<sup>54</sup> Brahmanism and high caste nationalism – it is said – tends to locate the caste system in a pristine golden age, rather than in terms of the reality of its contemporary working. It downplays the oppressive nature of the system and its strong patriarchy.<sup>55</sup> Rather, the emphasis is on the unity of the nation state under the leadership of high caste nationalists. From such a perspective, centrifugal forces are seen to weaken the national integrity of India.

Gerald Berreman has argued about the Brahmanical understanding that: ‘Such conjectures are an escape on the part of the upper castes who are interested in maintaining and enjoying their hegemony.’<sup>56</sup> They fail to take into account the history of the radical struggles of Dalits and other anti-Brahmanical groups such as the Ad-Dharmis in Punjab,<sup>57</sup> the Adi-Dravidas in Madras, the Adi-Andhras in Hyderabad, the

<sup>53</sup> Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (Illinois, 1958); S.V. Ketkar, *The History of Caste in India* (Ithaca, 1979); G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Bombay, 1969); M.N. Shrinivas (ed.), *Caste in its Twentieth century Avatar* (Delhi, 1996); M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay, 1962); J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origins* (Oxford, 1963); Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (Chicago, 1970); Gandhi as in Bhiku Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse* (New Delhi, 1989); M.K. Gandhi, ‘Speech on caste system,’ Ahmedabad, 5 June 1916, CWMG, Vol. 15, p. 226; Irawati Karve, *Hindu Society-An Interpretation* (Pune, 1961); Abbe Dubois, translated, annotated, and revised by Henry K. Beauchamp, as *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (Oxford, 1906), p. 110.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Deliege, *The Untouchable of India*, Translated by Nora Scott (Oxford and New York, 1999); Kathleen Gough in Edmund Leach (ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan* Cambridge (Cambridge, 1969); Gerald Berreman, *Caste and other Inequities: Essays on inequalities* (Meerut, 1979), pp. 9, 223; Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The anti-caste movement and the construction of an Indian identity* (New Delhi, 1995); Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth century Western India* (Cambridge, 1985), Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The life and times of Pandita Ramabai* (New Delhi, 1998) and *Gendering Caste: Through a feminist lens* (Calcutta, 2003); Partha Chatterjee, ‘Caste and Subaltern Consciousness,’ *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi, 1989); Mark Jurgensmeyer, ‘What if the untouchables don’t believe in Untouchability?’ *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Studies*, 12: 1 (1980).

<sup>55</sup> Chakravarti, *Rewriting History*, p. 50.

<sup>56</sup> Gerald Berreman, *Caste and other Inequities: Essays on inequalities* (Meerut, 1979), p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The movement against Untouchability in 20<sup>th</sup> century Punjab* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 6. The *Ad Dharm* (literally, the original religion) has been central



Adi-Karnatakas in Mysore, and the Adi-Hindus in the Hindu belt. These were some of the radical strands that emerged in opposition to the Brahmanism of the mainstream nationalist movement during the early years of the twentieth century.

While accepting the theory of Aryan invasion and mixture of races, such groups have tended to 'invert' it to argue for the superiority of non-Brahmans, claiming to be the rightful heirs of India and descendents of Shudra kings.<sup>58</sup> Untouchables are sometimes valorised in such terms as the 'aboriginal' inhabitants of India.<sup>59</sup> Some Christian missionaries endorsed such critiques by denigrating Brahmanical Hinduism and calling for lower caste and Dalit self-assertion.

Some scholars have argued that caste as we know it is largely a colonial construction. This tendency can be traced back to G. S. Ghurye, S. V. Ketkar, R. P. Dutt, and M.N. Srinivas, with Ronald Inden, and most recently Nicholas Dirks theorising the argument more systematically.<sup>60</sup> It is argued that British rule significantly expanded, sharpened and crystallized caste as a part of its governance. The British, it is claimed, moulded preceding social institutions into a unified system of caste that was held to span India. In particular, the census reports that tried to

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among lower caste social and religious activities in the Punjab for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Juergensmeyer the history of *Ad Dharm* reflects the development of Punjab's lower caste social consciousness: it incorporates elements of social awareness from an earlier religious tradition of village Untouchables, it records changes in the Untouchables' vision of themselves and their society, and it gives expression to the enlarged hopes and expectations that eventually outlived the movement itself.

<sup>58</sup> Phule, *Slavery*, CWMP, Vol. 1, p. xxx.; Ambedkar argues and proves that Shudras were Aryans and belonged to the Kshatriya class. See Ambedkar, 'Who were the Shudras? How they came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society,' in BAWS, Vol. 7, pp. 114-131; Shalini Randeria, 'The Politics of Representation and Exchange among Untouchable Castes in Western India (Gujarat),' (PhD thesis, University of Berlin, 1992); Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra critique of Hindutva philosophy, culture, and political economy* (Calcutta, 2002); James Massey (ed.), *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in today's theological debate* (Delhi, 1994).

<sup>59</sup> R.S. Khare calls these movements 'autochthonous radicalism.' Khare, *The Untouchable As Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York, 1984), p. 85.

<sup>60</sup> S.V. Ketkar, *History of Castes in India, Vol. I* (Ithaca, 1909); S.V. Ketkar, *History of Castes in India, Vol. II* (London, 1911); G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (New York, 1932); R. P. Dutt, *India Today* (London, 1940); Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford UK; Cambridge MA., 1990); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the making of modern India* (Princeton, 2001).

delineate an all-India caste hierarchy created a new form of caste politics, in which different castes vied to be classed as superior. In *Castes of Mind*, Dirks argues that caste became a far more pervasive, totalising, and uniform, being defined by the British as a fundamentally religious social order. It was taken to be a peculiarly rigid social phenomenon detached from political processes, providing a specifically Indian form of civil society. This was seen to justify the denial of political rights to Indian subjects. Being a 'backward' social form, India required continuing colonial rule while it slowly modernised its social institutions under British guidance.

Although this understanding shed considerable light on the politics of caste during colonial times, it tends to underestimate the deep historicity of caste, and how it has penetrated into every pore of Indian society. For centuries – and long before the coming of the British – the low castes and Dalits have been crippled by the omnipresence of this institution. As one critic exclaimed soon after Indian independence:

The curse of untouchability is like a hydra-headed monster. You take away one of its heads, and two heads come out in its place. You remove it in one place and it appears in another place. You try to cut it in one form and it appears it in another form.<sup>61</sup>

A sense of caste status is deeply internalised amongst Indians. This core social institution has been fundamental to Indian civilization, culture and tradition, and is certainly not – as Dirks asserts – the 'craftsmanship,' or a 'handy work' of British ethnography. We should note what Dirks seems to be oblivious of, his provocative title-- '*Castes of Mind*' (emphasis mine). The monster of caste permeates the Indian mentality; all that the British did was to change some of the forms in which it was expressed. Above all, following Ambedkar, we may argue that caste is not a physical

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<sup>61</sup> D.C. Sharma, Lok Sabha Debates (31 August, 1954), p. 706, as quoted in Anupama Rao, 'Undoing Untouchability? Violence, Democracy, and Discourses of state in Maharashtra, 1932-91' (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1999), p. 41.



object like ‘a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion, it is a state of the mind. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean the destruction of physical barriers. It means a *notional* [emphasis in original] change.’<sup>62</sup>

In her interview, Kumudtai Pawde stated that ‘although I try to forget my caste, it is impossible to forget. And then I recall an expression and tell myself, “*melyane jaat nahi ti jaat*” (what comes by birth and cannot be cast away by dying – that is caste).’<sup>63</sup> Although this might in some lights be seen as an acceptance of an inferior status, I would argue that the matter is much more complex. The non-resistance of Dalits to their oppression does not, I would hold, reflect an agreement or endorsement of the caste system, but rather an accommodation (a negotiation) to (and with) the realities of the distribution of power, the nature of sanctions, and the opportunities for change. ‘Every opportunity is taken to utilize any crack in the wall of oppression to mitigate it or escape it. The most ingenious and persistent mechanisms imaginable are utilized to manipulate the system and to avoid the worst

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<sup>62</sup> Ambedkar, BAWS, Volume 1, p. 68.

<sup>63</sup> The retired Prof. Kumudtai Pawde, M.A. (Sanskrit), interviewed on 16 October 2005, Dhantoli-Nagpur. I have also translated some sections of Pawde’s autobiography, *Antahsphot* (Aurangabad, 1995). Her work is provocatively entitled ‘*Antahsphot*’ meaning, ‘a burst of the inner conscience.’ Pawde calls it ‘a spontaneous overflow of the powerful feeling’ and clarifies that in her work her thoughts are primary and emotions are secondary. See Preface to the second edition. Pawde reasons that this is not her autobiography, but a self-talk when one reaches the cliff after being injured by the stratified Indian society, when the mind is continuously wounded and one’s (Dalit) identity is callously chewed upon. I am responsible for all accuracies and errors in my translations. Furthermore, I want to clarify my usage of the Marathi word ‘*tai*,’ which means ‘elder sister.’ My experiential knowledge supplemented by my experiences in field work supports the increasing usage of the word ‘*tai*’ in social circles. It is easier to call someone ‘*tai*’ rather than address somebody older by her name. This is because addressing an older person by her/his name is disrespectful in this part of the world. It is a recent phenomenon in India, and mostly due to the proliferation of women’s studies departments that students and younger scholars can call some of their respectful teachers by their first name. The word ‘*tai*’ helped me facilitate an easy rapport with informants. I also realized that irrespective of caste and class, most women engaged in social activities address each other or older woman as ‘*tai*.’ This practice finds its parallel in other parts of the country when women in the south of India refer to older sisters as ‘*akka*’. Sometimes the word is also used for as a respectable address for younger women. For example, the *tamasha* dancer informants addressed me as ‘*tai*’ even when I was their daughter’s age.

of its consequences.<sup>64</sup> Some scholars like Harold Issacs and Marc Galanter have mentioned the psychological problems that this creates for Dalits.<sup>65</sup> It is the dilemma of the Dalit identity that they want to assert themselves politically while at the same time they do not want to be socially stigmatised by their identity. The Dalit mentality of defiance and an urge for social revolution are thus accompanied by a preparedness to accept and accommodate.<sup>66</sup>

The debate around untouchability was transformed by the anti-reservation agitations that began during the 1980s, culminating in the Mandal Commission and the all-India agitation of 1991 against the V.P. Singh government.<sup>67</sup> It facilitated caste-based mobilisation of different communities towards political ends and revealed the deep-seated caste prejudice that still remained among the upper-caste middle classes who feared their displacement by the lower castes.<sup>68</sup> It led to a host of reports in newspapers and books on the physical violence, atrocities and human rights violations committed against Dalits.<sup>69</sup> It also brought out that the ways in which discrimination is carried on in new ways, involving often petty, everyday, covert prejudice that is often not at all obvious. Often, it is the symbolic or psychological

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<sup>64</sup> Berreman, *Caste and other Inequities*, p.167.

<sup>65</sup> Harold Issacs, 'The Ex-untouchables,' in Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India* (Arizona, 1972), pp. 375-410; Marc Galanter, *Law and the backward classes in India* (Berkeley, 1984); Galanter, 'The Abolition of disabilities-untouchability and the law,' in Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in contemporary India*, p. 284.

<sup>66</sup> I am referring to some works which deal with such acceptance and accommodation. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in colonial India: the Namasudras of Bengal, 1827-1947* (Richmond, 1997); Tapan Basu, *Translating Caste* (New Delhi, 2002), p. xv.

<sup>67</sup> The Mandal Commission report recommended 27% reservation in government service for the 'socially and economically backward classes' (Other Backward Classes). This decision to implement more reservations in 1990 by the then Prime Minister V.P. Singh led to a series of violent riots among caste student population.

<sup>68</sup> Also see discussion on the same lines by Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Problems for a contemporary theory of gender' in Nivedita Menon (ed.), *Gender and Politics in India* (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 499-503; M.N. Srinivas (ed.), *Caste: Its Twentieth century avatar* (New Delhi, 1996) and *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley, 1996); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind* (Princeton, 2001); Anupama Rao, *Gender and Caste* (New Delhi, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Smita Narula, *Broken People: Caste violence against India's 'untouchables'* (New York; London, c1999), is a good example in human rights work.



violence that hurts more than physical violence. This is particularly the case in the modern urban environment. However, this 'symbolic' or 'psychological' violence remains largely unexplored by scholars. In certain respects, such violence is more corrosive and harmful than physical violence, as it permeates deep into the conscious and the sub-conscious, instilling a sense of insecurity and inferiority. Today, this social and cultural violence is experienced as often being more dehumanizing than economic exploitation as such.<sup>70</sup>

Although the understanding of the life situation and mental world of the male Dalit has become much more sophisticated over the past thirty or so years, the female Dalits remain largely unspoken for by scholars. R.S. Khare has for example acknowledged that this is a major lacuna in his own study of untouchability.<sup>71</sup> Much of the mainstream feminist movement has neglected the presence of 'caste categories.' One exception has been Uma Chakravarti. At the start in *Gendering Caste*, she emphasises the pervasiveness of the religious, material and social power of upper castes dominance, arguing that the castes at the bottom of the hierarchy are often complicit in their own oppression.<sup>72</sup> Later, however, she writes that the Dalits through distinctive cultural representations have created for themselves a normative world in which they have dignity, self-respect and even a measure of power. Chakravarti also points out skills and knowledge of Dalits and women were denigrated as polluted and inferior in comparison with the upper caste males' 'sacred book knowledge.'<sup>73</sup> In the context of education, we may therefore ask what are those inherent forms of Dalit female knowledge that are denigrated as inferior and polluting

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<sup>70</sup> My argument is also underlined by Uma Chakravarti in *Gendering Caste* (Calcutta, 2003), pp. 8, 17.

<sup>71</sup> R.S. Khare, *The Untouchable as Himself*, Introduction.

<sup>72</sup> Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*, p. 3. She draws upon the work of Anand Chakravarti. See Anand Chakravarti, 'Inequality in Rural India' in Andre Beteille (ed.), *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 129-81.

<sup>73</sup> Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*, p. 17.

as compared to 'sacred/pure book knowledge?' Why are such skills of Dalits and of women not seen to be vital as compared to that of upper castes and males? <sup>74</sup>

There are still many questions to be asked by feminist scholars. Do we need to re-think caste patriarchy and caste through a gendered lens? How do upper-caste and mainstream movements conceive Dalit women and Dalit patriarchy? I will attempt to answer these questions in Chapter 3 on Dalit patriarchy. I shall also investigate the effects of this continuing mental and symbolic violence inflicted on and experienced by Dalit women. In this, there was a continuing tension between their need to accommodate and their desire to assert themselves. I shall try to unravel how Dalit women fight caste, class and gender oppression along with struggling for 'accommodation' in educational institutions. What are the emotional traumas that they face in this in order to do so? I shall seek to unravel these processes by focusing on accounts of Dalit women's access to the 'public' sphere through educational institutions and places of work. These daily struggles in the private and the public constitute a 'double jeopardy,' a 'double consciousness' as W.E.B. Du Bois would put it.<sup>75</sup> The Dalits do not want to fully 'Brahmanise' though they do appropriate certain traits of 'Brahmanhood.' Education is a prime factor that enables Dalits to find a balance between what they are 'now' (their present) and what they want 'to be' (in the

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<sup>74</sup> Some significant works like those of William Ryan talk similarly of the skills and language of the underprivileged who are denigrated and remain neglected in educational institutions. See William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim* (New York, 1976).

<sup>75</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1994), pp. 2-3. This book was first published in Chicago in 1903. For Du Bois, 'a "double consciousness" is a peculiar sensation; it is a sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. A Negro for instance would ever feel his "two-ness,"-- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.' Du Bois explicates that "the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, nor would he bleach his Negro soul in the flood of white. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and denigrated.'



future). It is imperative to understand the nature of both Dalit men and women's education in order to understand the paradoxes that Dalits live in and their limitations.

There is a widespread belief that the power of caste is diluted in the cities. Indeed, in the Dalit imaginary there is a powerful conception of city with a caste-free life, as liberatory and democratic. However, Dalit theorists like Kancha Ilaiah talk of the shattering of this dream due to the Brahman-Bania nexus in the city.<sup>76</sup> Owen Lynch in his study of the Jatavas in Agra found that they mainly worked in the ritually polluting leatherwork trade.<sup>77</sup> Nandini Gooptu, in her analysis of the *bhakti* cults among the urban untouchable castes in Uttar Pradesh of the early twentieth century, also locates links between occupation and caste in the urban context.<sup>78</sup> In a similar vein, Vijay Prashad, in his study of *balmikis*, suggested that several 'lower' caste communities (like Chuhras) were constructed as a community of sweepers upon their migration to the cities.<sup>79</sup> Dirks draws attention to the continuing politicised violence of caste in the urban context. He referred to the aftermath of the Mandal Report, which causes great turbulence,

The sociological assurance that caste would disappear except as a form of domestic ritual or familial identity when it entered the city and the new domains of industrial capital turned out to be a bourgeois dream disrupted both by steady reports of escalating violence in the countryside and then the turmoil over reservations in the principal cities of the nation.<sup>80</sup>

In such ways, caste is again and again reconstituted within the context of the city.

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<sup>76</sup> Kancha Ilaiah, 'The emergence of neo-kshatriyas and the reorganization of power relations,' in Ilaiah, *Why Am I not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Reprint, Calcutta, 2002 of original, 1996), p. 43. Ilaiah seems to draw upon the Phuleite '*shetji-bhatji*' duo which oppressed Dalits.

<sup>77</sup> Owen Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a city of India*, (New York, 1969)

<sup>78</sup> Nandini Gooptu, 'Caste and Labour: Untouchable Social Movements in Urban Uttar Pradesh in the Early Twentieth Century' in Peter Robb (ed.), *Dalit Movements and the Meaning of Labour in India* (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 277-298.

<sup>79</sup> Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom* (New Delhi, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, pp. 14-16, 290-291.

In day-to-day life, discrimination is not however practised in such obvious ways in the cities as it is in the villages. This leads to a self-willed blindness to the discrimination that is suffered on the part of many urban Dalits. Some Dalit women refused to grant me an interview when they discovered the nature of the research. What are the reasons for such silences, for the unspeakability of such caste discrimination? In the case of education, raw statistics might show that many Dalit children are now admitted into schools and colleges. These statistics fail to bring out the psychological hurts that Dalits often receive in such places. They are continually reminded of their status. For example, schools and colleges carefully maintain registers of B.C.s (Backward Classes) in a way that advertises the caste of a pupil.<sup>81</sup> Paradoxically, such records are necessary for the BCs, in order to avail of concessions. However, the symbolic violence and production of Dalit-affect associated with this insidious marking out and making visible of a Dalit status provides us a glimpse not just into the pervasive violence of being associated with particular caste groups, but of the existence of caste-based discrimination in ‘cosmopolitan’ areas and cases of the violence between castes in the (supposedly) ‘metropolitan’ spaces of schools, colleges and universities and cities. Scholars have thus begun to ask: ‘why and how is it necessary to introduce discourses on caste in the “secular” space of the classroom in universities today?’<sup>82</sup> In this dissertation, I offer an account as well as modes of uncovering the injustices experienced by Dalits in Pune. I shall also argue that even when Dalits gain a position in the middle or upper classes, their status as Dalits is not eroded.

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<sup>81</sup> There are official records of S.C., S.T. (Scheduled Tribes), O.B.C. (Other Backward Classes), N.T. (Nomadic Tribes), V.J.N.T. (Vimukta Jati, Nomadic Tribes) students.

<sup>82</sup> Tapan Basu, *Translating Caste* (New Delhi, 2002), p. x.



In order to capture such subtle markers of untouchability in urban educational spaces an integrative methodology of various sources, both written and oral sources, is required. The use of such sources will be examined in the next section.

### **Towards the Writing of a History of Dalit Women**

Once we seek to go beyond sociological generalisations about Dalits and Dalit women to uncover a more subjective historical experience, we encounter many silences. Although this is true for the history of the subaltern in general, the extensive official archive relating to the peasantry, tribal peoples and the working class has been read 'against the grain' in ways that have allowed for the writing of their histories in more thorough and sympathetic ways. This exercise has been carried out in particular in the twelve volumes that have been published so far in the *Subaltern Studies* series.<sup>83</sup> Until the fourth volume, however, women were ignored, and although this lacuna has been addressed strongly in later volumes, the whole series has continued to be remarkably silent about Dalits. In all, only two articles on Dalits have been published, neither of which is about Dalit women.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Dalit thinkers – notably Phule and Ambedkar – remain the 'subaltern' of the Subaltern project.<sup>85</sup>

There are nonetheless rich sources of information about the Dalit world and their thoughts on various issues. In the subaltern history of the Dalits there is a tradition of dissent by the Bhakti saints from thirteenth century that is often considered as poetry rather than as a historical source, though it may be read as such.

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<sup>83</sup> *Subaltern Studies*, Vols. I-XII, (New Delhi 1982-2005).

<sup>84</sup> Kancha Ilaiah, 'Productive Labour, Consciousness and History; The Dalitbahujan Alternative,' Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Subaltern Studies IX* (New Delhi 1996); Vijay Prashad, 'Untouchable Freedom: A Critique of the Bourgeois-Landlord Indian State,' in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, Susie Tharu (eds), *Subaltern Studies X* (New Delhi, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> Although Partha Chatterjee has a chapter titled 'The Nation and Its Outcasts,' in his *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), nothing is said about this Dalit tradition, or Phule or Ambedkar.

Such texts help us to fathom the conceptions, actions and experiences of Dalits through their own voices.

There is also a more recent Dalit literature, penned by the writers from oppressed classes. It comprises novels, autobiographies, short stories, plays and poetry reflecting the plight of this community. In these works, Dalits talk about their past, their history, their families, their duties in the villages, their daily struggle, their poverty, their education and development thereof, their children, their employment and their journey to the cities. We also have stories from the busy cities, poems depicting the life in the slums, and residence on the footpaths, the 'culture' of poverty and the daily struggle for survival. We have novelists and litterateurs writing about their experiences from their middle class residences. This Dalit literature is the expression of their 'self,' emphasising the importance of tracing the specific contours of their past and present. They are trying to make a critical space for themselves even if on the margins. They raise polemics, a political protest, or set out a philosophical or ideological argument. They try to pursue their own separate analyses. Dalit writings have instilled a tone of immediacy to the intensity informing most upper caste criticism of untouchability. These writings have been plagued by questions relating to the origins of the genre of Dalit life narratives, its political significance as well as its limitations.

The poet Om Prakash Valmiki has thus sought to capture what he calls the 'anguish of centuries' (*sadiyon ka santap*): if you had to suffer such things as the untouchables suffer, he asks, what will you do? What will you do if you had to don the spoiled clothes of the upper castes, if you were not permitted to drink water in the



well, live in decent houses, read books, respect each other—then what will you do (*tab tum kya karoge*)?<sup>86</sup>

For Dalit women, autobiographies written by women like Bebi Kamble<sup>87</sup> and Shantabai Kamble<sup>88</sup> give details not only of their plight, suppression, humiliation, dilemmas and exploitation, but also their challenge to communitarian notions of a singular Dalit community. They give us the journey of these women, their social, economic, religious, political deprivations, their struggle and present status in society. The potential contribution from Dalit women writers from Muktabai in Phule's classroom of 1852 to contemporary Kumud Pawde,<sup>89</sup> Urmila Pawar,<sup>90</sup> Mukta Sarvagod Meenakshi Moon, Saroj Kamble, Asha Thorat, Hira Bansode, Jyoti Lanjewar, Sugandha Shende, Surekha Bhagat, Aruna Lokhande, Susheela Mool, Meena Gajbhiye, Vimal Thorat and many others in *Sugava*<sup>91</sup> and *Asmitadarsha*<sup>92</sup> are examples from Maharashtra which talk about the agency of Dalit women. Bama states, 'Dalits like me are fired by the desire to construct a new world of justice, equality and love. Like the double-edged *karukku*, they keep the oppressors slashed.'<sup>93</sup> It is such agency of Dalit women that I shall seek to excavate in the realm of education. Such testimonies provide a space for the proliferation of Dalit feminism

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<sup>86</sup> Om Prakash Valmiki, *Sadiyon ka santap* (Dehradun: Philhal Prakashan, 1991), as quoted in Vijay Prashad, 'Revolting Labour: The making of the Balmiki community,' Vol. 1 (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1994), p. 52.

<sup>87</sup> Bebi Kamble, *Jina Amucha* (Pune, undated).

<sup>88</sup> Shantabai Kamble, *Mazhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (Bombay, 1986).

<sup>89</sup> Kumud Pawde, *Antahsphot* (Aurangabad, 1995).

<sup>90</sup> Urmila Pawar, *Aaydaan* (Mumbai, 2003).

<sup>91</sup> This is a publishing house in Pune, under the auspices of Prof. Vilas Wagh. It is a wonderful platform for Dalit authors.

<sup>92</sup> *Asmitadarsha* is a magazine featuring the writings by mostly Dalit authors started by Gangadhar Pantawane during the peak days of the Dalit Panther movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It is housed in Aurangabad.

<sup>93</sup> Bama's autobiography '*Karukku*' is provocatively titled, signifying the oppressive present and the struggle against it, a metaphor that connects the present with the future. Bama, *Karukku*, Translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom (New Delhi, 200); also see M.S.S. Pandian, 'On a Dalit woman's testimony' *Seminar-Dalit* 471, (Nov 1998), pp. 53-56. This is just one example from Tamilnadu.

which remains invisible to most middle class upper caste feminists.<sup>94</sup> This act of passage from memory to history is happening in a moment of redefining of Dalit feminism through a revitalization of history.<sup>95</sup>

Works of some Dalit feminists like Kumud Pawde, Urmila Pawar, Jyoti Lanjewar (from Maharashtra),<sup>96</sup> and Challapalli Swaroopa Rani (from Andhra Pradesh) bear testimony to the 'double jeopardy' of Dalit women.<sup>97</sup> They theorize that Dalit women are 'Dalits (in relation) to Dalit men'; thus they are 'doubly Dalit' as they bear the burden of gender and caste oppression.<sup>98</sup> This situation of Dalit women mirrors that of African-American women who are 'doubly bound' by race and gender.<sup>99</sup> However, what are the specific experiences of such 'Dalit of the Dalits' women in educational institutions?

For Ambedkar, 'untouchability constitutes a definite set of interests which the untouchables alone can speak for. Hence, it is evident that we must find the

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<sup>94</sup> See Chapter 3 for such discussions.

<sup>95</sup> I am drawing upon Pierre Nora's work. See Pierre Nora, 'Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de Memoire,' *Representations*, 26, Spring (1989), p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> Prof. Kumudtai Pawde, 16 October 2005, Dhantoli-Nagpur; Urmilatai Pawar, M.A. (Marathi literature) interviewed on 5-7 September 2005, Borivili-Mumbai; Prof. Jyotitai Lanjewar, M.A. (Marathi literature), interviewed on 10 October 2005, Ambazhari-Nagpur.

<sup>97</sup> Challapalli Swaroopa Rani, 'Dalit men's Writing in Telugu,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, (25 April 1998), WS 22, as in Tapan Basu, *Translating Caste* (New Delhi, 2002), p. 195.

<sup>98</sup> Jyoti Lanjewar, 10 October 2005, and also in 'Dalit Literature and Dalit Women,' in P. G. Jogdand (ed.), *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives* (New Delhi, 1995). Caste politics glosses over gender difference as it has always been dominated by male leaders, with the issue of gender being either subsumed within its general rhetoric, or simply set aside as trivial or frivolous. Only recently some feminist renderings have investigated the multiple and changing manifestations of caste in Indian society in order to understand the particular forms in which gender inequality and sex subordination are produced. See works of Dalit feminists like Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, *Amhihi Itihas Ghadawala: Ambedkari Chalvalit Streeyancha Sahabhag* (Pune, c1989), others like, Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios* (New Delhi, 2006), Anupama Rao, *Gender and Caste* (New Delhi, 2003); Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste through a feminist lens* (Calcutta, 2003) for the Indian context.

<sup>99</sup> I draw upon such theorized works on subalterns in other landscapes whose lives have immense parallels with Dalits in India. Works of scholars like Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, 1991), p. 31 and C. Gay and K. Tate, 'Doubly Bound: The Impact of Gender and Race on the Politics of Black Women,' *Political Psychology*, 19: 1 (March, 1998), pp. 169-184, among others, amply signify that Black women are 'doubly bound' by race and gender. Also see Chapter 3.



untouchables to represent their grievances which are their interests.’<sup>100</sup> I agree to some extent with the African-American feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins that ‘the oppressed brutality cannot be experienced by the oppressor who writes about it, and *so the Black [Dalit women in my case] women must write their own histories.*’<sup>101</sup>

Dalits must increasingly attempt to write their own histories, delineate their experiences, and their life stories, for if ‘we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others for their use and our detriment.’<sup>102</sup> Despite this, it is not the case that non-Dalits can never write a satisfactory history of the Dalits. It is possible for the outsider to develop sympathy and empathy towards the suffering and oppression that being a Dalit entails.<sup>103</sup> In particular, Dalit women may reach out, and be reached out to, by other women. In this way a link may be forged between feminist historians.

The other very important source for Dalit history is that of the oral. In my interview with her, Urmila Pawar stated: ‘I was thinking about women’s contribution in the Mahad *satyagraha* and other struggles. When I spoke to people about this idea they ridiculed me. “There were no women,” they said. However, I could not believe

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<sup>100</sup> Ambedkar, ‘Evidence before the Southborough Committee on Franchise’ Examined on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1919, in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 256.

<sup>101</sup> Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, pp. 34-35. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>102</sup> I concur with Audre Lorde as quoted in Collins, *Black Feminist thought*, p. 35.

<sup>103</sup> This debate on differential experience, social location, and questions of representation are also detailed in Gopal Guru, ‘Dalit women talk differently,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30: 41 and 42 (14-21 October 1995), pp. 2548-2550; Sharmila Rege, ‘Dalit women talk differently: A critique of ‘difference’ and towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint position,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33: 44 (October 1998), pp. WS 39-WS 46, and ‘Real Feminism’ and Dalit Women, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35: 6 (February 2000), pp. 492-495; Also see the Adiya Nigam-V. Geetha-Meera Nanda Debate on the ‘authenticity of voice.’ It suffices to say here that I do endorse Nigam, granting centrality to the experiences of Dalit oppression for the historian, thus breaking the ‘subject-object’ dichotomy, which the elite objective scientist is unable to share. But at the same time, I would side with V. Geetha and Meera Nanda that we need to rationalise Nigam’s categorical framework which runs the risk of redefining/reinscribing Dalitness as ‘otherness.’ See Nigam Aditya, ‘Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35: 48 (25 November 2000), pp.4256-4268; V. Geetha, ‘Who is the third that walks behind you? Dalit critique of modernity,’ 36: 2 (13 January 2001), pp. 163-164; and Meera Nanda, ‘Hitching Dalit modernity to anti-modernist wagon,’ 36: 17 (28 April 2001), pp. 1480-1483.

this and ventured to explore these gaps and blanks and commenced on my project.’<sup>104</sup> She and Meenakshi Moon went around Nagpur, Aurangabad, Akola, and Amravati carrying tape recorders to interview Dalit women. *Amhihi Ithihas Ghadawala* (We Made History too) is a monumental work in which the authors painstakingly interview women involved with the struggle of their emancipator, Dr. Ambedkar.<sup>105</sup> In an analogous exercise, I attempt to trace women’s voices in the arena of education.

The subalterns had no letter knowledge in order to stack the official archives and hence the significance of their oral tradition ‘hopes to draw attention to the lacuna in the theoretical analysis of historical sources and to remedy it by examining the value of oral traditions as a historical source.’<sup>106</sup> Oral sources are a necessary condition for a history of the non-hegemonic classes; they are less necessary for the history of the ruling classes who have had control over writing and leave behind much more abundant written records.<sup>107</sup> We have to seriously engage in oral history in order to engage with the Dalit women’s own understanding of their history, in order to write richer and multi-layered accounts including official and non-official history.<sup>108</sup> Dalit histories cannot be captured in archives and we need to develop this critical past

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<sup>104</sup> Urmila Pawar, M.A. (Marathi literature), Retired officer, Interviewed on 5-7 September 2004, Borivili-Mumbai.

<sup>105</sup> Pawar and Moon, *Amhihi Ithihas Ghadawala* (Bombay, 1989). Also see excerpts from a dialogue with Urmila Pawar at the Oral History Workshop, January 18, 1998, organized by Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW) as reproduced in Basu (ed.), *Translating Caste*, pp. 235-241.

<sup>106</sup> I draw upon works of oral historians like Vansina, Portelli, and others. See Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A study in historical methodology* (Chicago, c1961): Introduction

<sup>107</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The battle of Valle Giulia: oral history and the art of dialogue*, (Madison Wis., c1997) and *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other Stories: form and meaning in oral history* (Albany, 1990); James Massey (ed.), *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today’s Theological debate* (Delhi, 1994), pp. 4-6.

<sup>108</sup> David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: adivasi assertion in western India*, (Delhi; New York, 1987), *Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and usurers in Western India*, (Delhi; New York, 1996), ‘Community, Patriarchy, Honour: Raghu Bhangare’s revolt,’ *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 23: 1 (October 1995), p. 92; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past Oral history* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 88-90; Gail Omvedt, *We Will Smash the Prison* (London, 1980); Sumitra Bhavé, *A Pan on Fire*, Translated by Gauri Deshpande (New Delhi, 1988); Lalitha, K., Vasantha, K., Rama, M., Uma, M. Susie, T., Veena, S., *We Were Making History* (New Delhi, 1989); Richard Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview* (London, 1998); Jane Thompson, *Women, Class and Education*, (London, 2000): Introduction, among many others.



through the ‘eyes of the present.’<sup>109</sup> Such a methodology is crucial to hear the ‘language of silence of caste’ that I have alluded to in the preceding pages. In my research, I contacted women from all backgrounds – rural and urban, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed – to provide detailed accounts that related to the objects of this study. In this, I always paid attention to the uniqueness of each case, not looking merely for abstractions.<sup>110</sup>

The collection of such life stories provides a way of putting on record the experiences of relatively powerless Dalit women whose ways of knowing and ways of seeing the world are rarely acknowledged, let alone celebrated, in the expressions of a Brahmanical hegemonic culture. Telling and listening to such stories also creates vital links among participants and it can be a powerful and practical instrument of conscientization.<sup>111</sup> Personal narratives of Dalit women will offer them a place from which to reflect upon our past experience; to scrutinize our stories which carry agency, meaning and information about the social and psychological positions we inhabit. And it is also significant to explore as to what becomes of these stories. The current popularity of autobiography and narrativity in feminist research is a measure of the significance now attached to experience, reflection and psychoanalytic understanding, as a counter balance to the kind of public and external evidence which is available from historical and structural analysis and political economy. Carolyn Steedman exemplifies the theoretical genre perfectly, whilst insisting that, ‘once a

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<sup>109</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History* (England, 1987), p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview* (London, 1998); Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, p. 35.

<sup>111</sup> This refers to the concept of ‘critical consciousness’ which we discussed in the earlier pages. For, Phule, Marx, Gramsci, Ambedkar, Freire and so on this means the ‘awakening of the slave to the idea of his slavery and thus leading to a rebellion.’ I am also drawing on Jane Thompson’s insightful work on working class women’s education in England. See Jane Thompson, *Women, Class and Education*, (London, 2000); Paula Allman, *Revolutionary social transformation: democratic hopes, political possibilities and critical education* (Westport, 1999).

story is told, it ceases to be a story; it becomes a piece of history, an interpretative device.’<sup>112</sup>

It has been a challenging task to intricately weave through the life stories of our ‘unheard,’ ‘unsung,’ ‘forgotten’ Dalit women through my own *subjectivation*.<sup>113</sup> Such a study requires not only a reflection on certain fundamental issues of Dalit self and society, but also a careful handling of their ‘diverse’ thoughts and experiences, including those localized and scattered. I have had some very intriguing and engaging experiences while conducting ethnographic interviews with ‘my’ Dalit women which the elite scientist is unable to share. I have been able to enter their ‘sequestered spaces,’ restricted to elite scholars and successfully unpack their experiences, making them reflect on their past history. I have seen and known some of my informants since my childhood. Most of the time my informants used the collectives ‘*aaplyat*’ (in our community), ‘*aapan*’ (we), ‘*aapla samaj*’ (our community); thus talking to me as a Dalit woman. Being a Dalit woman certainly helped me easily intrude into their private lives and engage with them fully. My fieldwork has been my life itself; the experiences of growing up as a Dalit in Pune. It has required me to seriously take into account the question of experience; wherein the deconstruction and reconstruction of history can take place, in order to develop critical knowledge and a critique of knowledge itself.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman-A story of Two Lives* (London, 1986), p. 143.

<sup>113</sup> I am once again drawing on Foucault’s paradoxical character of ‘subjectivation of the prisoner’ [*assujettissement*]. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 203.

<sup>114</sup> I am drawing on some feminists’ commendable work on debates of identity and experience. See C.T. Mohanty, ‘On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s’ in Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (eds), *Beyond Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, (New York and London, 1994), pp. 147-163; Paula Moya, ‘Postmodernism, ‘Realism,’ and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism,’ in J.M. Alexander and C.T. Mohanty (eds), *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York and London, 1997), p. 145, and original in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds), *This Bridge called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York, 1983), p. 23. Also see Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, pp. xi-xii.



I selected my interviewees through what sociologists call 'snowball' sampling. I contacted teachers, lecturers, social workers, relatives, acquaintances and friends who helped me enlist my informants. My first interviewee was my grandmother who questioned me as to why I was speaking it to her. Why did I want to know her degraded past life? She did not want to remember how she carried the carrion on her head (she told me this later). However after some persuasion she reflected on her life in the village of Takali (Taluka, Kopergaon; District, Ahmednagar). I argue that to some extent the Dalit experiences of pain, their suppression, oppression, their ideologies of protest and liberation constitute new knowledge, leading to a Dalit epistemology, furthermore Dalit pedagogy. Such efforts are necessary in pedagogical practices, in order to transform educational institutions radically.

I highlight this struggle of the Dalits for better conditions and towards a different, formal 'citizenship.' I seek to distinguish and investigate the Dalit woman's daily uphill task in a move to the cities<sup>115</sup> as they pursue Ambedkar's and other Dalit leader's postulates and crusade for education, rationality, and cleanliness, leaving behind the marks of untouchability<sup>116</sup> as they move towards a certain understanding of a place in 'modernity.' I propose to chart this journey in the voices of the Dalit women from three generations; of the first generation who moved into the city *vastis* advancing towards 'modernity,' a 'middle classness' found later in the voices of the second and third generation learners.

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Drawing upon feminist methods, Ilaiyah underlines that narratives of personal experiences are the best contexts in which to compare and contrast social forms.

<sup>115</sup> Ambedkar and the other Dalit leaders gave a clarion call of 'move to the (modern, urban) cities' as opposed to Gandhi's 'move to (rural, backward) the village.'

<sup>116</sup> Ambedkar called upon the Dalits to erase the marks of untouchability. He exhorted them to 'leave behind their blanket (which was their traditional mark), and to be clean.' He wanted Dalit women to wear clean nine-yard saris that covered their bodies, white if possible. These Ambedkarite postulates are diligently followed by Dalits even today, as I have seen in meetings that I have attended.

## Dalits and Education

The Indian nationalist agenda was to 'educate all.' Inspired by dreams of economic development through the application of technology and industrialization, and fired by the ideals of democracy, equality, abolition of caste and by the vision of their country as a strong, integrated and advancing nation, the planners for independent India set a high store on education. They saw education as a basic human right and as an instrument for economic, political and social change and development. Article 45 of the Indian constitution thus promised free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen years. Caste reformers have put considerable faith in education as one of the principal agents for the removal of caste restrictions. Recently, India has endorsed the UN-inspired project of 'Education for All' (in Hindi '*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan*'). There is nonetheless a widely-held opinion that the economic liberalisation that many countries, including India, have undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s have had an adverse impact on the quantity and quality of education.<sup>117</sup> In this respect it seems that many states are increasingly abdicating their responsibility of providing equitable access to education.

Many scholars have argued that educational is generally beneficial for all and that there is a positive relationship between education and socio-economic status.<sup>118</sup> Some, such as Padma Velaskar, argue that education has a liberating potential for Dalits. She has examined the role of education in the Dalit struggle for liberation and how it has acted as a mediator in 'contested reproduction' as well as in 'contested

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<sup>117</sup> Sureshchandra Shukla and Rekha Kaul (eds), *Education Development and Under-development* (New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>118</sup> P.N. Pandey in 'Education and Mobility among SC' (1978), Sabnis and Mahurkar (1985), Waghmare (1985), G. Chinappan (1987). An M.Phil. dissertation (1992) by Swati Mutalik, also underlined the positive effects of education on social mobility, social change and social participation. Anjali Kurane is of the opinion that education determines aspirations, productivity, and vertical and horizontal mobility. Anjali Kurane, *Ethnic identity and social mobility*, (Jaipur, 1999); S.K. Chatterjee, *Education Development of Scheduled Castes: Looking Ahead* (New Delhi, 2000).



change' of the structures of caste inequality and untouchability. Moreover, she seeks specifically to articulate and evaluate the assumed and hidden role of education in the social changes brought about by these struggles.<sup>119</sup>

The desire for education has been growing amongst Dalits over the decades. In a study of Dalit college students carried out in the 1970s, M.B. Chitnis found that while 85% of the parents and guardians of the students were illiterate, in 75 % of cases they showed a strong interest in the educational progress of their wards.<sup>120</sup> This finding struck a blow at those who blamed Dalits for their own illiteracy and ignorance. Parents might be illiterate, and might not even be able to afford to buy books for their children, but they still have a very positive attitude towards education.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, although educational uptake amongst Dalits has certainly improved greatly in recent years, there is still a long way to go.<sup>122</sup> Some Dalit communities are more motivated than others.<sup>123</sup> It is also well known that only a

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<sup>119</sup> Padma Velaskar, 'Ideology, Education and the Political struggle for Liberation: Change and Challenge among the Dalits of Maharashtra,' in Shukla and Kaul (eds), *Education, Development and Under-development*, pp. 210-240.

<sup>120</sup> M.B. Chitnis, 'An Educational, Social and Economic Survey of Milind College Students', as in the Milind College Annual Vol. X, 1973 and in Barbara Joshi (ed.), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement* (London, 1986), pp. 47-49; Suma Chitnis, *A Long Way to Go....: Report on a Survey of Scheduled Caste High School and College Students in Fifteen States of India*, A Project Sponsored by ICSSR (New Delhi, 1981); S.D. Joshi, 'Educational Problems of SC and ST in Baroda district,' 1980, Third survey of Research in Education, op. cit. SI 163, p. 143.

<sup>121</sup> Another study indicates that though far less educated and of poor economic means, and needing immediate financial help from the grown up members of the family, nearly nine-tenths of the students got encouragement from their father, mother and brother. Thus, it can be said that the members of the older generation, irrespective of their own educational level, understood the value of education therefore, encourage the younger members of family to take up education. See Chitnis, 'Educational, social, and economic survey,' pp. 45-46; S.K. Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead: Educational Development of Scheduled Castes* (New Delhi, 2000); Jose Kananaikil, 'Marginalisation of the Scheduled Castes' in Jose Kananaikil (ed.), *Scheduled Castes and the Struggle against Inequality* (New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>122</sup> Suma Chitnis, *A Long Way to Go....: Report on a Survey of Scheduled Caste High School and College Students in Fifteen States of India*, A Project Sponsored by ICSSR (New Delhi, 1981)

<sup>123</sup> Anjali Kurane, *Ethnic Identity and Social Mobility* (Jaipur, 1999); Y. B. Abbasayulu, *Scheduled Caste Elite: A Study of SC elite in Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad (PhD Thesis, Department of Sociology, Osmania University, 1978), pp. 130-131, as quoted in S. K. Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 273; Sachidananda, *The Harijan Elite* (London, 1976) as in Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 273; Anant Santokh Singh, *The changing concept of caste in India* (New Delhi, 1969), pp. 47, 57, and as quoted in Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 277.

relatively small upper stratum of Dalits makes full use of the opportunities that are opened up through education.<sup>124</sup>

There is a considerable literature on the issue of reservations and positive discrimination for Dalit children. Statistics are set out regarding quotas allotted and the ways the SCs, STs and others benefit from such facilities and concessions. Lelah Dushkin goes on to say that some are thriving and accruing immense benefits due to reservations. This is however creating an upper class elite among them.<sup>125</sup> Several studies have brought out the ways in which education, and the resulting economic betterment, creates internal divisions amongst Dalits. The Dalits who move upwards in this way are more likely to be oriented towards the higher caste groups. Some educated who have risen high in their social hierarchy have snapped their ties with their past<sup>126</sup> and there are instances of illiterate Dalits being treated with contempt by educated members of the community.<sup>127</sup> Sachidananda has found that, by and large, a great number of the Dalit elite in Bihar have taken little interest in bettering the lot of their less fortunate brethren.<sup>128</sup> Suneila Malik's research showed that the educated members among the Dalits pointed out that they did not like to use their caste names, because if they did, the outlook of the people whom they were interacting with would change and they would be looked down upon as inferior.<sup>129</sup> Two issues of *Sugava*

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<sup>124</sup> Lelah Dushkin, 'Backward Class Benefits and Social Class in India, 1920-1970,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14: 14 (7 April, 1979), pp. 661-667; Dushkin, 'Scheduled Caste Politics,' in Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India* (Arizona: The University of Arizona Press), pp. 165-226, Andre Beteille, *The backward castes in contemporary India* (Delhi; Oxford, 1992),

<sup>125</sup> Dushkin, 'Scheduled Caste Politics,' pp. 212, 218. Dushkin argues that protective discrimination as a whole has become a mechanism for social control, an instrument of distributionist politics. Also see her, 'Backward Class benefits and social class in India, 1920-1970' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14: 14 (7 April 1979), pp. 661-667.

<sup>126</sup> Abbasayulu, p. 26.

<sup>127</sup> G.K. Prajapati, 'Impact of education on social, economic and political changes among SC: a case study of danapur sub-division, 1982, in Third survey of research in education, op. cit. SI, 218, p.173.

<sup>128</sup> Sachidanand, as quoted in Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 277.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279. Original in Suneila Malik, *Social Integration of the Scheduled Caste* (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 50-55. I have found this tendency in my research which I comment upon in the dissertation. For Malik, as the level of education increases, the tendency to dissociate from their own caste groups



have the themes of Dalit elites and so-called 'Dalit Brahmans' who have snapped their ties with their communities. This is an increasing concern for many Dalits.<sup>130</sup> A related issue is that increasing education has also led to competition among Dalits for a larger percentage of the pie of reservation. Although there are few studies on this, Wankhede has argued that in Maharashtra the Mahars take away most of the reservations and are thus disliked by other Dalit groups, such as the Matangs and Chambhars.<sup>131</sup>

Following a common high caste argument, Dushkin states that if the Dalits are to gain any genuine respect in the wider society, they will have to gain places and positions outside the facilities granted through legislation and the devices of protective discrimination.<sup>132</sup> Some Dalits would agree with Dushkin, feeling that not only do reservations stigmatise the community, but that they are a crutch that they no longer need. Some even agree that reservations make them lazy. Most, however, are strongly in favour of such concessions and indeed want more for their 'uplift.' Although positive discrimination is definitely a sign of 'subalternity' of Dalits, it is also a marker of 'Dalithood' around which the community as a whole tends to rally.

An enduring problem has been the continuing high dropout rate amongst Dalit students. There are strong pressures on many to earn an income to supplement the family earnings. Girls are expected to do housework on top of their studies. The home atmosphere puts a damper on their learning; for example, there is no space for

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increases because while, on the one hand, they improve their socio-economic conditions through their own achievements. On the other, the status, of the group to which they belong remains the same, which, in fact, lowers their own social standing and as a result, they tend to dissociate themselves from their own caste groups.

<sup>130</sup> Vilas Wagh (ed.), *'Sugava Special Deepavali Issue,'* (Pune, Nov-Dec 1986), and *'Ambedkari Prerana Visheshank,'* (Pune, 1994). I am grateful to Prof. Gyan Pandey for drawing my attention to these volumes.

<sup>131</sup> G.G. Wankhede, 'Educational Inequalities among Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36: 18 (5-11 May 2001), pp. 1553-1558.

<sup>132</sup> Dushkin, 'Scheduled Caste Politics,' p. 226

them to do their homework. Furthermore, the school curriculum hardly resonates with their Dalit culture.<sup>133</sup> The schools are in general ill-equipped and lacking in the most basic of amenities. They are often humiliated by high caste teachers, who implant in them a belief that they lack any aptitude for education. Scattered references suggest that classroom processes in schools are pervaded by discriminatory practices that relate to larger societal attitudes regarding 'inferior' caste status of Dalits. Ilaiyah refers to his own teachers of high castes in schools: 'if he was a Brahmin he hated us and told us to our faces that it was because of the evil time-kaliyug, that he was forced to teach "sudras" like us.'<sup>134</sup> Veslaskar argues that 'new-stigmatizing' identities based on secular criteria of lack of merit are being imposed on Dalits in place of their old traditional impure identity. They are labeled as 'undeserving, stupid, indolent and so on.'<sup>135</sup> Policy documents tend to ignore these issues, showing a general lack of sensitivity to the economic and social realities of these children's lives.

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<sup>133</sup> Mohammad Talib, 'Educating the oppressed: Observations from a school in a working class settlement in Delhi,' in Shukla and Kaul (ed.), *Education, Development and Underdevelopment*, pp. 199-209. Padma Velaskar, Kancha Ilaiyah, Geeta Nambissan, 'Dealing with Deprivation,' *Seminar*, 493 (September, 2000), and as available on <http://www.india-seminar.com/semsearch.htm>; B.K. Anitha, *Village, Caste and Education* (Jaipur, 2000) all decry high-handed attitude of dominant caste/class teachers and the exclusion of minority cultures. Works of John Dewey, Michael Apple, M.F.D. Young, Bernstein 1975, Nell Keddie (ed.), *Tinker Tailor...the myth of cultural deprivation* (Harmondsworth, 1971), Rosenthal and Jacobson, *Pgymalion in the School: Teacher's expectations and pupils' intellectual development* (New York, 1993), Bowles, 1977; Gicourel and Kituse, 1963, also help to understand this disadvantage.

<sup>134</sup> Ilaiyah, *Why am I not a Hindu*, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> Talib, 'Educating the oppressed,' pp. 203-205. Talib observes that the teachers always say, 'this child was deficient in the *ruchi* [interest] necessary for aspiring education of any kind.' One student said, 'my teachers have always told me so. They told me that my head does not contain brain but *bhoosa* [dry grass]. They said so because I do not understand the lessons in the class.' Therefore convinced, he dropped out. On the lines of Talib, P. Sainath, and others, Geeta Nambissan attributes these to the poor physical infrastructure (dilapidated buildings, leaking roofs and mud floor-a depressing atmosphere). Geeta Nambissan, 'Dealing with Deprivation,' *Seminar*, 493, September 2000 and the Government of India Report of 1998, p. 303, revealed that the 'school of a Dalit girl was reported to be very dirty as ground was swampy and there was cow-dung heaps and firewood all over. Sainath's reference of an adivasi school in Orissa, "now being used to stock tendu leaves and corn" [1996:54].'



Some investigators deny the existence of caste discrimination in educational institutions.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps these scholars failed to pick up on casteism in their studies, for few Dalits would like to talk about such discriminatory practices. Indeed, for some these have been relatively minor issues compared to greater forms of oppression that they face in their day-to-day life. Urmila Pawar, talking about her childhood, thus identified the major enemies in her life as her father, mother, brother, and her teacher, and went on to state that caste oppression was by comparison a minor affair, for ‘I had to deal with the four big ones every day.’<sup>137</sup> Elsewhere, however, she poignantly remarks on the uniqueness of Dalit women’s experience – one that can be analysed only with ‘caste-specific categories.’ Such are the ambivalences of the Dalits that I want to discuss. As it is, the issue of classroom interaction and peer culture is an understudied one.

### **The Dalits of Pune City**

This dissertation focuses on the experiences of Dalit women in the classrooms and their struggles around the question of education in the city of Pune. Very few studies shed light specifically on the issue of Dalit women’s education in cities.<sup>138</sup> The selection of the city of Pune was basically due to my familiarity with the city of the Peshwas since my childhood. Since ‘language is power,’ my mother-tongue—Marathi helped me venture on to the field work smoothly. Further, Pune is a historical city that has been the cultural and educational capital of Maharashtra. This is the land of reformers like Phule, Ranade, Gokhale and Tilak. What was the life of the Dalits

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<sup>136</sup> Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, pp. 283-84, Chitnis, *A Long Way to Go*, pp. 278-81; S. R. Kakade, ‘A study of the integration of the SC in Indian society-a case study in Marathwada’ (PhD thesis, University of Pune, 1979).

<sup>137</sup> Pawar, ‘Gosh Seshvachi,’ pp. 142-147.

<sup>138</sup> Few such works are of Usha Tribhuwan, ‘A Study of Educated SC Women in an urban setting,’ (MPhil thesis, University of Pune, 1977); Savita, Navare, *Role of Socialization of SC Women-A Case study of primary school teacher of Pune* (MPhil thesis, Indian Institute of Education, Pune, 1990).

under the upper caste hegemonic shadow? It may be pointed out that the Dalit movement led by Ambedkar was never as strong in Pune as that in the cities of Nagpur and Aurangabad, in part because of this strong high caste dominance.

Initiatives have been made right from the early twentieth century to provide education for the backward classes.<sup>139</sup> There are also a number of hostels for them like Sant Janabai Vasatigruha (I interviewed some students here), Jawaharlal Chhatralaya in Shivajinagar, Dalit Varga Vidyarthi, Prakash Mitra Mandal, and so on. What sort of education have Dalits received as a result? Do they have access to the higher and high quality institutions like B.M.C.C., Symbiosis, Fergusson College and so on? What do they feel about living in or around such institutions?<sup>140</sup> As it is, most Dalits have to look to the municipal schools of Pune for their education.

There are visible locales in the city that signify 'caste' backgrounds, and Dalits can be (and are) easily identified by their *vastis*, *aalis*, and *wadas* (residential quarters). For example, in the city of Pune, the Deccan Gymkhana area along with Prabhat Road area, Bhandarkar Road area, Sadashiv Peth, Shaniwar Peth are Brahmin dominated. This is also the '*heart*' of the city. There are other places like Jawahar Nagar, Ghorpade Peth which are Chambhar colonies; there is a Dhorvadi<sup>141</sup> off Salunkhe Vihar road. Mahars and Matangs are found in Yerawada, Dapodi, Parvati slums and so on. Dalits aspire to move outside these residential areas (which are on the periphery of the city) not only to hide their identities, but also to access facilities

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<sup>139</sup> Eleanor Zelliott has written a significant article tracing the history of Dalit education in Pune. 'The history of Dalits in Pune,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 74 (1999) New Series, ISSN 0972-0766.

<sup>140</sup> An insightful article by the Anveshi Law committee reports the politics of untouchability on the campus of the Hyderabad Central University. Anveshi Law Committee, 'Caste and the Metropolitan University', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37: 12 (23 March 2002), pp. 1000-1003; see also A.R. Vasavi, 'Caste indignities and subjected Personhood,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41: 35 (2-8 September 2006), pp. 3766-3771.

<sup>141</sup> Dhors are a SC community engaged in treating hides of animals. 'Dhorvadi' is the *vasti* (colony) of Dhors.



like better schools, better work places and so on which are invariably in the 'heart' areas.

In my interviews, I found that there was considerable difference among different Dalit communities in their access to education and their share of the facilities provided by the government. The Mahars,<sup>142</sup> who were led by Ambedkar, were dominant socially, ideologically, economically and politically. It is also a very important fact, proved statistically by G.G. Wankhede,<sup>143</sup> that the Mahars have responded actively to the various reform movements and facilities provided and take away most of the 'pie of the reservation facilities' provided to the Backward Castes. The other castes like the Matangs<sup>144</sup> and Chambhars, rivals of the Buddhist-Mahars, are vying with them in this respect. Hence I ventured upon a comparative study of the Mahars and Matangs, who have been traditional rivals.<sup>145</sup> This picture of caste rivalry repeats itself in the other parts of India as well.<sup>146</sup> I attempt to explore this rivalry in the city of Pune. Furthermore, I investigate in Chapter 6 the middle-class, urban, Dalit children who are brought up in a more culturally and intellectually stimulating environment, and appear to have a premium on acquiring skills as opposed to their rural and lowest class counterparts. How does their experience compare to that of less-privileged Dalits?<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Mahars are the most pre-dominant SCs in Maharashtra comprising about 9% of the SC population according to the 1991 census. Most of them converted to Buddhism signifying an 'exit' from Hinduism under their leader B.R. Ambedkar. They do not call themselves Mahars and also do not like the term Neo-Buddhists very much. They prefer to call themselves Buddhists. Maharashtrians however understand all Buddhists as former untouchable Mahars.

<sup>143</sup> G.G. Wankhede, 'Educational Inequalities among Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36: 18 (5-11 May 2001), pp. 1553-1558; Karuna Ahmad, 'Towards Equality': consequences of protective discrimination,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8: 2 (14 January 1978), pp. 69-72.

<sup>144</sup> Matangs are the erstwhile Mangs. This community prefers the Sanskritised name Matang. I was asked to bear this in mind while addressing the women from this community.

<sup>145</sup> B.C. Somvanshi, *Mahar-Mang Relations* (Aurangabad, 1989), p. 96. Somvanshi explores the causes of the rivalry between Mahars and Mangs. I will discuss this in Chapter 7.

<sup>146</sup> M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay, 1962), p. xxi.

<sup>147</sup> Pierre Bourdieu articulates this 'premium' as 'cultural capital.' I discuss this in detail in Chapter 9.

The clarion call of Ambedkar to educate was no easy task; it was a path strewn with many a thorn of caste segregation, disproportionate Dalit poverty, the struggle involved in the move to and settling in city slums and ghettos, made worse by social, economic and mental insecurity. For many Dalit women, education instilled in them a fearful passivity, being experienced as a further instrument in their social, economic, religious, and psychological crippling. It was a rarity, indeed, to come across a Dalit woman who enjoyed her school experience. In this way Dalit women are socialised to accept the lowest ladder in the hierarchy, to represent and inscribe their subordination and submission. I draw attention towards the factors that go into the making of the 'incapability' of Dalits, rather than blaming them for their failure at schools or other opportunities. I will return to these points in the section on education of Dalits. I will attempt through the voices of my Dalit interviewees to uncover the processes of how Dalit difficulties are compounded by the antipathy of upper castes and half-hearted measures and poorly implemented policies of the government. Only in a minority of cases have the exposure to the 'public' sphere and the entrée to urban institutions of education and employment been perceived as a positive or empowering experience by Dalit women.

Dalit education is thus fraught with many limitations and contradictions. There is a constant push and pull, a constant contesting with and consenting to the dominant ideologies. Though the education system empowers the Dalits economically and can be a major factor for upward mobility, I want to mark the mental violence that again and again cripples the lives of Dalit girls and women. In order to study the 'every day' living of Dalit women in such wrenching paradoxes, I adopt an 'insider



approach' (as Robert Deliege puts it).<sup>148</sup> This inner view of caste along with the lived experience allows me a leverage to investigate their worlds.

Vijay Prashad concludes in his work on the *neech log*: 'the end to Dalithood cannot be enacted through the law only, but it has to be struggled for as part of the struggle which continues to define our modern world.' If our present is to be bearable, we are under a moral obligation to join in that dream to construct a nation, and as Ambedkar explained, '[a nation] in which each member feels the longing to belong and the capacity to enact that desire.'<sup>149</sup> I carry this hope forward for Dalit women.

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<sup>148</sup> Robert Deliege, *The Untouchable of India*, Translated by Nora Scott (Oxford and New York, 1999). Other studies that adopt such an approach include those by Gerald Berreman, 'Kin, Caste and Community in a Himalayan Hill Village' (PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1959), and also his excellent articles in *Caste and other Inequities: Essays on inequalities* (Meerut, 1979); B.S. Cohn, *The Chamars of Senapur in UP; An Anthropologist among Historians and other essays* (New Delhi; New York, 1987); Joan Mencher (ed.), *Social Anthropology of peasantry*, (Bombay, 1983); Pauline Kolenda, *Class, cult and hierarchy: essays on the culture of India* (Meerut, 1983), *Caste in Contemporary India: beyond organic solidarity* (Jaipur, 1984); Harold Issacs, *India's Ex-Untouchables* (Bombay, 1965); Owen Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social mobility and Social change in a city of India* (New Delhi, 1974); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The movement against Untouchability in 20<sup>th</sup> century Punjab* (Berkeley, 1982); R. S. Khare, *The Untouchable As Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars* (Cambridge, 1984); Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom: social history of a Dalit community* (New Delhi; New York, 2000), and also 'Revolting Labour: The Making of Balmiki Community' Vols 1 and 2 (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1994); Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: religion, identity, and power among a central Indian community* (Albany, 1998)

<sup>149</sup> Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom*, p. 164. Also see Ambedkar, 'The Triumph of Brahmanism: Regicide or the Birth of the Counter-Revolution,' as in BAWs, Vol. 3, p. 309. Prashad draws upon Ambedkar's conceptualisation of nation and nationality.

## Chapter 2: The Genealogy and Politics of Dalit and Mahar Identity

Naming the social category that we are dealing with in this thesis is fraught with problems, for many terms are both applied and contested. It is striking that those considered the lowest of the low in Hindu society have many different names, in contrast to the higher castes, who generally have one accepted and largely uncontested nomenclature. The chapter starts by discussing the terms used to describe groups that have been considered 'untouchable.' It then focuses on the single most important of such communities in Maharashtra, the Mahars.

Various terms have been applied for such groups over time, and they have been based on shifting definitions. We thus have terms such as 'Antyaja,' 'Atishudra,' 'Untouchables,' 'Outcastes,' 'Pariahs,' 'Depressed Classes,' 'Exterior Castes,' (1919, used by Hutton), 'Harijan' (a glorified term popularised by Gandhi which many Dalits do not accept), 'Dalits' (mostly after 1970s with the Dalit Panther Movement) and most recently 'Buddhists.' In Maharashtra they are often called '*magasvargiya jati*'—literally 'Backward Castes.' In 1928, the colonial authorities applied the term 'Scheduled,' and census officials and various government committees created a list of 'Scheduled Castes' (SC), which was finalized in 1936. This list became the basis for further lists of SC drawn up by state governments after independence.<sup>150</sup> These became a *normalising* code for and of such castes. There is however no agreed definition that is used to place a caste in this category. Rather, once the lists were drawn up, inclusion or exclusion created its own logic.

Some broad considerations were however taken into account when drawing up this list. It was not intended that the term had any reference to any occupation as

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<sup>150</sup> Modification Order, 1956; published as S.R.O.24-77A dated 29/10/1956 by Government of India. All those listed in the above Government of India order are defined as those belonging to the Scheduled Castes



such, but to those castes who by reasons of their historical positions in India's Hindu society, were denied access to temples, or had to use separate wells, were not allowed to attend a school, or had to suffer similar discrimination. Other features were as follows:

- Occupies a low position in the Hindu social structure and caste hierarchy of the Hindu social organization. Contact was said to entailed compensatory purification on the part of high caste Hindus.
- Lack of general educational development in major section of these communities.
- Their representation in government service is inadequate.
- They are inadequately represented in the fields of commerce and industry.
- They suffer from physical and social isolation from the rest of the community

Although the term SC is still widely used today, many prefer the term 'Dalit' (the oppressed). The Dalit ideologue Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane has written:

Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. The Dalit believes in humanism. He represents the exploited men (and women) in his country. His (and her) lifeless body had to face the agony of pain, but the burden of alienation has been the source of rebirth for thousands of people.<sup>151</sup>

Dalitness is therefore a means towards achieving a sense of 'identity,' a social, political and cultural identity. It is a source of confrontation, a willingness to struggle for justice and equality, for self-elevation and self-pride for all who are oppressed.<sup>152</sup>

Attempts have been made to give a much wider definition to 'Dalit' – namely as the oppressed in general, including adivasis, other depressed castes and classes. Here, 'Dalit' seems to be a mobilizing slogan/agent or masterword that can bring under its

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<sup>151</sup> Gangadhar Pantawane, 'Evolving a new identity: the development of a Dalit culture,' in Barbara Joshi (ed.), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement* (London, 1986), p. 79. Also see p. 80.

<sup>152</sup> Also see Pantawane, 'Evolving a new identity,' pp. 79-87.

umbrella all the subalterns, or oppressed. In this thesis, however, I apply the term largely synonymously with that of SC. I should note however that *terms are always slippery*, and we must deploy imperfect categories in a strategic way.<sup>153</sup>

I have already in the preceding chapter pointed out that there are sharp internal divisions amongst Dalits. In particular, there is the Mahar-Matang rivalry in Maharashtra. Similar rivalries are found in other states, as for example in Andhra Pradesh, where there are tensions between Malas and Madigas. Scholars like D.G. Mandelbaum, V.R. Shinde, Sunanda Patwardhan, and D.D. Kachole<sup>154</sup> have mentioned the Mahar-Matang traditional rivalry, but none has offered a critique. They have mentioned how these two castes have been competing with each other since at least the pre-colonial period when the Peshwas ruled Maharashtra.<sup>155</sup> However, according to B.C. Somvanshi, the forms in which this hereditary rivalry has been expressed have changed over time. He asserts that:

The rivalry in these days is basically due to the conversion of the Mahars to Buddhism; due to which the Matangs consider the Mahars out of the Hindu fold, betraying Hinduism. Second, with positive discrimination bringing about revolutionary changes in the Mahars, the Matangs feel left behind and are fighting for reservation on the basis of population. This has helped the ruling parties to create unfathomable chasms between these two communities and has hindered the progress of a united SC front.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> I am following Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York and London, c1993), pp. 3-6. Spivak discusses the 'strategic' use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible politically interested way. For her the 'fetish-character' of the masterword has to be persistent all along the way, even when it seems to remind oneself of it is counterproductive.

<sup>154</sup> D.G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India* (Berkeley, 1970); M.N. Srinivas (ed.), *India's villages* (2nd rev. ed., London, 1960), p. 31; V.R. Shinde, *Bhartiya Ashprushyancha Prashna* (Nagpur, 1976), p. 136; Sunanda Patwardhan, *Change Among India's Harijans* (Delhi, 1973), p. 30; D.D. Kachole, *Matang Community in Transition* (Aurangabad, 1979), p. 308.

<sup>155</sup> Also see P. N. Gavali, *Peshwe Kalin Gulamgiri Va Ashprushyata* (Pune, 1981), pp. 49-59.

<sup>156</sup> B.C. Somvanshi, *Bhartiya Jati Sansthet Matanganche Sthan ani Mahar-Matang Sambandh* (Aurangabad, 1989). I have translated this and other works from Marathi. I am responsible for all errors and accuracies.



He thus sees a policy of 'divide and rule' in operation. Against this, I have observed at a meeting held in Pune how the Shiv Sena, a political party tried to approach the Matangs by adorning portraits of their leaders who remained obscure till date, singing their glory and propounding a Mahar-Matang-Shiv Sena amalgamation. I attended another gathering on 24 September 2005, which was a Buddhist meet. The photos of Phule, Ambedkar, Shahu Maharaj, Annabhau Sathe and Ahilyabai Holkar along with the speeches signified the urge for a united front of SCs, STs, and OBCs.<sup>157</sup>

Urmila Pawar and most Mahars whom I interviewed, as well as many Mahars in general, prefer to call themselves 'Bauddha' (Buddhists). Some call themselves 'Nav Bauddha' (Neo-Buddhists); however, these are very few. When I interviewed her, Urmila Pawar refused to call herself a Mahar and resented it even more when I repeated 'it,' exclaiming that it was causing a 'symbolic violence' to her.<sup>158</sup> She said that she would halt the interview if I used the word any further. She also told her daughter that I was using the word 'Mahar' instead of 'Bauddha' and both affirmed that 'we'<sup>159</sup> were Bauddha! A few Mahars describe themselves as 'Dalit.' Most however do not like the term, as they feel that it signifies one who is 'broken,' 'trampled upon,' 'weak,' a 'shudra,' and most importantly the 'earlier untouchables.' They declare that they are not broken or deserving association with words like 'Dalit.'

One Buddhist got into an argument with me over the use of the word 'Dalit' in the title of my dissertation. He is an academic in an authoritative position at

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<sup>157</sup> A meeting in Sadashiv Peth (Pune) which was a call of the *Ambedkari Vidyarthi Parishad*, 24 September 2005.

<sup>158</sup> Urmilatai Pawar, Buddhist, M.A. (Marathi Literature), Retired, Borivili-Mumbai, 5 September 2004.

<sup>159</sup> The power of 'we,' 'our community' has been immense in my work. I could readily establish a rapport with my informants as well as could easily enter their lives, more easily perhaps than those not of the community.

Siddhartha College.<sup>160</sup> He said, ‘I wonder how any University can accept dissertation titles with the term “Dalit”!’ However, I (very patiently) told him that the word ‘Dalit’ was gaining currency (compared to the other names) in academia internationally. Furthermore, I wanted to impress upon him the fact that if he used the word ‘Buddhists’ instead of ‘Dalits,’ that called for a conversion of all Dalits (SCs) to Buddhism, and that also meant that Buddhists were a category separate from the other SCs. It would once again mean that the terms ‘Buddhist’ and the ‘Buddhist struggle’ would be confined only to them in a way the Ambedkarite struggle was confined to the Mahars alone; it would not apply to the other castes and communities, which would further fragment the Dalits. Prof. Jyoti Lanjewar, a Dalit feminist who is also in a leading position with the Maharashtra wing of the Republican Party of India, stated in her interview:

The Mahars/Buddhists are not very co-operative with the other SCs. They are involved with themselves and their uplift without taking cognisance of the “others” below them. If they continue this they would be isolated. “We” [emphasis mine] should not force everybody to become “Buddhist” in order to be in our camp.<sup>161</sup>

When I started writing the proposal for my dissertation, I used the word ‘Scheduled Castes’ to mark the untouchables of my study. I found that the word ‘Dalit’ was associated with the Mahars most of the time. My initial survey with the Matangs and Chambhars revealed that they hated to be associated with the ‘stigmatised’ word ‘Dalit.’ They thought that the word was meant for ‘untouchable Mahars,’ precisely as they thought that ‘Ambedkar was a Mahar leader.’ With the use of the political term ‘SC’ I wanted to retain the differences of each caste, since I found enormous

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<sup>160</sup> Anon., Siddhartha College, Mumbai, 12 December 2006.

<sup>161</sup> Prof. Jyoti Lanjewar, Buddhist, PhD (Marathi Literature), Ambazhari-Nagpur, 10 October 2005. All emphasis is mine. I attended the ‘Dhammadiksha Suvarna Jayanti Bauddha Mahila Sammelan,’ in Nagpur, 10 October 2005 along with Jyotitai. I came across stalwarts like Prof. Kumud Pawde, Chhaya Khobragade, Dr. Vimal Thorat, and many others during this meeting. I had just heard of their names as associated with the Dalit movement, I interacted with them for the first time.



differences within the SCs, which I felt needed to be acknowledged. The term 'SC' is politically preferred because these communities seek compensatory discrimination due to the 'label' SC.

Furthermore, I was reluctant to subsume all SCs under the single category of 'Dalit'; especially when they disliked it. Later on in the course of my work I began to see the advantages of using the culturally and politically loaded word 'Dalit.' It seemed to provide a means to unite subaltern groups rather than exacerbating divisions within them. Hence, I did away with the use of the term 'Scheduled Castes' to replace it with 'Dalit.'<sup>162</sup> I was also told by an acquaintance that I should address Mangs as Matangs (only) as they might take offence. It is of interest to note that the Mangs prefer the Sanskritised, Hinduised label of 'Matangs' – rather than the older 'Mangs' – just as the group that used to be known as 'Chambhars' now prefer to be called 'Charmakars.' This once again reveals the affinity of these SCs to Hinduism and their dislike for the 'polluted' Mahars who have adopted 'Buddhism.' In the next section, I shall focus on the Mahars and their history.

### The Mahars

The term 'Mahar' was popularly said to be derived from '*maha-hari*' or 'great eater.'<sup>163</sup> According to some, it was derived through Prakrit from the Sanskrit word, '*mritaharin.*' This name they were said to have earned by their occupation of removing carcasses of dead animals. Phule explained that the term 'Mahar' was also probably derived from the phrase '*maha-ari,*' meaning 'the great foe.'<sup>164</sup> They were

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<sup>162</sup> Sometimes, I have been forced by the preferences of my informants to use other terms. Taking this into consideration, I will name the 'erstwhile Mahars' as 'Buddhists' as most informants stressed it.

<sup>163</sup> Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. XVIII, Part I, p. 439 as quoted by Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay, Volume II* (Bombay, 1922), p. 402.

<sup>164</sup> Phule, *Slavery*, in CWMP, Vol. 1 translated by Patil (Bombay, 1991), p. 25. Also see Phule, in Dhananjay Keer and S.G. Malshe (eds), *Mahatma Phule, Samagra Vangamay* (Mumbai, 1969), p. 72. Also see O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology*, p. 141.

also called 'Antyaja' – the last-born, which was again the lowest in the social scale. *Atishudra* meant those below the Shudras, the last of the fourfold divisions of Manu, and is indicative of the supposed primitive origin of the tribe.

The higher castes call Mahars '*thorlegharche*' an ironical expression meaning the noble born. These days they are also called '*sarkarche javai*' meaning the son-in-laws of the Government who are given a special treatment due to the special provisions.<sup>165</sup> The Mahars of Maharashtra are also called '*bhumiputra*,' or '*dharnicheput*,'<sup>166</sup> meaning 'sons of the soil'. This also indicates the original position of the Mahars. Dheds and Doms are respectively the Gujarat and Northern India equivalents of the Mahars.<sup>167</sup> '*Kathivale*' or 'men with a stick' is a word indicating their profession in olden times when they had to maintain security. '*Parvari*' a term often applied by the Europeans to all Mahars, was essentially a term for Mahar musicians.<sup>168</sup> The term '*Veskar*' means a gatekeeper and describes a Mahars occupation of a night watchman of the village '*ves*' (gate).<sup>169</sup>

The Pune Mahars who are followers of the *varkari* sect are known as Chokhamela, after the famous Mahar saint. This resembles the Chamars who call themselves Rohidasis, after the famous saint Rohidas, or the Bhangis who call themselves Valmikis, after Rishi Valmiki, the writer of the Ramayana. Some of my Mahar/Buddhist friends have suggested being called '*neele*,' literally—the blue ones. After conversion to Buddhism, Mahars are associated with the '*neela zhenda*'—blue flag, and hence the blue ones. Also suggested by them was the term, '*zhenduchi*

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<sup>165</sup> Most of the interviewees used this expression whilst talking about their experiences of discrimination.

<sup>166</sup> R. C. Dhere, *Lajjagauri* (Pune, 1978), pp. 59-60.

<sup>167</sup> Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes*, p. 400.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>169</sup> The Mahar is attributed with all the above functions and names even in Molesworth's dictionary of Marathi and English words. See J.T. Molesworth, 'English and Marathi dictionary' (2nd edn, rev. and enl., New Delhi, 1985), p. 492.



*phule*' (literally marigold flowers) – as the colour of this flower represents the colour of the Buddhist monks' robes. Another term for the Buddhists is '*jaibhim wale*', as they salute each other with 'Jai Bhim' or Glory to Ambedkar whose name was Bhim, and so on.

Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary quotes Dr. John Wilson who says that the word, 'Maharashtra,' can also be split as '*Maharanche rashtra.*'<sup>170</sup> Jotiba Phule,<sup>171</sup> J. T. Molesworth,<sup>172</sup> Dr. John Wilson (as in Molesworth) and S. V. Ketkar have all supported the thesis that 'Maharashtra is Mahar's Rashtra.' These authors are playing with etymologies here. The term '*rashtra*' which means state, has been tacked to '*maha/mahar,*' and this is very fanciful, as it then makes 'Maharashtra,' the 'state of the Mahars.' We should note the significance of Dr. Wilson, who was a missionary in the 1840s, after whom the Wilson College in Mumbai is named. If we consider the theories of caste it seems that some missionaries have been pioneers of the 'inverted Brahmanism' and Dr. Wilson seems to be one of those. It is also said that there were other people by the name of '*rattha,*' with 'Mahar' and '*rattha*' being combined to make 'Maharashtra'.<sup>173</sup>

The touch of the Mahar shadow is thought to pollute. The *Bombay Gazetteer*<sup>174</sup> relates that in some outlying villages in the early morning the Mahar, as he passes the village well, may be seen crouching so that his shadow may not fall on the water-drawers. The village barber will not shave the Mahars, nor are they allowed to draw water from the village well. Formerly, an earthen pot was hung from their

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<sup>170</sup> Dr. Wilson, as in Somvanshi, *Mahar-Mang relations*, p.11.

<sup>171</sup> Phule, *Nibandhmala*, p. 391, as in Shankarrao Kharat, *Maharashtratil Maharancha Itihaas* (Pune, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>172</sup> J.T. Molesworth, *A Dictionary: Murathee and English* (2nd edn, Bombay, 1857), p. xxiii. As in Kharat, *Maharancha Itihaas*, p. 8.

<sup>173</sup> A. N. Deshpande, *Aadhunik marathi vangmayacha itihās, Part 2* (Pune, 1970), p.7

<sup>174</sup> Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. XVIII, Part I, p. 441, as quoted in Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes*, p. 401.

necks to hold their spittle, they were made to drag branches to wipe out their footsteps, and when a Brahman came near, they were forced to lie far off on their faces, lest their shadow might fall on him. Muktabai<sup>175</sup> wrote about the Pune Mahars who had to leave the village before 3 pm or so when the shadows started falling long, lest they pollute a Brahman. In some parts of the country the Mahars had to shout, or carry a stick with bells so that the Brahman would know of their presence and save himself from pollution. However, the polluted Mahar did not allow the shadow of the lower caste Mang to fall on him.

Mahar lived outside the villages in separate Maharvadas or Mahar quarters<sup>176</sup> just as the Mangs had Mangvadas and the Brahmans have Brahmanvadis. I have noted in the preceding chapter how these caste quarters exist to the present date even in big cities. In Pune, there are *vastis* of Mahars, Dhors (off Salunkhe vihar road), Chambhars (Ghorpade peth, Jawahar nagar), Matangs (Parvati *paytha* slum, Yashwant nagar) and Khatiks (Satara Road). It is also observed in the city of Mumbai that BDD (Bombay District Development Board) chawls where most of the lower castes and classes have been residing are coloured by caste divisions. There are clusters of Konkani Mahars, Kunbis, Marathas, Buddhists and so on.

Ambedkar called upon Dalits to give up their *balutedari* duties in the village, their dress, and all other signifiers. He himself set an example by adopting Western attire and is always seen in pictures/statues as well dressed and looking sharp. His male followers likewise took to wearing western clothing, while his female followers followed his advice to wear the clean nine-yard saris, in the process reaming their

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<sup>175</sup> Muktabai Salve was a Mang girl who studied in Phule's class of 1852. Her explosive essay written in 1855 has been translated, and has found in place in many a scholarly works. Muktabai speaks about hardships of the Mahars and Mangs in Pune. Muktabai Salve, 'Manga Maharachya dukkhavishayi,' in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (eds), *Women's writing in India from 600 B.C. Vol. 1* (New York, 1991), p. 216.

<sup>176</sup> Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes*, p. 400. Dalit writers also talk about this.



selfhoods.<sup>177</sup> He also called upon them to change their heavy and crude jewellery to more delicate forms, suggesting the wearing of yellow beads with cheap pearls.<sup>178</sup>

This was to counteract the Brahman practice of married women wearing black beads.

I attended the 'Dhammadiksha Suvarna Jayanti Buddha Mahila Sammelan,' a convention of Buddhist women on account of the golden jubilee of the Dalit conversion to Buddhism, 10 October 2005, Nagpur. One Buddhist woman in the audience called upon other women and the organisers of the convention to stress the need to throw away the Hindu black beads and to replace them with yellow beads.

Ambedkar took all these measures so as to annihilate the Mahar past and to give them a new identity. Further, he introduced the Dalits to Buddhism, which could provide them equality and justice outside of Hinduism.<sup>179</sup> Much of the Mahar community responded and followed their leader. Since my childhood, I have attended Buddhist gatherings in Pune, Mumbai and Nagpur and have witnessed this practice of wearing white, clean, dress by men and women. In this way, the Mahars have discarded their robes of subservience.

Large numbers of Mahars followed Babasaheb Ambedkar and converted to Buddhism in 1956. The Census of 1961 clearly underlines this; for there were only 95 Buddhists in Pune in the year 1951; compared to 1,28,150 in 1961.<sup>180</sup> The Census of

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<sup>177</sup> From within the Mahars, Ambedkar wanted to make a statement in opposition to the colonial ethnographers, the Brahmans and the other communities. In his conferences, especially for women, he impressed upon them the negative connotations of their dress, their food habits and their overall appearance. He advised them to wear clean and full saris, like the upper caste women. Ambedkar was of the view that their dress could be torn, could have many holes, but it had to be 'clean.' Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission* (2nd edn, Bombay, 1962), pp. 104-105; Pawar and Moon, *We made History too*, pp. 57-59.

<sup>178</sup> Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, p. 105.

<sup>179</sup> Ambedkar argued for a position of untouchables 'away from the Hindus.' He discusses in detail his reasons for conversion to Buddhism, and also of the state of the converts. See Ambedkar, 'Away from the Hindus,' 'Caste and Conversion,' and 'Christianizing the Untouchables,' BAWS, Vol. 5, pp. 404-476.

<sup>180</sup> *Census of India*, 1961, Vol. X. Part VA, as in Sunanda Patwardhan, *Change Among Indian's Harijans* (New Delhi, 1973), p. 10.

1961 for Maharashtra reveals that there were 56 percent Buddhists, compared to 16 percent Mahars and 14 percent Mangs in Maharashtra.<sup>181</sup> The conversion brought about not only a significant social, political and religious metamorphosis among the Mahars, but also was a psychological emancipation for the Mahars from the tentacles of Hinduism. The Mahar movement under Ambedkar has been a growing and thriving force since its inception. Eleanor Zelliott has given an excellent historical account of it and has delved into the causes, the rise and the present concerns of the movement.<sup>182</sup>

Regarding the religion professed and practised by the Mahars I note that efforts have been made in the past and are being made to shed off the minute traces of Hinduism and to follow the precepts of Buddhism. However, the community is still grappling with these changes and is not able to discard Hinduism totally. Further I marked that some are also trying to deify the Buddha and Buddhism. My fieldwork and many interviewees are a witness to this phenomenon. A Buddhist house has images/statues of the Buddha like any Hindu God and they worship him with flowers and incense sticks. Some also offered to the Buddha '*naivadya*' (the Hindu practice of offering food to Gods before the members of the family consumed the food) as analogous in Hinduism on the day of Dussehra, the Hindu festival which is also the day of the Mahar conversion to Buddhism.<sup>183</sup> The *viharas* (prayer halls) have turned into temples for some. They read Buddhist texts like Hindu *granthas*. This was the practice in one of the *viharas* in Marol village in East Andheri, suburb of Mumbai.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> According to the 1961 census for Maharashtra there were 16 percent (782,008) Mahars, 14 percent (727,006) Mangs, and 56 percent (2,789,914) Buddhists. See *Census of India*, 1961, Vol. X, Maharashtra, Part V-A, *Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Maharashtra-Tables* (Delhi, 1964), pp. 26-32.

<sup>182</sup> Eleanor Zelliott, 'Learning the use of political means: The Mahars of Maharashtra,' in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1970), pp. 26-69. This essay appears in other versions too. See Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 86-125.

<sup>183</sup> I noticed this ambivalence in one Buddhist family in Trimurtigar-Nagpur, 14 October 2005.

<sup>184</sup> 14 June 2005.



Some Buddhists worship the image/statue of Ambedkar; the volumes of the *Speeches and Writings of Ambedkar* adorn their shelves while they still celebrate the Hindu festivals of Diwali and Dussehra. At the same time it should be noted how there are confusions on the nomenclature of Buddhists and Mahars. Such are the ambivalences and predicaments that I seek to investigate and address.

Harold Issacs's interviews with urban Mahars clearly bring out this dilemma of asserting a new identity.<sup>185</sup> He reports:

among the Mahars I met in Bombay there was always the double edge to the dilemma: whether, if they chose to identify themselves at all, to say "Mahar" or "Buddhist," though the effect in both cases would be same.<sup>186</sup>

Though his work dates from the 1960's, it seems that the present times are not much different. Some of the interviewees agreed that they were Mahars. However some of them ferociously guard their Buddhism and no longer want to be called Mahars, as the word brings back to them the memories of their degraded past. They despise the term, which stigmatises them, commits a 'symbolic violence' to them, hence they find Buddhism very liberal, very emancipating, giving them a new identity. My fieldwork has revealed the interesting experiences of some Dalits, who are effective in making Buddhism a new *jati*, and not only a national religion but an international one. The conferences I attended are a witness to the same. They are organising various programmes to launch their agenda and spread the message of Ambedkar and the Buddha. They are trying to attract other castes, especially the other SCs, STs, and OBCs; perhaps, for a united front against Brahman domination.<sup>187</sup> A famous ST

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<sup>185</sup> Harold Issacs, *India's Ex-Untouchables* (New York, 1965).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44. Also see p. 45.

<sup>187</sup> Even Phule had suggested this 'common front' during the mid and late nineteenth century. Phule founded the 'Satyashodhak Samaj' (Society for the Search of Truth) to unite the lower castes and Untouchables. He referred to some pseudo-historical episodes, in order to testify the ancient solidarity between Mahars and Shudras and denounced the strategies of Brahmans to divide the lower castes. See CWMP, Vol. 1, p. xix, and *Slavery*, pp. 25, 49. Also Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic*

writer Laxman Mane also converted to Buddhism on the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur, and many newspapers carried his interview. The recent conversions of millions of untouchables to Buddhism and Christianity in Nagpur indicate the increasing exit from Hinduism. The Buddhists are a growing force today; nationally and internationally, and many political parties in India approach them for their support.

In all this history, Dalit identity assumes a largely male persona. As Bebi Kamble has argued, the women have remained '*khelnai*' (toys) in the hands of the men of the community.<sup>188</sup> They are outcast not only to the wider world, but to their own men, including most male Dalit writers and litterateurs. This work tries to address this vacuum and give a space to the Buddhists (presumably Maharins) – and also the Matangins – to narrate their stories.<sup>189</sup> The next chapter examines the issue of Dalit patriarchy in more detail.

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*Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi; Thousand Oaks; London, 1994), p. 98.

<sup>188</sup> Bebi Kamble, as quoted in Shobha Bhagwat, *Dalit Purushanchya Atmcharitratil Stree Pratima* (Pune, 1989), p. 32.

<sup>189</sup> Chapter 7 will focus on the differences between the experiences of the women of these two communities.



### Chapter 3: Dalit patriarchy disinterred

How did the Dalit women fight caste, class and gender oppression along with struggling for accommodation in educational institutions? In order to understand the linkage between Dalit women and their education we have to critically engage the matrix of caste, class, and gender.<sup>190</sup> Mainstream movements and feminist movements in particular seem to be misguided in their understandings of Dalit women. Many scholars share a notion that Dalit women are somehow more 'free' than high caste women. In this chapter, I will attempt to question this postulate and analyse the specificity of Dalit woman's experience of patriarchy.

#### Debates in Indian Feminism

Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, in their work entitled *Daughters of Independence*, delineate a historical materialist approach in dealing with caste and gender. They are of the opinion that lower caste women are not secluded like their upper caste counterparts because their men depend on them for survival. Joshi and Liddle also write about the non-sexual and the sexual divisions of labour. They suggest that women of the lower castes are forced to take up work for wages. While addressing the issue of sexuality, they state:

Lower caste women, by contrast, experience far fewer controls over their physical freedom. The economic benefits and the social constraints of seclusion are unknown to them. Sati was never demanded of them, widowhood was no curse, divorce was allowed in many lower-caste communities and widows and divorced people could re-marry without disgrace.<sup>191</sup>

This analysis of Liddle and Joshi suggests that Dalit women, though economically deprived, lead more sexually liberated lives than upper caste women.

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<sup>190</sup> Some African-American feminists have dealt with intersections of race and gender. Patricia Hill Collins theorizes this intersection as the 'matrix of domination.' See her *Black Feminist Thought*, p. 18.

<sup>191</sup> Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India* (New Delhi, 1986), p. 91. Also see pp. 65-69.

The romanticizing of Dalit women's lives is also a feature of the writings of Dalit ideologues like Kancha Ilaiah. He claims that Dalit patriarchy is more democratic than Hindu patriarchy, arguing that certain customs like *paadapuja* (worshipping the husband's feet) are not found among the Dalits. However, he notices wife-battering in Dalit families and says that the 'beaten wife has the right to make the attack public by shouting, abusing the husband and if possible beating the husband in return.'<sup>192</sup> It is hard to see how this can in any way be read as a so-called 'democratic patriarchy.'

These tensions are brought into a sharp relief by Urmila Pawar's analysis of the gender question in relation to the Dalit movement. She argues:

The Dalit woman in contrast to the Brahman woman was not bound by customs such as sati, child marriage, etc. The Dalit woman was not confined to the four walls as the upper caste woman. [...] She did not address her husband or elders with imposed veneration. [...] there was a wide gap between Dalit and Brahmin women on economic, social and educational levels. Along with caste based atrocities she was also constantly under the threat of rape, in the family she had to tolerate the physical violence and other atrocities of men.<sup>193</sup>

Thus there is a constant movement between an understanding of the liberation that Dalit women's economic 'independence' provides women, and the oppressive economic deprivation of the community. Urmila continues:

A myth is harboured that unlike the Brahman woman the Dalit woman is free from bondage and stifling restrictions. The pain of the Devadasi, the deserted woman and

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<sup>192</sup> Kancha Ilaiah has a whole chapter dedicated to 'Marriage, Market and Social relations' in *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra critique of Hindutva philosophy, culture, and political economy* (Calcutta, c1996), pp. 20-35. Official data suggests that almost 27.4% of SC women have been beaten or physically mistreated since the age of 15 years, in 25.2% of cases by their husbands. See the National Crimes Records Bureau's *Crimes in India 2003 Report* (New Delhi, 2004), available online on, <http://ncrb.nic.in/crime2005/home.htm-figures>.

<sup>193</sup> Urmila Pawar, 'What has the Dalit Movement offered to Women?' in Sandeep Pendse (ed.), *At Crossroads, Dalit movement today* (Bombay, 1994), pp. 84-85.



the murali is ignored in this stand. In fact the woman in the household is yet to get recognition as a full and equal human being.<sup>194</sup>

Central to my enquiry is this tension between understanding the Dalit woman as sexually 'liberated' (in the form of a murali and devadasi)<sup>195</sup> and economically 'independent'; and an account of the Dalit woman as 'oppressed,' both sexually and economically.<sup>196</sup>

Several Indian feminist writers have pointed out how lower class and Dalit women are largely ignored in many feminist writings. Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj thus state that 'research of indologists, sociologists, social historians, anthropologists particularly from the pre-independence period provided descriptions of positions of middle class/elite women.'<sup>197</sup> Most studies deal with high caste patriarchy and the position of elite women in family, marriage and kinship networks. Women in agrarian situations or of the lower castes are largely ignored.<sup>198</sup> Some, as we have seen, even deny that patriarchy was as pervasive for lower as for high caste women. Further, for some upper caste feminists the very 'linking of women and shudras *together* [emphasis mine] is one more evidence of the low position of women.'<sup>199</sup> They appear to be more concerned with the linking of women with the Shudra than the subordination of the Shudra. What happens to the Shudra woman in

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>195</sup> Muralis and Devadasis are Dalit women 'married,' rather abandoned in the name of God. Though 'protected' by God these women are exploited by both upper and lower caste men.

<sup>196</sup> Also see Chapters 8 and 9 for further analysis through the voices of Urmila Pawar and other informants.

<sup>197</sup> Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Women and Society in India* (Delhi, 1987), p. 7. These two authors say that their work is a text-book for women's studies in the institutions of higher learning, providing a review of the relationship between family, economy, education, and health.

<sup>198</sup> This argument is also underlined by Desai and Krishnaraj, *Women and society*, p. 7; Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian colonial history* (New Delhi, 1989), pp. 21-22. Sangari and Vaid argue that Dalit women have been suppressed in the earlier literature.

<sup>199</sup> Desai and Krishnaraj, *Women and Society*, p. 33. Shudras are the lowest strata in the four-fold division of Hindu society. Unlike the 'un-touchables,' Shudras are 'touchable.'

this subordination? Who seeks to understand the Shudra or Ati-shudra<sup>200</sup> woman when the upper caste middle-class woman is predominant in most feminist renderings? In general, upper-caste feminism has been unable, therefore, to critically engage and confront inequalities of caste of community 'implicit in that subject or its worlds.'<sup>201</sup> Dalit women have been dealt with only tangentially.

In general, women in India identify with their caste over and above their gender. The progressive feminist Uma Chakravarti writes that upper caste men and women have both defended patriarchal institutions strongly, as they see them as a bulwark of their higher position in society. She states: 'patriarchy was and is a necessary aspect of class order and social stability, women then would and did resist its reformulation.'<sup>202</sup> She shows that upper caste women in the late nineteenth century mostly aligned with their men against the lower castes. While this seems a bleak situation for the late nineteenth century, the late twentieth century situation does not seem to be very different. For example, when upper caste women protested against the Mandal provisions (on university campuses at least), they decried the increasing quotas that would deprive them of upper caste IAS husbands.<sup>203</sup> In other words, these women were not ready to accept qualified Dalit men as their potential husbands.

There is a long history in India of the identification of women's self-assertion with high caste agendas. Susie Tharu, Tejaswini Niranjana, Kumkum Sangari, and Sudesh Vaid underline that 'women as middle class and upper caste has a long

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<sup>200</sup> 'Ati-shudra' is another word for those untouchables who are below the Shudras and outside the pale of Hindu society.

<sup>201</sup> My argument is endorsed by Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender,' in Nivedita Menon (ed.), *Gender and Politics in India* (New Delhi, 1999), p. 497.

<sup>202</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The life and times of Pandita Ramabai* (New Delhi, 1998), p. 236.

<sup>203</sup> There were many newspaper reports of this incident. Also see, Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*, pp. 1-3; Tharu and Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender,' pp. 494-525. IAS stands for 'Indian Administrative Services,' the highest cadre of Indian bureaucracy which all middle classes/castes aspire to enter.



genealogy that, historically and conceptually, goes back into nationalism as well as social reform.<sup>204</sup> Thus it seems that 'all the women are upper caste (and by implication, middle class Hindu) and all the lower castes are men.'<sup>205</sup> The Indian feminist movement is essentially an upper caste and middle class movement. Tharu and Niranjana show how the late twentieth century, anti-Mandal woman aligns herself above all as a citizen of India rather than as a gendered being, thus avoiding a 'battle of sexes' with middle class men. However, the claiming of 'citizenship rather than sisterhood [with Dalit women] now not only set them against Dalit men but also against lower-caste/class women.'<sup>206</sup>

Such evidence illustrates that gender becomes a hidden issue, being glossed over in the interest of community.<sup>207</sup> I can multiply instances in which Dalit women have been blanked out by upper caste women or where upper caste women and men have insulted them. This seems to be analogous to the struggle by women of 'colour' and others in the U.S. who have demanded visibility and an explicit acknowledgement and analysis of racial differences and the specificities of 'gender' oppression in the context of Western feminism.<sup>208</sup> These debates between feminists from the 1970s to

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<sup>204</sup> Tharu and Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender,' p. 502. Also Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*, pp. 7,8,18; Susie Tharu and Lalita K. (eds), *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Present*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1993), p. xix.

<sup>205</sup> Tharu and Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender,' p. 503. This conjecture finds it parallel to the western case in which, 'all women are white and all black are men.'

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., pp.502-503.

<sup>207</sup> Scholars like Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, p. 31; Gay and Tate argue in the case of the U.S. that Black women are 'doubly bound' by race and gender and most of the times race solidarity trumps/is more significant than gender solidarity. See C. Gay and K. Tate, 'Doubly Bound: The Impact of Gender and Race on the Politics of Black Women', *Political Psychology*, 19: 1 (March 1998), pp. 169-184; Elizabeth Spelman, 'Gender and Race: the Ampersand problem in feminist thought' in Kumkum Bhavnani, (ed.), *Feminism and 'Race'* (Oxford and New York, c2001), pp. 74-88. I already discussed Tapan Basu's work which reiterates this notion in Chapter 1. See Basu, *Translating Caste* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 219-233.

<sup>208</sup> Michelle Newman, *White women's rights: the racial origins of feminism in the US* (New York, 1999); P.H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York, c1991): Introduction; Works of black feminist scholars bell hooks, Angela Davis, Kimberly Crenshaw underline this view.

the 1990s<sup>209</sup> also resulted in the formation of some autonomous black women's organisations. Mainstream Indian feminists can be criticised in similar terms for their failure to speak to the experiences of Dalit women in any meaningful way. These feminists have attacked high caste patriarchy for its oppressiveness, but not on the grounds of caste. At best, these feminists pay merely lip service to those (Dalit) women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

The location from where the voice emanates is significant in order to understand and unpack the dynamics at play. Kumud Pawde, a Dalit feminist, reflected upon her initial struggle for the inclusion of the category of 'caste' in a gendered analysis of Indian society.<sup>210</sup> She argued for a Dalit feminist standpoint and a Dalit feminist movement during a conference that she attended in Pune in 1993. At that juncture, she was criticised and blamed (by some upper caste, middle-class feminists) for fragmenting the woman's movement by foraying into contexts of caste, race, ethnicity and class. They questioned Pawde, '*aga, assa kasa boltes tu?—How do you say so, and call for a separate [Dalit women's] movement?*' And, 'as activists and writers whose work is widely known, they [read upper caste, middle-class feminists, men, and women] act as if they are best able to judge whether other women's voices should be heard.'<sup>211</sup> Are Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular only to be heard when their voices resonate with the dominant discourse?

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<sup>209</sup> An insightful article by Clare Hemmings is critical of an insistent narrative of feminist thought as a relentless march of progress, and further interrogates the techniques through which the dominant (feminist) story is secured. See Clare Hemmings, 'Telling feminist stories,' *Feminist Theory*, 6: 2 (2005), pp. 115-139. I thank Angie Willey, my graduate colleague at Emory for having read this chapter and for these discussions.

<sup>210</sup> Prof. Kumud Pawde, Buddhist, M.A. (Sanskrit), Dhantoli-Nagpur, 16 October 2005.

<sup>211</sup> I am following the famous black feminist scholar, bell hooks. hooks writes about these hegemonising/hegemonic tendencies of white feminists. bell hooks, 'Black Women: Shaping feminist theory' in Bhavnani, *Feminism and 'Race'* (Oxford and New York, 2001), p. 36.



Dalit scholars like Gopal Guru,<sup>212</sup> others like Sharmila Rege, Vidyut Bhagwat, and so on have supported a specifically Dalit feminist standpoint. Furthermore, Guru, for example, cautions the Dalit brethren against patriarchies that obstruct Dalit women.<sup>213</sup> Rege however draws on Liddle and Joshi's understandings of division of labour and sexual division of labour<sup>214</sup> to elaborate on her conception of the 'brahmanical social order.' Rege also seems to principally follow the Bourdieuan framework in the Indian context, and argues that a division of labour, a sexual division of labour and a division of sexual labour account for an understanding of the incarnate social order, Brahmanical patriarchy, caste-based patriarchy and endogamy.<sup>215</sup> She also underlines the silence on the subject of caste-based patriarchies for Dalit women:

That an internal critique of patriarchy in Dalit politics is much needed is beyond doubt and the importance of such a critique for political radicalism has been in fact over-determined.<sup>216</sup>

Rege calls upon higher caste/class feminists to 're-invent' themselves as Dalit feminists in order to strengthen the movement.<sup>217</sup> Some have indeed agreed to try to

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<sup>212</sup> Gopal Guru opened the debate on the use of 'difference' for a Dalit feminist politics by bringing into sharp focus the assumptions behind Dalit women to talk differently. The feminist scholar Sharmila Rege which I discuss later in the chapter initiated the debate on the need for a Dalit feminist standpoint. These are useful analytical tools in ways they centre Dalit women. Gopal Guru, 'Dalit women talk differently,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30: 41 and 42 (14-21 October 1995), pp. 2548-49. This debate has been most recently published in Anupama Rao, *Gender and Caste* (New Delhi, 2003): Introduction. For details see the discussion on the invisibility of Dalit women in latter part of the analyses.

<sup>213</sup> Gopal Guru, 'Looking critically at Dalit activism' *Hindu* (12 January 1999), and 'Dalit women talk differently,' p. 2549.

<sup>214</sup> See p. 57 for the discussion on Liddle and Joshi.

<sup>215</sup> Sharmila Rege, 'Dalit Women talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33: 44 (31 October 1998), pp. WS-39-WS-46. Also see Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA., 1984), p. 474.

<sup>216</sup> Sharmila Rege, 'Dalit Women talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33: 44 (31 October 1998), pp. WS-39-WS-46.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. WS-45. Rege has recently written about Dalit women's testimonies thus underlining the significance of Dalit women's voice.

do so.<sup>218</sup> However, it is an irony that, instead of acclaiming Kumud Pawde for inaugurating this move, the credit is enjoyed by 'others.' The danger here is that the mainstream appropriates the voice of the subaltern and then claims to speak in its interests and even for it, thus once again 'silencing' the subaltern – to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak.<sup>219</sup>

In my view, it is important not to subsume Dalit feminism into the overarching rubric of Indian feminism, for one needs to comprehend the specific context of the femininity and oppressed sexuality of Dalit women.<sup>220</sup> The assertion that 'all women are oppressed' implies that women have a common lot; it blanks out the diversity of experiences, and it fails to understand the specific Dalit histories, culture and religion, class, personal lives, and self-hood in their own contexts. What we have to search for is not so much an alternative understanding/voice to written history (as David Hardiman puts it);<sup>221</sup> *it is the voice itself*. The question of voice and experience raises a problematic. While it is important to situate experience by historicising it, it is a discursive account of such experience that allows for an understanding of experience as something contested.<sup>222</sup> The actual callisthenics would be a spectacle to watch

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<sup>218</sup> See works of Indian feminists like Sangari, K and Vaid, S., *Recasting Women*, 1990: Introduction, Uma Chakravarti, Kannabirans, Rege, and so on.

<sup>219</sup> Gayatri Chakravarti-Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern speak,' C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of culture* (Illinois, 1988), pp. 271-307. This essay appears in many versions.

<sup>220</sup> I would employ and extend the third world feminist renderings to the case of Dalit women in India. See Chandra T. Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,' *Feminist Review*, 30 (Autumn 1988) pp. 61-88. This paper is published in many versions. Also see C.T. Mohanty, A. Russo, and T. Lourdes (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991), C.T. Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (Durham, 2003).

<sup>221</sup> David Hardiman, 'Community, Patriarchy, Honour: Raghu Bhangare's revolt,' *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 23: 1 (October 1995), pp. 88-130.

<sup>222</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 15, 20 for these discussions. I am speaking of the possibility of taking experience-as-a-fact, in order to ground a Dalit epistemology. Also see Joan Scott's article, 'Experience' where she argues, that while 'experience serves as a way to talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is unassailable,' we have to be conscious that 'experience should not be the origin of our explanation but that which we want to explain because 'what counts as experience in neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always



when the subaltern Dalit woman finally voices and theorises such experiences and truths in a way that speaks truthfully to them and their condition.

Some male Dalits, such as Guru and Ilaiyah, have made a rather different move, in that they try to subsume the category of 'gender' under that of the 'caste' collective. They argue that all women are Dalits. They do this in order to forge solidarity in the fight against the oppressive caste system. However, they turn a blind eye to the fact that the vast majority of high caste women have no such gendered solidarity with Dalit women.

When during my interviews I questioned Dalit women about their marital relations, the resonant theme was that of male domination. The feminist streak in me motivated me to inquire more into theories about patriarchy and explore whether or not there was a particular quality to it in the case of Dalits. It is to this exercise that we shall now turn.

### **Engaging Patriarchy, Intra-Caste Patriarchy in General and Dalit Patriarchy in Particular**

Of all the concepts generated by contemporary feminist theory, patriarchy is probably the most overused (and most contested) and, in some respects, the most under-theorized.<sup>223</sup> The notion of patriarchy is highly problematic, in that it exists in various forms in different social domains, for example in employment, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, law and politics.<sup>224</sup> Some view it in an evolutionary perspective. Carole Pateman thus assigns it to the premodern period,

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contested and therefore, always political. See Joan Scott, 'Experience,' in Judith Butler and Joan Scott (eds), *Feminists theorize the political* (New York, 1992), pp. 22-40. Also see Chapter 1, pp. 26-29.

<sup>223</sup> I am following Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy,' *Gender and Society*, 2: 3, Special Issue to Honour Jessie Bernard, (September 1988), pp. 274-290.

<sup>224</sup> Nira Yuval Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London and California, 1997), p. 7 and original in Susan Walby, 1990 and Special issue of *Sociology*, 1989.

with patriarchy becoming transformed into fraternity in modern liberal times.<sup>225</sup> Val Moghadam (1994) and John Caldwell locate patriarchy in geographical zones, namely the 'patriarchal belt' that stretches from Northern Africa across the Middle East to the northern plains of the Indian subcontinent and parts of rural China. In this 'belt' of 'classical patriarchy'<sup>226</sup> the patriarchal extended family is the central social unit, in which the senior man rules everyone else and family honour is closely linked to a woman's controlled 'virtue.' We should note the underlying racism that aligns such 'patriarchal belts' with 'coloured' landscapes. Deniz Kandiyoti has noted that the term patriarchy often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders.<sup>227</sup>

A few studies reveal that women invoke the identity of the race, family, and caste rather than their sex as it is less helpful to them in the fulfilment of their desires.<sup>228</sup> A study by Patricia Gurin provides insight in understanding why women in general have not developed group consciousness as readily as other subordinate categories. Gurin underlines that one of the major reasons for weaker gender consciousness among women is lack of political consciousness.<sup>229</sup> Gurin further marks that women do not express a distinctively subordinate consciousness, and this contrasts dramatically with the subordinate-superordinate polarization of the

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<sup>225</sup> S. Andermahr, T. Lovell, C. Wolkowitz, *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* (London, 1997), pp. 159-160.

<sup>226</sup> Yuval Davis, *Gender and Nation*, p. 7, and original in Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with patriarchy,' p. 278.

<sup>227</sup> Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy,' p. 275.

<sup>228</sup> Even Tanika Sarkar argues that very rarely would women unite under gender. See Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 21-23.

<sup>229</sup> Patricia Gurin, 'Women's Gender Consciousness,' *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 49: 2 (Summer, 1985), pp. 143-163.



perspectives of blacks and whites. Her study also underlines that while the structure of gender relations, compared to that of race relations, inhibits the development of strong group consciousness among women, it simultaneously provides a different avenue for social change—one that capitalizes on the greater consensus among men and women.<sup>230</sup>

Claudine Gay and Katherine Tate, in their article entitled 'Doubly Bound: The Impact of Gender and Race on the Politics of Black women,' argue that black women are 'doubly bound,' and that gender matters as much as race in forming their political identities.<sup>231</sup> Using data from two national surveys of voting-eligible black Americans in 1984 and 1996, they establish that black women identify as strongly on the basis of their gender as their race, and that these gender and racial identities are mutually reinforcing. These authors are of the view that 'being female and black do not automatically lead to a gender or race consciousness. But once consciousness is reached such individuals are more politically liberated than those who lack group consciousness.'<sup>232</sup> I am looking for such a consciousness in the Dalit women I interviewed. As a part of my project, I interrogated their participation in 'counter-public-spheres' and I discovered that very few of these women were involved in such a Gramscian emancipatory exercise.<sup>233</sup>

Feminist literature has searched for the organising principles that determine the power differences between men and women. Theories concerning 'patriarchy,' (Eisenstein, 1979; Walby, 1990) or as others prefer to call it the 'sex/gender system,' (Rubin, 1975) or 'gender regimes,' (Connell, 1987) have been at the centre of feminist

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>231</sup> Gay and Tate, 'Doubly Bound: The Impact of Gender and Race on the Politics of Black Women', *Political Psychology*, 19: 1, 1998; Also see Elizabeth Spelman, 'Gender and Race The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought' in Kumkum, Bhavnani (ed.), *Feminism and 'Race'*, pp. 74-88.

<sup>232</sup> Gay and Tate, 'Doubly Bound,' p. 172.

<sup>233</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 10-11.

theory since its inception.<sup>234</sup> For Nira Yuval-Davis, 'patriarchy' is too crude an analytical tool. She argues that it does not allow for the fact that in most societies some women have power at least over some men as well as over other women. Nor does it take into account the fact that in concrete situations women's oppression is intermeshed in and articulated by other forms of social oppression and social divisions.<sup>235</sup> Furthermore, Yuval Davis states:

Gender should be understood not as a "real" social difference between men and women, but as a mode of discourse which relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference as opposed to their economic positions or to their membership in ethnic and racial collectivities. Therefore gender and sex can be analysed as modes of discourse but with different agendas.<sup>236</sup>

Individuals have multiple identities – those of sex, generation, race, occupation, and so on. 'At a particular point of time they have to decide which identity to invoke.'<sup>237</sup>

Feminists tend to absolutise the male and female domains, seeing them as seamless blocks, forming binary opposites of total power and total powerlessness.<sup>238</sup> For

Tanika Sarkar patriarchy operates through far more complicated trajectories. She

writes:

[patriarchy operates] with crisscrossing power lines that fracture both domains and that, at times, unite segments across the blocs. The same woman, depending on the presence of sons, her husband's status and fortune, and her age, gets to know both subjection and rule. This is why, and how, perhaps, women are, much of the time, complicit subjects of patriarchy.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Yuval Davis, *Gender and Nation*, p. 5.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>237</sup> B. Jhunjhunwala and M. Jhunjhunwala, *Indian Approach to Women's Empowerment* (Jaipur, 2004), p. 308.

<sup>238</sup> Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, p. 21.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.



Thus a Brahman woman would invoke her identity as a woman in a group of women gathering while she would invoke her identity as a Brahman in a gathering of Brahmans.<sup>240</sup>

The Indian-Hindu tradition holds the contribution of the father and the mother to the making of the child as those of the 'seed' and the 'soil' respectively. Therefore, in comparison between the seed and the soil or seed and the womb, obviously the seed is weightier and the offspring is characterized by the seed. Evidence from genomic imprintings since 1984 also reveals that the child inherits unconscious desires from his father and capacities from his mother.<sup>241</sup> We live in a 'genomic age,' and we move into new notions of sexism and racism.

Contrary to what the notions of patriarchy suggest, women are not usually just passive recipients and non-participants in the determination of gender relations. Probably most importantly, not all women are oppressed and/or subjugated in the same way or to the same extent, even within the same society at any specific moment.<sup>242</sup> As Kamla Bhasin states:

Women also support and perpetuate patriarchy [...] in order to retain their privileges women continually renegotiate their bargaining power, so to say, sometimes at the cost of other women. No unequal system can continue without participation of the oppressed, some of who derive some benefits from it. Women also perpetuate and support patriarchy.<sup>243</sup>

Many women thus endorse patriarchy in order to derive certain perceived benefits for themselves.

<sup>240</sup> Jhunjhunwalas' in their work *Indian Approach to Women's Empowerment*, have cited this example quoting Dalit women's stand. I have inverted this example of objectifying Dalit women adopted by Jhunjhunwalas and other scholars.

<sup>241</sup> Perhaps this is the biological justification for understanding patriarchy. See Jhunjhunwala and Jhunjhunwala, *Indian Approach to Women's Empowerment*, p. 164. Also see Ruth Hubbards, *Exploring the Gene Myth: how genetic information is produced and manipulated by scientists, physicians, employers, insurance companies, educators and law enforcers* (Boston, c1993).

<sup>242</sup> I am following Yuval Davis, See Yuval Davis, *Gender and Nation*, p. 8.

<sup>243</sup> Kamla Bhasin, *Understanding Gender* (New Delhi, 2000), p. 22.

For the purposes of this chapter, I use ‘patriarchy’ generally to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women and keep them subordinated. The subordination that women ‘experience on a daily basis, regardless of class, takes various forms—discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence—within the family, at the work place, and in society.’<sup>244</sup>

Dalit patriarchy has been a locus of severe criticism in the writings of Sharad Patil, Gopal Guru, Chhaya Datar, Urmila Pawar, Sharmila Rege, Vidyut Bhagwat to Pratima Pardeshi.<sup>245</sup> In his pioneering argument on a separate *chul* (hearth) for Dalit women, Gopal Guru delineates certain external and internal factors to demonstrate Dalit women’s need to ‘talk differently.’<sup>246</sup> Guru accuses Dalit leaders of subordinating and at times suppressing the independent political and cultural expression of Dalit women. That this internal critique of Dalit patriarchy in Dalit politics is much needed is beyond doubt. Guru argues that ‘the experience of Dalit women shows that local resistance within Dalits is important. The whole situation *compels us to defend the claim of Dalit women to talk differently.*’<sup>247</sup> Such

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<sup>244</sup> Kamla Bhasin, *What is Patriarchy?* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>245</sup> Gopal Guru, ‘Dalit Women Talk Differently,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30: 41 and 42 (October 14-21, 1995), p. 2549, Guru, ‘Looking critically at Dalit Activism,’ *Hindu*, January 12, 1999; Rege, ‘Real Feminism and Dalit Women: Scripts of Denial and Accusation,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35: 6 (Feb 5, 2000), pp. 492-495; Urmila Pawar, ‘What has Dalit movement offered to Women?’ in Sandeep Pendse (ed.), *At Crossroads: Dalit Movement Today* (Bombay, 1994) and Urmila Pawar, Interview: ‘The Dalit Woman speaks up: Amhihi Ithihas Ghadawala,’ in Basu, *Translating Caste*, pp. 234-241; Pratima Pardeshi, ‘Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and the question of women’s liberation in India,’ translated by Sharmila Rege, Monograph published by the Women’s Study Centre (University of Pune, 1997); Vidyut Bhagwat, and Pratima Pardeshi, *Abrahmani Streevadi Itihasslekhanchya Dishene*, (Pune, 1998) also see Sumitra Bhawe, *Pan on fire: Eight Dalit women tell their stories* (New Delhi, 1988).

<sup>246</sup> Guru, ‘Dalit Women Talk Differently,’ pp. 2548-49.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2549. Emphasis is mine. Guru argues against the exclusion of Dalit women from both the political and cultural arena. He further underlines that social location determines the perception of reality and therefore representation of Dalit woman’s issues by non-Dalit women was less valid and less authentic. Rege argues against Guru that such claims on the basis of authenticity of experience may lead to a narrow identity politics which may further limit the emancipatory potential of Dalit women’s organizations. See Rege, ‘Dalit Women talk differently: A critique of “difference” and towards a Dalit feminist Standpoint position’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33: 44 (October 1998), p. WS-44.



assessments of Dalit politics by activists and social scientists recognize that the movement is at crossroads in terms of ideological debates on this issue.

Dinkar Salve in *Chakravyuhat Dalit Chalval* (Dalit Movement in a Maze) underlines the need for Dalit politics to view Dalit women not as numbers but as revolutionary agents.<sup>248</sup> In a similar vein, Guru affirms the need for Dalit men to disengage with the portrayal of Dalit women as divisive and to incorporate them for their positive emancipatory potential. This would lead to a meaningful engagement with their creative energies.<sup>249</sup> My respondent Kumud Pawde remembered the days of this heated debate.<sup>250</sup>

A few upper caste and middle-class feminists argue that their first loyalty must be to their gender, and urge Dalit women to see the way in which they are being exploited by their own fathers, husbands and brothers. Madhu Kishwar argues that 'oppression of women by men of their own community is the fundamental reality of women's oppression in India, cutting across classes and castes.'<sup>251</sup> In her response to Sharmila Rege's paper entitled 'Dalit Women Talk Differently, (discussed in the earlier paragraphs) Chhaya Datar casts a critical eye over the trend towards identity politics, linking 'the explosion of caste-class identities to the new trend towards Brahmanisation/Sanskritisation among Dalit and OBC castes and the unstable political atmosphere which encourages the bargaining for seats in the democratic processes of elections and power-sharing.'<sup>252</sup> She goes on: 'Dalit women are posed in a competitive situation against savarna women, encouraged by Dalit and OBC men

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<sup>248</sup> Dinkar Salve, 'Chakravyuhat Dalit Chalval' (Dalit Movement in a Maze), Krantisinha Nana Patil Academy, Pune, 1997, as quoted in Rege, 'Real Feminism,' p. 494.

<sup>249</sup> Guru, 'Looking critically at Dalit activism,' *The Hindu* (January 12, 1999).

<sup>250</sup> I have already delineated Kumud Pawde's experience in the preceding pages, see pp. 59-60.

<sup>251</sup> Madhu Kishwar in discussion with Jaya Jaitly in 'Samvad,' *The Times of India*, August 15, 1998. I have borrowed this quote from Vandana Sonalkar, 'An Agenda For Gender Politics' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34: 1 and 2 (9 January 1999), pp. 24-25.

<sup>252</sup> Chhaya Datar, 'Non-Brahman Renderings of Feminism in Maharashtra: Is it a more Emancipatory Force?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34: 41 (9 October 1999), p. 2964.

who want to divert the prospective competition aimed at them by their own women to savarna women.’<sup>253</sup> Seconding the argument of Kishwar (as delineated above) Datar accuses Dalit Panthers of using Dalit women as pawns in the race for power, of not encouraging Dalit women, and not taking up their issues in the revolt against Brahmanical culture during the 1970s.<sup>254</sup> She thus blames men in general, and (in this case) the Dalit Panther party in particular for not empowering women and encouraging their dependence on men. Datar’s preoccupation with women’s unity and empowerment leads her to critique Dalit patriarchy.

Vandana Sonalkar, in an influential paper entitled ‘An Agenda for Gender Politics,’ decries the above views of Datar, Kishwar, Moghe and others.<sup>255</sup> She points out that such a line of thinking stems from an essentially incorrect understanding of how patriarchy operates in Indian society. She argues that such feminist postulates gloss over the fact that, in India, patriarchy operates through caste, reproduces caste hierarchies, and also uses caste divisions to perpetuate itself. She further affirms:

The category “women” does not have sufficient unity to represent itself as apolitical group cutting across class, caste and community, though this may also be true in the present conjuncture! Rather, the mode of oppression of women in this society is so intimately bound up with caste that both issues have to be addressed together.<sup>256</sup>

The categories of ‘gender’ and ‘caste’ in the Indian social nexus are intertwined. Further, one has to take into consideration the different forms of patriarchy that different women face. Thus, it seems that the ‘the danger lies in ranking oppressions.’ One should be aware of such reductive or essentialist theoretical tendency (whether it

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p. 2965.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 2965. ‘Dalit Panthers’ is the radical wing of the Republican Party of India. They began in the late 1960s in the slums of Bombay, as young Dalit activists and developed a confrontational style against all sorts of discrimination.

<sup>255</sup> Vandana Sonalkar, ‘An Agenda for Gender politics,’ pp. 24-29.

<sup>256</sup> Sonalkar, ‘An Agenda For Gender Politics,’ p. 26.



be Marxist, feminist, or cultural nationalist) to posit one kind of oppression as primary for all time and in all places.<sup>257</sup> Thus, the nature of Brahman women's oppression may be different from that of the Dalit women, and not less or more. However, the oppression of Brahman women is mediated by Brahmanical privilege, unlike Dalit women's oppression.

Sonalkar therefore takes to task Indian feminists whose struggles do not engage with the forces of patriarchy on a social scale. She refuses to romanticize Dalit women's sexuality, and argues that the position of Dalit women is in many important respects worse than upper caste women:

Educated upper caste women are granted freedom to work and move in society with relative ease, as long as they respect the broad rules of caste and class endogamy; minor violations on their part are also accepted. But the Dalit or adivasi woman in the village is still seen as not having any rights. When upper caste, educated, middle-class women participate in building organisations for asserting the rights of such women, they still carry their caste identity into the "field"; they can deal with bureaucrats, judges and the police, while a Dalit woman going to these officials with the same demands is still, in the India of 1998, in real danger of being raped.<sup>258</sup>

This was a fitting reply to some upper caste, middle class feminists who seem to be misguided about the actual conditions of Dalit women and Dalit patriarchy. Sonalkar also underscores Urmila Pawar's submissions that I dealt with in the preceding pages.<sup>259</sup> There are parallels here with Kumkum Bhavani's argument that white feminist assertions that 'sisterhood is global' tend to deny the different spaces that are inhabited by non-white and third world women. In this way, inequalities of power

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<sup>257</sup> I am drawing upon works of feminists like Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, *La Prieta, This Bridge called my Back: writings of radical women of color* (2nd edn, New York, c1983); Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, 'Challenging Imperial Feminism,' *Feminist Review: Many Voices, 1 Chant*, No. 17 (1984), pp. 3-19.

<sup>258</sup> Sonalkar, 'An Agenda for Gender Politics,' p. 29.

<sup>259</sup> See Urmila Pawar, p. 2 of this chapter.

within the women's movement are masked.<sup>260</sup> We may thus see as analogous the movement of non-white women in the West and that of the Dalit women in India, which can make spaces for an enriched feminist theory and greater liberation for women in general.

Continuing her critical analyses of the gender/caste project Rege forcefully accused Datar of blinding the 'spaces within the anti-caste struggles' made by Dalit and Bahujan women: 'What such a script fails to see is the radicalism of Dalit women activists working at the local level.'<sup>261</sup> I came across some respondents who sometimes challenged the patriarchal leadership, making spaces for feminism in the Dalit movement, and other times privilege their Dalit-bahujan identity over gender. In response to real women's experiences, Rege called for an in-depth analysis of castes and distribution of power in Maharashtra.<sup>262</sup> Instead of accusing Dalit male leadership, 'an engaged introspection within the [upper caste, middle class] women's movement is also called for.'<sup>263</sup>

Patriarchies should thus be seen as relational, subject to a wider political economy, occupying different configurations, and subject to continual reformulation.

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<sup>260</sup> Bhavnani, *Feminism and 'Race,'* p. 5. See also Julia Sudbury, *'Other kinds of dreams': Black Women's organizations and the politics of transformation* (London and New York, 1998) for an overview of these arguments in the U.K.

<sup>261</sup> Rege, 'Real feminism,' p. 494 and original in Ilina Sen, *Spaces within the Struggle* (New Delhi, 1992).

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. p. 494 and for a detailed analysis see Suhas Palshikar, *Jaat va Maharashtraatil Sattakaran* (Caste or Power Politics in Maharashtra), Sagata, 1998 and Kishore Dhamale, *Brahmanvaad Viruddha Bahujanvaad* Krantisinh Nana Patil Academy, 1997.

<sup>263</sup> Rege, 'Real feminism,' p. 494 and original in Vidyut Bhagwat, 'Sarvadharmatil Dalit-OBC Streeyana Hakkachi Pratinidhitva Have (Dalit-OBC women of all religions must have representation),' *Maharashtra Times*, (27 July 1997); Pratima Pardeshi, 'Dr.Ambedkar Ani Streemuktivad (Dr.Ambedkar and Women's Liberation), Krantisinh Nana Patil Academy, Pune, 1997; Rekha Thakur, 'Uchavarniyanchi Dambhikta' (Hypocrisy of the Upper castes), *Loksatta*, (28 July 1998); Sonalkar, 'An Agenda For Gender Politics', Rajeshwari Deshpande 'Politically Sensitive Gender Discourse,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (6-13 March 1999).



I stand by Kumkum Sangari who argues that patriarchies cannot be challenged in isolation.<sup>264</sup>

A view that came up time and time again in my interviews with Dalit women was a notion that high caste – particularly Brahman – men were more liberal in their treatment of women. In this, they ignore the many forms of oppressions inflicted by upper caste men on upper-caste women. Autobiographies of Brahman women and widows from the end of the nineteenth century in Bengal and Maharashtra are replete with stories of their subjugation and oppression. The inhuman systems of sati, disfiguring of widows, banning widow-remarriage, and imposition of traditional roles of women even through the educational curricula, speak volumes about upper caste and middle class patriarchy. It ignores the fact, also, that the upper castes, including some upper caste women, strongly opposed the Hindu Code Bill that was promoted by Ambedkar. Instead of praising this bold pro-woman initiative by Ambedkar, the upper castes called him the ‘Modern Manu’ in a sarcastic way and ridiculed him for donning the mantle of a Yajnavalkya or Parashar.<sup>265</sup> There is still no adequate legislation to guard the rights for Indian women in general, and Hindu women in particular. It shows that the work of feminists has still to go a long way in India.

It needs to be emphasised that Brahman women are in a different position of power to Dalit women. I once again draw upon Sonalkar’s article to illustrate my

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<sup>264</sup> Kumkum Sangari, ‘Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30: 51 (23 December 1995), pp. 3287-3310 and continuing the same article in 30: 52 (30 December 1995), pp. 3381-3391. For Sangari, ‘patriarchy is to be related to other systemic oppressions. Feminists cannot isolate and challenge patriarchies alone but also have to confront all that they are shaped by and embedded in; that is, the very nature of patriarchies requires a thoroughgoing egalitarian project which demands an end to all forms of inequality that women and men are subject to-based on class, caste, distribution of surplus and division of labour.’

<sup>265</sup> Eleanor Zelliott, ‘Dr. Ambedkar and the Empowerment of Women’ in Anupama Rao, *Gender and Caste* (New Delhi), pp. 204-217; Pardeshi, Pratima, ‘The Hindu Code Bill for the liberation of Women,’ in Rao, *Gender and Caste*, pp. 346-362; Gyan Pandey, ‘The Time of Dalit Conversion,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41: 18 (6-12 May 2006), pp. 1779-1788 for a fresh foray into this argument.

point about the glaring disparity in the treatment offered to upper and lower caste women. Sonalkar demonstrates the fact that caste operates through a number of social and economic institutions, ensuring first and foremost the domination of the upper castes and the subservience of the lowest castes. She argues:

Women of the lower castes remain at the bottom of the hierarchical order, they have no right to privacy or decision-making and no right of protection against sexual exploitation. This can be seen in the question put by a judge to Bhanwari Devi when she went to court against her upper caste rapists: "How far apart were your legs when the rape took place?"<sup>266</sup>

The judge in this case considered Dalit women's experiences and vulnerability to upper caste male violence to be of little consequence. For the upper castes, the sexual exploitation and rape of a Dalit woman does not present any element of comparison with the rape of a respectable upper caste woman. The case of Dalit women parallels the African American women who are considered 'sexually promiscuous' and 'whores,' whose cries lack any legitimacy. What happens to a lower caste (or a coloured) woman has usually been of little concern to the judges and courts.<sup>267</sup> Hence the judge in the Bhanwari Devi case further asked, 'how could upper caste men rape this "Dalit" woman, she ought to be out of her mind.' Would the judge have made such comments about an upper caste woman? Viewed historically as 'loose women,' Dalit women's cries of rape necessarily lack legal authority. Three Dalit women are raped every day, on average and the remarkably few upper caste men have been prosecuted for sexual violence they have inflicted on these women. Dalit women are

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<sup>266</sup> Sonalkar, 'An Agenda for Gender Politics,' p. 29. Also see Vandana Sonalkar, 'Towards a Feminism of Caste,' *Himal South Asian*, available at [www.himalmag.com/2004/january/review.htm](http://www.himalmag.com/2004/january/review.htm). Also see Urmila Pawar's argument on p. 2 of this chapter.

<sup>267</sup> I am principally drawing on works of feminist scholars like bell hooks, "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory", in her *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre* (Boston, MA., 1984), pp. 1-15; Angela Davis, 'Rape, Racism and the myth of the Black Rapist,' in her book, *Women, Race, and Class*, (New York, c1981), pp. 172-201; Bhavanani, *Feminism and 'Race'* (Oxford and New York, 2001); Patricia Hill Collins, 'The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought' from *Signs* 14.4 (1989), pp. 745-73.



sexually 'touchable'; they are raped, paraded naked and killed. The police and the state machinery are all complicit.

### **Caste, Marriage and Education**

Ambedkar understood the force of endogamous marriages in Indian society which strengthened caste segregations. Such practices do not allow castes to dissolve. In order to bring about a mixing of races that would not allow caste identity to prevail, Ambedkar spoke about the significance of inter-caste marriages.<sup>268</sup> Education has an important role to play in this, for it tends to lead to a higher age of marriage for men and women. Sachidanand argues that: 'the shift from ascribed occupation to occupation by choice means lengthening of the period of education and at times an uncertain future, thus making them hesitant to marry and raise a family until they are well-settled in life.'<sup>269</sup> Suneila Malik notes also that educated SCs prefer higher age at marriage for son and daughters as compared to the illiterate and less educated.<sup>270</sup> Also, the higher the level of education, the lower was the opposition to inter-caste marriage.

A study by P.N. Panday showed that there was not a single case opposing inter-caste marriage among postgraduates, whereas among graduates only one in three opposed it. Sometimes the higher educated SCs also want to marry upper castes.<sup>271</sup> Suma Chinis's study suggested that 53% of school students and 39% of college students said that it was either 'important' or 'very important' for them to marry a

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<sup>268</sup> Ambedkar was convinced that the real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. 'Nothing will serve as the solvent of caste.' See Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 67. Also see Chapter 9.

<sup>269</sup> Sachidanand, as quoted in S.K. Chatterjee, *Education of the Scheduled Castes: Looking Ahead*, (New Delhi, 2000), p. 281.

<sup>270</sup> Suneila Malik, as quoted in Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 171.

<sup>271</sup> Sachidanand, as quoted in Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 281.

person of their own caste.<sup>272</sup> In a similar vein my study also suggests that some educated Dalits like the Pawades and Nikams lean towards inter-caste marriages. However, many Dalit fathers are not willing to marry their daughters to caste Hindu boys, as they are concerned about the treatment that might be meted out to their daughters. Therefore it is not only that upper caste underscore endogamous marriages (as I referred to while dealing with the post-Mandal agitations of women), but the lower castes frequently share a similar view. We have to think therefore of alternative remedies for the erasure of caste since the Ambedkarite formula of inter-caste marriages is under-played in contemporary times.

Some of my respondents suggested a fear of their treatment in upper-caste households; however some of the second-generation and higher educated third-generation women like Prakshoti Pawar and Amita Pillewar were open to inter-caste marriages. Another study revealed by B.V. Shah and Thakur revealed that parental authority was significant in the matter of marriage.<sup>273</sup> Malik explains that among graduates and post-graduates not more than 14 percent think that the boy and girl concerned should decide upon marriages.<sup>274</sup> A study by Sachidanand reveals that 'love marriages are still unknown. This may be attributed to the fact that among the SCs spread of education and modern attributes are only a recent phenomenon.'<sup>275</sup> On similar lines, my study also marks that love marriages were, and are indeed, rare among my respondents. However, my experience reveals that some SC males pursue upper caste women as they think that upper caste women are trained better and are educated in a good environment which they would pass on to their next generation.

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<sup>272</sup> Suma Chitnis, *A Long Way To Go...Report on a survey of Scheduled Caste High School and College students in Fifteen States of India* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 103.

<sup>273</sup> Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 281.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.



Unfortunately, SC women may not be a priority for upper caste boys. From my experiences growing up in Pune and my interactions with Dalit men, the number of marriages between SC-males and-upper-caste women is definitely greater than the other way round.<sup>276</sup> Are we going to face a similar situation as in the case of Black single women, in that one reason for increasingly single Black women is that Black men seek white women?<sup>277</sup> What is the fate of such 'Dalit of the Dalits'—Dalit women and African-American women?

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<sup>276</sup> Also see Chapter 9, pp. 253-254.

<sup>277</sup> Patricia Hill Collins writes about the Black Man who remains elusive to a Black woman. He is seeking the white woman most of the time. Hill Collins, *Black feminist thought*, p. 162-163.

### Chapter 4: The Right to Education

Most of the Dalits who migrated from rural areas to Pune City during the course of the twentieth century were illiterate at the time of their migration. There are very few accounts of their lives, but from what I have discovered through interviews with their educated daughters, there were great obstacles to their obtaining any education in the villages from which they had come. Many never even considered going to school. As Lakshmi Shinde stated:

The father told us that he faced a lot of hardships and times were difficult. He used to work on the farm in some village in Solapur. He came to Pune later. He did not know school. He never told us anything about it.<sup>278</sup>

Others desired education, but found many obstacles placed in their way. Lalita

Randhir recounted how her Dalit father had told her:

I was full of curiosity and remorse when I saw these Brahman boys walk to school. I did not have such luxury. I had to work in the fields, watch cattle, get firewood, help my father and mother with all jobs including the village *taralki*. I used to watch these Brahman boys going to school, whilst I sat under a tree watching my cattle. They were nicely dressed in white shirts and dhotis, with black topis with bags hanging on their shoulders. They used to carry books usually in a bag. I used to wonder what this was all about. What was school? Why was I not allowed in school? Why did I have to look after the cattle when they attended school? What did they do at school? What is reading like? What does the teacher teach about? I used to see them all play from my far-off shady tree.<sup>279</sup>

He had sat outside the school writing in the mud whatever he understood from the echoes of the teacher's voice inside the class. These 'falling words' of the teacher are like those of God who would impart knowledge in order to awaken/open the eyes of

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<sup>278</sup> Lakshmi Shinde, Matang, Class 12, Self-employed, Parvati slum-Pune, 9 October, 2000. Lakshmi is a young, smart, and successful Matang business woman. She lives in the Parvati slums and handles a number of small businesses. She has special employment schemes for women: making flowers, artificial jewelry, etc.

<sup>279</sup> Lalita Randhir talked about her father. Lalita Randhir, Buddhist, Masters in Commerce, Bank Officer, Ramtekdi (Swami Vivekanand Nagar)-Pune, Interviewed on 22 May 2001. I have seen Lalita since my childhood. I remember her with her eyes towards the ground, with a bag on her shoulder, limping to her office.



Dalits. Further, we should note the ‘symbolic power’ enjoyed by the teachers and the belief in the legitimacy of the words of the Brahman teacher. Thus the operation of power leads to the reproduction of conditions of inequality, in that the upper caste Brahman teacher is ‘*deva*,’ rather a ‘*bhudeva*,’ a God on earth and the lower caste, an ‘untouchable.’

Even when they were admitted to school, they often had to sit in a separate space, far from the teacher, or even in the corridor or veranda. Meena Mahajan’s mother told me that she had never been to school, but she remembers her brother sitting in the school corridor while the teacher taught.

The Brahman sat first, then Maratha, then Chambhar, Mahar and the Matang in the dust at the doors of the school, outside [...]. *Kai aaiku yenar o yevhadya lamba, tumhich sanga kasa shikaicha an kai shikaicha? Mulinna tar baher jayala manaai, ghar kam phakta!* [How could a student listen from so far? How were we to be educated? Girls were to engage in house-work and not allowed to go outside.]<sup>280</sup>

Such were the predicaments of Dalit boys; for Dalit girls even the idea of going to school was in most cases beyond their imagination. Meena’s mother thus once again demarcated the ‘caste-rows’—rows in the classroom along caste divisions. She also suggested that the inscription of ‘feminized’ domains of the ‘private’ by some Dalit parents did not allow Dalits girls to be educated. Further, Meena’s mother pointed out the social hierarchy which was crystallised by the education system. Moreover, students were strictly categorised on caste lines which also decided their capabilities. Caste decided their rank: the highest caste would be the first-benchers who were the most ‘intelligent,’ thus mirroring the social hierarchy, and the lowest castes, the pest, the vermin were the last in the classroom, or even outside such a classroom. Thus, schools, within/without classrooms, were arranged in order to regulate the social

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<sup>280</sup> Meena Mahajan’s mother, Buddhist, Mangalwar Peth-Pune, 29 April 2002. She did not have much time to talk to me, because she had to attend her vegetable stall.

divisions and there could be no infiltration on an individual, or a collective scale. Where could these Dalit girls find emancipation? Furthermore, when the Dalit bodies were made 'visible,' the upper-caste pupils perhaps felt more privileged and further denigrated Dalit students.

### **The Struggle for a Right to Education**

Jotirao Phule occupies a central and pioneering position in the struggle for a right of all to education. Through his *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Society for the Seeking of Truth), he launched a vigorous polemic against the hegemony of the *shetji-bhatji*<sup>281</sup> complex. He not only constructed a counter-history for the lower castes, but he also identified the lack of education as the main culprit in keeping the lower castes in mental slavery. He thus stated that 'a good deal of their poverty, their want of self-reliance, their entire dependence upon the learned and intelligent classes' could be attributed to the 'deplorable state of education among the peasantry.'<sup>282</sup> Phule understood the cunning means adopted by the Brahmans and allied castes, and the elites in general to keep the Shudras, Dalits and women in perpetual darkness. The first battle was to win them a right to be educated. I would categorise this as a first-stage struggle. This would, Phule envisaged, lead to the development of that 'critical consciousness' that is necessary to bring about a cultural emancipation of the lower classes, something that resonates later in the twentieth century in the works of Ambedkar, Gramsci, Freire, and Foucault. The critical thinking, the deconstructive

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<sup>281</sup> Marwari-Brahman (Bania-Brahman), duo which harassed the lower castes. See Phule, 'Marwadi, Bhat yanche kasabavishayi,' *Gulamgiri*, as in Dhananjay Keer and S.G. Malshe eds. *Mahatma Phule Samagra Vangmay* (Mumbai, 1969), p. 149.

<sup>282</sup> Jotirao Phule, *Collected works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule*, Vol. 2, pp. 67-68. For further details about him and his work see his *Ballad of Raja Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhosale (1869)*; *Priestcraft exposed (1869)*; *Slavery (1873)*; Keer and Malshe eds. *Mahatma Phule Samagra Vangmay* (Mumbai, 1969); also see works by Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and the Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India*, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 119; Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in colonial India*, (New Delhi: Sage, 1994); Uma Chakravarti, *Re-writing History: The life and times of Pandita Ramabai*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).



ability or 'the third eye,' as Phule theorised/labeled it, demanded not mere alphabetical competence but the capacity to see through knowledge/power equations in society and consequently to dismantle them. Phule's postulation was clearly observed in practice when his Matang girl-student, Muktabai, produced in 1855 a scathing written critique of Brahmanical hegemony.<sup>283</sup> The newly acquired skills of literacy enabled this girl of fourteen to question the social hierarchy and power of the Brahmans.

After Phule, some sympathetic Non-Brahman leaders besides Phule, like Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and Bhaurao Patil also strived to educate the untouchables.<sup>284</sup> It was through such support that B.R. Ambedkar was able to attain the highest levels of education. Born into a family which had a long history of association with the army, he was supported by scholarships from the Gaikwad of Baroda and later from Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur to complete his Ph.D. in Economics at Columbia in 1916. Further, he received a D.Sc. in Political Science from the London School of Economics. He was also a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly (1937-39), Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution and Law Minister (1947-57). During his days at Columbia, Ambedkar kept in touch with his community by writing letters. In his letter to one of his father's friends, congratulating him for educating his daughter, he says:

Parents give both *janma* [birth] and *karma* [destiny] to the children and we should now follow this principle to see better days. Our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is accompanied by female education and the fruits which you can

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<sup>283</sup> Muktabai Salve, 'Manga Maharachya dukkhavishayi,' in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (eds), *Women's writing in India from 600 B.C., Vol.1* (New York, 1991), pp. 215-217.

<sup>284</sup> Eleanor Zelliott has recently written about these 'Experiments in Dalit Education: Maharashtra, 1850-1947,' in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth century India* (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 35-48.

very well see in your daughter. Let your mission therefore be to educate and preach the idea of education to those at least who are near to and in close contact with you.<sup>285</sup> Thus right from his early twenties Ambedkar, like Phule, talked about the need for education for boys and girls alike.

After his return to India, he started the *yadnya* (non-stop struggle/burning to achieve a goal) to fight for the uplifting of his community. He constantly pressed upon the people the need to look at their conditions critically and to understand the grave situation. He confided in his people:

We are made to bear such injustice, such insult, ignominy and such pressure. Even then we behave like dumb persons and as weak as the cow. We do not feel irritated and sorry, we have no consciousness of it and we do not wonder over it. But we, who look so big, will not resist if anybody kicks us. Upon deep thinking, two reasons have been found for it. One that, we do not have knowledge; and two, we do not have power.<sup>286</sup>

Thus, Ambedkar felt that to procure 'that' knowledge, formal education was necessary and had to be brought within the reach of everyone.<sup>287</sup> He believed that the mental lethargy, the reconciliation with suppression and satisfaction from the present among the untouchables can only be shaken off when they are given education. Ambedkar trusted that education would open a new window to the untouchables as to how the world was progressing and how backward they were. He believed that '*shikshan hey vaghiniche dudh aahe, jo te prashan karel to gurgurel*' (education is the milk of a tigress, the one who tastes it will roar). Along with efforts for formal education, Ambedkar engaged in informal education of the untouchables through his

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<sup>285</sup> Ambedkar, as quoted in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission* (2nd edn, Bombay, 1962), p. 27.

<sup>286</sup> Ambedkar, *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>287</sup> Ambedkar, 'On Grants for Education,' in BAWS, Vol. 2, p. 40. Both the Vidarbha and the Bombay demands of the Depressed Class Association reflected the need for education. Only 2.9 percent of the Mahars were literate, according to the 1931 census. See Zelliott, 'The Mahars of Maharashtra' in her own, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi, 1992), p. 102.



Marathi newspapers that functioned as mouthpieces of associates he led—

*Muknayak*,<sup>288</sup> *Bahiskrit Bharat*,<sup>289</sup> *Janata*,<sup>290</sup> and *Prabuddha Bharat*.<sup>291</sup>

Ambedkar's ideal for the untouchable was 'to raise their education standards so that they may know their conditions, have aspirations to rise to the level of the highest Hindus and be in a political position to use political power as a means to that end.'<sup>292</sup> He argued that: 'mere knowledge of the three R's is insufficient for the great height many of them must reach in order that the whole community may along with them rise in their general estimation. There is a great need to disturb their pathetic contentment and to instil into them that divine discontent which is the spring of all elevation.'<sup>293</sup> Ambedkar underlined Dewey's theory of inquiry aimed at producing an independent thinker, not an imitation of the teacher, and not a mere database of information.<sup>294</sup> He believed in self-help as the best help and wanted the untouchables to realize this and do away with the dependency and patronage of the Hindu reformers. These conjectures of Ambedkar, which are in line with Phule, Freire, Gramsci, and Bourdieu, once again underscore that, 'as long as the slave does not burn with hatred for his slavery, there is no hope for salvation [...]. Tell the slave he is a slave and he will revolt.'<sup>295</sup> Thus Ambedkar linked the potential of formal education to arousing the critical consciousness of the Dalits. He wanted the Dalits themselves to fight for their self-elevation, and education was the weapon for this, stating that: 'there will be no difference between you and animals if they will not

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<sup>288</sup> Leader of the voicesless/dumb (1918-20).

<sup>289</sup> The Boycotted India (1927-29).

<sup>290</sup> The People (1929-55).

<sup>291</sup> The Enlightened India (1955 onwards...).

<sup>292</sup> Eleanor Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 62, 158.

<sup>293</sup> Ambedkar, in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, p. 143.

<sup>294</sup> Also see an insightful article by Christopher Queen on 'Reflections in the light of Ambedkar's philosophy of Education,' in *Pravartan-Siddharth College at Fifty*, Siddharth College magazine (Bombay, 2000), p. 40.

<sup>295</sup> Ambedkar, in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, p. 60. See my discussion in Chapter 1.

desire to see their children in a better position than their own position.<sup>296</sup> In 1924, he established the Bahishkrut Hitkarini Sabha, which had among its objectives the establishment of libraries, hostels, social centres and classrooms for the untouchables. He also established the Depressed Classes Education Society in 1928 to give this programme a sound basis.

The work was consolidated in later decades by other educational societies, such as the People's Education Society of 1945. It established the Siddhartha College in Mumbai to promote higher education among the poorer and weaker sections of the society. The foundation of this Society gave a great impetus to the admission of girls in schools and colleges. The society had various branches over Maharashtra at Pune, Mahad, Nanded, Pandharpur, and in Bangalore, with good schools, colleges, diploma institutes, research centres, and hostels encouraging the younger generation towards education.<sup>297</sup> The college boasts that it has carried higher education to the doors of the poor and downtrodden irrespective of caste.<sup>298</sup> Further research on this society would be worthwhile.<sup>299</sup>

In his speeches Ambedkar repeatedly underlined the importance of education for women. In a speech to a gathering of women at the Mahad Satyagraha Parishad of 1932, he exhorted them:

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>297</sup> People's Education Society's 60 (1945-2005) Years of Glorious Existence Commemorative Volume, p13. This volume is an evidence of the multi-faceted People's Education Society and its many activities.

<sup>298</sup> K. B. Talwatkar, 'People's Education Society: A Glorious Heritage,' writing in the *Report of the P.E.S.: A Brief Review of work and activities 1945-1973* (Bombay, 2000), p. 81. As reproduced from People's Education Society, Silver Jubilee Number.

<sup>299</sup> This is beyond the parameters of my research. Furthermore, personal contacts and influence is necessary to get access to the archives of the society. Only scholars close to the members of the society have been able to uncover such material. I had to haggle for an hour to get to the commemorative volume. I could access the particular volume only after I persuasively answered some questions and insisted on having the volume for my research.



You must educate your children. You must also educate your daughters. Knowledge and education are not for men alone. These are important for women too. If you want your next generation to progress, then you must educate your daughters.<sup>300</sup>

In this manner Ambedkar encouraged Dalit women to take on the responsibility of educating their daughters and spreading education and knowledge in the society. He held that 'an educated mother educated a family,' and in turn the society. It was this educated individual, family and community that would then build a progressive India. However, it is ironic, that Ambedkar asked *only* women, and not men, 'to educate their sons and instil in them the confidence to make a mark in the world.'<sup>301</sup> In this he inferred that the first place of the woman was within the household; she, the wise mother had to occupy herself as a partner to the husband and nurturer of (her) children (sons). Feminist historians have already critiqued such attitudes on the part of mainstream Indian nationalists. By extending religious metaphor of a feminine-bodied earth, modern nationalism created a discourse of the motherland, and women as mothers of the nation. Women were valorised as nurturers of man. In this way educated mothers would regenerate Indian society through the nurturing and socialising of their children. Women had to be prepared for this task through a thorough and wholesome system of education.<sup>302</sup>

Ambedkar grappled with the issue of discrimination for Dalits within schools. Instead of advocating separate schools he demanded that they attend normal schools, so that they could learn to assert themselves in their everyday life and thus lose their

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<sup>300</sup> Ambedkar, as in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, p. 104-105.

<sup>301</sup> Ambedkar, as in Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, p. 105.

<sup>302</sup> Himani Banerjee discusses this agenda in her article, 'Mothers and teachers: gender and class in educational proposals for and by women in colonial Bengal,' *Journal of historical sociology*, 5: 1 (March 1992), p. 3. Uma Chakravarti presents similar views in *Rewriting History* (New Delhi, 1998), pp. 200-207.

sense of inferiority.<sup>303</sup> He stated: 'Their status would be raised and their powers would be stimulated.'<sup>304</sup> Addressing the annual gathering of the Rajaram College at Kolhapur on 24 December 1952, he said, 'knowledge is the foundation of a man's life and every effort must be made to maintain the intellectual stamina of a student and arouse his intellect.' He asked the students to develop their thinking power and make use of knowledge they had gained.<sup>305</sup> He stated:

Coming as I do from the lowest order of the Hindu society, I know what is the value of education. The problem of raising the lower order is deemed to be economic. This is a great mistake. The problem of the lower order is to remove from them that inferiority complex which has stunted their growth and made them slaves to others, to create in them the consciousness of the significance of their lives for themselves and for the country, of which they have been cruelly robbed by the existing social order. Nothing can achieve this except the spread of higher education. This in my opinion is the panacea of our social troubles.<sup>306</sup>

The clarion call of Ambedkar 'to educate the children' was chanted and followed like a mantra by his followers.

However, Ambedkar's ideas come into conflict with the postulates of Gandhi. The Gandhi-Ambedkar debate over myriad issues is controversial and a much contested issue to date amongst Indians, more precisely Dalits. As it is many Dalits detest the postulates of Gandhi even after so many years. In order to understand this I want to highlight the split between the agenda of nationalism and of radical caste movements that nurture divergent understandings of caste relations. I draw upon some conjectures of Gandhi with regard to untouchables and their education. Unlike Phule,

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<sup>303</sup> Like Ambedkar, Gramsci also underscored the importance of 'common schools.' See Chapter 1, p. 4.

<sup>304</sup> Ambedkar, 'Evidence before the Southborough Committee, 27 January 1919,' BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 277. In a similar vein, Gramsci also reinforced the importance of 'common schools' for all classes in order to wipe out ranking. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 31

<sup>305</sup> Ambedkar, as in Keer, p. 443.

<sup>306</sup> Ambedkar, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1950, as quoted in People's Education Society's 60 Years of Existence (1945-2005) Magazine issued on the 61<sup>st</sup> Foundation Day (8 July 2005), p. 6.



Ambedkar and other non-Brahman leaders, Gandhi believed that, 'caste has nothing to do with religion; [moreover] Hindu society has been able to stand because it is founded on the caste system.'<sup>307</sup> For Gandhi, the caste system was a natural order of society and the callings of a Brahman—spiritual teacher—and a scavenger were 'equal,' and their due performance carried equal merit before God. Thus Gandhi reiterated his belief in the *swadharma* of the followers of caste duties whether Brahman, farmer, scavenger and so on.<sup>308</sup> For Gandhi, caste had a readymade means for spreading primary education. He said that 'each one of us has to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling.'<sup>309</sup> In other words Gandhi advocated that an 'untouchable could become a skilled scavenger.' I stand by Ambedkar and underscore that all this represented a cruel joke on the helpless classes. He criticized Gandhi bitterly for calling scavenging a 'noble' profession for the scavenger and thus helping to perpetuate it.

Gandhi not only demanded that people follow their caste callings but he also desired a return to romantically idealized villages that in practice perpetuated caste oppression. Ambedkar, by contrast, gave a clarion call for Dalits to move to the cities, a modern space in which caste discrimination was comparatively much weaker. In his 1939 lecture on 'Federation versus freedom' Ambedkar pronounced: 'in my mind there is no doubt that Gandhi age is the dark age of India. It is an age in which people instead of looking for their ideals in the future are returning to antiquity.'<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Gandhi, in *Harijan*, 18 July 1936, as in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 83.

<sup>308</sup> Gandhi, as quoted in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 83, and also in Rodrigues, Valerian, 'Gandhism-the doom of the untouchables,' in *The essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 149-172, and Gail Omvedt, *Ambedkar: towards an enlightened India* (Viking, c2004), p. 71.

<sup>309</sup> Gandhi, 'Dr. Ambedkar Indictment-II,' *Harijan*, 18 July 1936 as in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 83 and also available in CWMG, 288, Vol. 69 (May 16 1936-19 October 1936), as available online on <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOLO69>.

<sup>310</sup> Ambedkar, BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 352.

Gandhi proclaimed that all should work together in the national cause, and he discouraged any fragmentation of the movement. However, he was unable to escape his own biases in favour of caste Hindus. For example, during the deliberations over separate electorates for Dalits in 1932, Gandhi confided to Patel and Mahadev Desai that political separation will 'lead to bloodshed. *Untouchable hooligans* will make common cause with *Muslim hooligans* and kill caste Hindus.<sup>311</sup>

Eventually Gandhi modified his views and advocated a more radical attack on the system of untouchability. He agreed with Ambedkar that untouchability was (and is) eroding Hinduism and stated that the moment that untouchability was eradicated, the caste system would be purified. He said in 1935, that 'caste has to go' as it was degrading modern India.<sup>312</sup> He admitted that the Hindus made their brethren crawl on their bellies, and it was high time for them to purify themselves. They should revere one another and purge Hinduism of this 'device of Satan.' He put pressure on caste Hindus to open up access for untouchables to public wells, tanks, roads, schools, temples and cremation grounds and in response to Ambedkar, extended his battle for the untouchables into the civil sphere. Ultimately, Gandhi accepted that the '*untouchables had to exercise power themselves* [emphasis mine] if they were to better their position in any meaningful way,'<sup>313</sup> just like Ambedkar. Despite this, the Ambedkar-Gandhi conflict continues to this day.

### The Second Stage

By the time of independence in 1947, Dalits had in most cases won the struggle for a right of entry to educational institutions, and for the right of girls to be educated. This may be defined as a first- stage struggle. The battle now moved on to

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<sup>311</sup> Gandhi, 21 August 1932, CWMG, Vol. 50, p. 469. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>312</sup> Gandhi, 'Caste must go,' *Harijan*, 16 November 1935, as in the CWMG, Vol. 68, p. 152.

<sup>313</sup> I am following David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His time and ours* (Delhi, 2003), p. 134.



a second stage, that of taking advantage of whatever education was available. Even after the right to education was won, rural children – particularly girls – still found it hard to attend school. Researchers have pointed out that location, physical facilities, teachers, examination policies, hours of instruction, and curriculum are among the school-related factors that contribute to gender differentials in enrolments. These supply factors, like the demand factors, often have a different impact on parents' decisions about educating girls than on their decisions about educating boys. For example, *ceteris paribus*, female enrolments should be inversely related to distance; that is the shorter the distance to school, the greater the likelihood that girls will attend. Many researchers have reported that long distances to school are a barrier to female education.<sup>314</sup> I will investigate this in the Dalit case.

The parents put their children in the nearest available school for the sake of convenience. Most of the first generation respondents said that the school they attended was the only school available. It seems the situation has not improved much, and the statistics from Department of Education are a testimony to this.<sup>315</sup> Parents did not pay much attention to the quality or medium of the school. This was the case with almost all the first-generation learners. The parents were happy that they could at least send their children to some school and the exuberance of 'entering' the citadels of schools so long denied to them was the stronger motivating force. According to Padma Nikam, who was brought up in a village:

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<sup>314</sup> Shahrukh Khan, 'South Asia' in Elizabeth M. King and M. Anne Hill (eds), *Women's Education in Developing countries: barriers, benefits and policies* (London and Baltimore, 1993), p. 229-230.

<sup>315</sup> The SC girls enrolment in school suffers great impediments. There is a great disparity between the enrolment of boys and girls in schools. See Chapter 7, p. 5. Also see the statistics provided by the Department of education, Government of India, as available online, <http://www.education.nic.in/pdfs/Table16EnrolmentofScheduledCasteStudents.pdf> The drop out rate of SC girls, at all levels of education is higher than that of boys. The government statistics testify this. See online, <http://www.education.nic.in/pdfs/Table25DropoutRatesofScheduledCasteStudentsatPrimary.pdf>. Also see Chapters 5 and 6 for further discussion.

Only one school was available. It was till the class 4 and sometimes till the class 7. The children had to go to some town for further education. This long distance and the poverty of the parents discouraged the child. The girls were more affected as they were not allowed to go so far. They were made to sit at home after class 4 or 7.<sup>316</sup> This was the condition of girl's schooling. They could go to school as long as it was close by. The parents and moreover the mothers were anxious as to their safety if they had to travel far. Also, they wanted the girls home early so that they could help with housework. Physical distance thus mattered significantly.

Despite this, village children often had to walk miles, crossing oscillating river bridges to get to school. In rural areas, children seemed to accept quite long walks to school and took it as a natural part of life. This is the case even today in some remote parts of India where there are fewer or no modes of transportation. The children in the cities, however, are not used to this and complain about the long distances to school/college. These experiences of rural children are vividly described in the Marathi Dalit literature. The stories depict children enjoying their walks to schools, running on roads/pathways, playing pranks, stealing mangos, guavas and berries on their way to school. This was more fun, compared to the actual school. Draupadi Nagare said, 'many a times I missed school as I did not like it much. It was far, moreover, I did not like the studying. I loved to play with my friends. I was not very interested in school and in studies.'<sup>317</sup> Even Jyotsna Kadam was happier playing with her friends than attending school.<sup>318</sup> The dry school atmosphere, the absent teachers, the boring classes with difficult mathematics was obnoxious for some girls. Urmila said, 'no child wanted to scratch his brains learning the tables, the additions and

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<sup>316</sup> Padma Nikam, Buddhist, Class 3, President of the Hawker's Union, Interviewed on 22 October, 2005, Borivili-Mumbai. Padmatai talked to me for at least 4 hours. She would not let me go and insisted that I stay at her place that night. She had a lot to tell me. She also gave me a copy of her autobiography in process, *Mazhya Jivanacha Pravas* (The journey of my life).

<sup>317</sup> Draupadi Nagare, Buddhist, Class 7, housewife, Ramtekdi-Pune, 11 September 2004.

<sup>318</sup> Jyotsna Rokade, Buddhist, Masters in Commerce, Sales Tax Officer, Vishrantwadi-Pune, 15 August 2004.



multiplications. They all wanted to play in the mud, herd cattle and bathe in the rivers, which were more fun, no hard work.’<sup>319</sup>

Since most village schools only went up to class 4, and at most class 7, the children had to go to some other town for secondary education. In her autobiography, Shantabai Kamble talked of her trip to technical school:

I passed Class 6. For Class 7, I had to go to Pandharpur or join the technical school with the boys. I had no money to go to Pandharpur and Patil Master doubted how I could cope with the boys. However, after a few months, Kamble Guruji enquired about me and made me join the technical school. I was the *only* [emphasis mine] girl in the school. I felt left out. I engaged in all the jobs done by the boys. At the end of the year, I had to go to Pandharpur to appear for the exams. When the results were out, my cousin and I had cleared the exams.<sup>320</sup>

Shantabai was the only Dalit girl in her primary school in early 1940s, and in technical school she was the only girl. The upper castes refused to send their girls to the technical school as they were required to work alongside boys carrying out ‘male’ jobs such as ploughing, sowing, reaping and carpentry. Even the teachers discouraged girls in this respect, and as a result upper caste girls went to the High School in Pandharpur town. As any such secondary education called for travel to towns which the parents could hardly afford, only a small minority of Dalit girls like Shantabai reached that level.

Many more opportunities opened up when Dalits migrated to the cities. This process of migration also occurred at a time when education was opening up for Dalits. Despite this, most of the first-generation learners said that there were very few Dalit girls in their schools. For example, during the late 1940s, Bebi Kamble, Shantabai Kamble, and Rukmini Ghangale were the only girl in the class from any ‘Backward Class’ category. At that time, few Dalit parents supported education for

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<sup>319</sup> Urmila Pawar, *Buddhist, M.A. (Marathi literature)*, Borivili-Mumbai, 6 September 2004.

<sup>320</sup> Shantabai Kamble, *Mazhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*, (Bombay, 1986), p. 26.

girls. Even those who did generally believed that girls should go to school only up to a particular level. She should, after *some* education seek a job. This job was not only for economic independence of the daughter but also to help the parents financially. She was to get married later. It was also commonly held that certain subjects were not suited for girls. Alaka Kale said, 'though my father was an officer he thought that science, and commerce are not for girls. The girl should study till matriculation and if she progresses ahead at all, Arts is the stream for her.'<sup>321</sup> In this, her father saw himself as following Ambedkar's call for a specific educational agenda for girls. The transnational gendering/feminization of certain types of studies has been widely commented on by various scholars, including Bourdieu.<sup>322</sup> For example, teachers commonly believe girls to be less capable than boys in mathematics; consequently, they fail to use teaching techniques that might improve girls' achievement in that subject. Most of the time girls are channelled into domestic science, handicrafts, and biology; while boys go for chemistry, mathematics, and vocational subjects. Alaka's father's standpoint once again underscored the belief that arts, drawing, painting, and crafts were the most suitable subjects for women.

It should be noted here that in a few cases, mother also showed such prejudices. They did not support higher education and also streams of education that were traditionally masculine. Mothers had different kinds of fears regarding higher education. They knew that the Dalit boys did not study much. They saw them loitering around. Therefore, they were concerned that if their daughters studied too far ahead and in the traditionally 'male' subjects, they would surpass boys in their

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<sup>321</sup> Alaka Kale, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Karve Road-Pune, Interviewed on 1 July 2002.

<sup>322</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London, 1977), pp. 77-80. For Bourdieu the traditional division of labour assigns to women familiarity with things of art and literature. See Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA., 1984), p. 57.



community, thereby eliminating a chance at marriage. These mothers preferred to have uneducated or under-educated married daughters versus educated 'spinsters.' Some mothers opined that the daughters should get married while still studying and continue their further studies from their marital home.

Some informants complained that their teachers did not teach them well. They just passed on their limited knowledge. The teachers typically acted in an arrogant manner towards the pupils. When they asked questions, they insulted and shouted at them. Thus they discouraged any queries. The girls learnt the text without understanding. Snehlata said:

I disliked geometry. It was in class 8/9 when we had some geometric theorems. The teachers just copied them from the books to the board, one after the other and told us to copy [...]. Nobody asked as to how the teacher derived the proof. The teachers did not explain it well. Nobody dared to ask questions. However, I asked once; but, with the response I got then, I never dared to ask anything after that. They did no reply properly and insulted us only. No one asked any queries and we by-hearted everything. We just scraped through this subject most of the times.<sup>323</sup>

Thus Snehlata and other respondents also talked a lot about the power relationship in the classroom. The teacher's gaze was positioned on the classroom, minutely observing the students. Moreover, nobody could ask any queries, no interrogations or comments were entertained. Even if somebody gathered enough courage to ask a question, s/he was trampled on in an uncouth manner. This demeanour of the Brahman and upper caste teachers led to a further smothering of these new students. The social oppression continued in the schools as well and the Dalits' attempts to question it were defeated most of the times. This is generally applicable to all students; however, in the case of Dalits and women, the caste and gender factors compound the problem. I will demonstrate this once again when we deal with the

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<sup>323</sup> Snehlata Kasbe, Matang, B.A., Senior Officer, Pune Station-Pune, 10 September 2003.

caste discrimination these women faced in their schools. However, there were more stories and contradictory experiences with the second and third generation students.



## Chapter 5: Life in the Urban Slum

Dalits have become an increasingly major element within the population of Pune city since the 1970s. Their percentage of the total population of the city increased from 6.63 in 1971, to 9.87 percent in 1981, 15.78 in 1991, and 25.42 in 2001.<sup>324</sup> By 2001, the city had a total SC population of 125,127.<sup>325</sup> This huge increase has come about largely through migration from rural areas, with the incoming migrants living for the most part in the rapidly growing slums. Some of my informants talked about their villages and how and why they migrated to the city. Gangabai Kuchekar, an old woman who is partially blind, narrated her journey to the city:

I remember that I was married and had two children then. We came to this place and lived in a slum near Holkar Bridge. Then we moved to the St. Mira's college.<sup>326</sup> After that when this Yashwantnagar<sup>327</sup> slum was allocated many of our friends moved here and we also came here.<sup>328</sup>

The Holkar Bridge is a historic one close to the bungalow where once resided Lord Elphinstone. It is commonly observed that such bridges provide shelter to the poor. They become temporary residences until they can find a better place to live. Many families in the city are seen curled under these bridges. The Yashwantnagar slum consisted of small shelters and shacks on the bank of the river Mutha (Pune is on the river Mula-Mutha). In this chapter, I chart such journeys in the voices of the Dalit women of the first generation like Mrs. Kuchekar who by moving from the villages

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<sup>324</sup> *Census of India, 1991, Series 14, Maharashtra, Part VIII (1): SC-1: Distribution of SC population by sex for each caste*, pp. 66-67, Ward level primary census abstract for slum areas of million plus cities-2001, p. 420. There was a phenomenal rise of 41.48% rise in the urban population of Pune district between 1961 and 1971. See, *Census of India 1981: District Census Handbook, Pune* (Bombay 1986), p. 7.

<sup>325</sup> Ward level primary census abstract for slum areas of million plus cities-2001, p. 420.

<sup>326</sup> There is a bridge near St. Mira's College, another home for the homeless migrants.

<sup>327</sup> This slum is near Netaji Subhash Chandra High School, Yerawada and is a home to Matangs.

<sup>328</sup> Gangabai Kuchekar, a Matang woman from Yashwant Nagar-Yerawada slum. She is Meera Jangam's co-sister's mother, Interviewed on 23 July 2004.

into the city *vastis* achieved their own form of 'modernity.'

### The Urban 'Puneri' Landscape

We may start by examining the social cartography of Pune, which has permeated into the everyday life of Pune-kars (the people of Pune). The heart of the city, Sadashiv Peth,<sup>329</sup> built by Madhavrao Peshwa<sup>330</sup> has been and continues to be the 'polis' around which the city has been growing. The Sadashiv Peth area is dominated by middle-class Brahmans, and other upper castes. Other lower communities have no space here; they are found in outer, surrounding *peths* like Kasba Peth, Somvar Peth, Mangalwar Peth, Budhwar Peth, Shukrawar Peth, Bhavani Peth and Nana Peth. In these places, the lower casts lived huddled together in very overcrowded conditions. They also inhabit some peripheral areas, such as Yerawada,<sup>331</sup> Airport Road, Vadgaonsheri, and so on. As in the villages from which they have come, the Dalits are found mostly on the margins.

Sadashiv Peth is the 'social polis,' of Pune, the cultural capital of Pune.

Madhavrao Peshwa brought the Chitpavan Brahmans from the Konkan and re-settled them in the Sadashiv Peth. He took great efforts to provide them the basic infrastructure for a comfortable living, with a good water supply, markets and venues for cultural practices. It is replete with most of the esteemed, prestigious and 'good'

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<sup>329</sup> This Peth/Kasba is named after the famous Sadashivrao Bhau, who presumably died fighting the Third Battle of Panipat.

<sup>330</sup> The famous Madhavrao Peshwa is said to have brought the Chitpavan Brahmans from Konkan and re-settled them in Sadashiv Peth area of Pune. Madhavrao is noted for his various experiments like building of underground water channels from a small dam on the Parvati hill to Sadashiv Peth. Most wadas in this area have their own wells and *hounds* (water tanks) for a constant supply of clean water. This Chitpavan-dominated patch signifies and exercises the Gramscian 'hegemony' for any Pune-kar. 'Common sensically,' a Sadashiv Pethi Brahman is famous for his thrift, connivance, grammatically and 'pure,' nasal-toned Marathi and other similar features of highest Brahmanhood.

<sup>331</sup> I grew up in Sidhartha Nagar in Yerawada. The name suggests that it was dominated by Baudha/Buddhists: Siddhartha is the princely name of Gautam Buddha. Yerawada is on the Nagar highway and on the periphery of Pune city.



quality schools; theatres like Bharat Natya Mandir and Tilak Sabhagruha<sup>332</sup>; academic institutions like Bharatiya Itihaas Saunshodhak Mandal (Discovery of Indian History Association),<sup>333</sup> Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth,<sup>334</sup> Asthtanga Ayurvedic College, Maharashtra Mitra Mandal,<sup>335</sup> and many small music schools and cultural centres.<sup>336</sup> The educational societies and institutions started by Brahman social reformers such as Tilak, Agarkar and Chiplunkar are in the Sadashiv Peth area.<sup>337</sup> Chiplunkar left government service and opened his own private New English School in 1880. Tilak and other Chitpavan Brahmans like Madhav Ballal Namjoshi were the charter members of the faculty. In 1919, referring to his comradeship with Agarkar, Tilak said, 'We were men whose plans were at fever heat, whose thoughts were of the degraded condition of our country, and after long thought we came to the conclusion that the *salvation of our motherland lay in the education, and only the education, of the people.*'<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, other old schools of repute which were started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century like the Ahilyadevi High School, Nutan Marathi Vidyalaya, the Gopal High School, Renuka Swarup High School, the famous Dnyan Prabodhini, and many more are found in the core of the city—in and around Sadashiv Peth.

The Dalit settlements are found in the areas of Yerawada, Vishrantwadi, Vadgaon Sheri, Dhorvadi, Kondhawa, Hadapsar, Wanowrie, and Mundhwa, which are on the margins of the city. Dalits reside in these sections, which are closer to their

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<sup>332</sup> For Marathi plays and talks.

<sup>333</sup> This library and archive has some significant material of immense historical importance in Sanskrit and Marathi.

<sup>334</sup> This was started in early 1900s.

<sup>335</sup> This is a big compound with a playground, a swimming pool and a lecture theatre all catering to the Brahmans in Sadashiv Peth and in the areas around.

<sup>336</sup> I noticed the display of Sanskriti Kendra which I loosely translate as 'cultural centre'. The centre was to bring together children and teach them Sanskrit *shlokas*, prayers to gods, good mannerisms and habits.

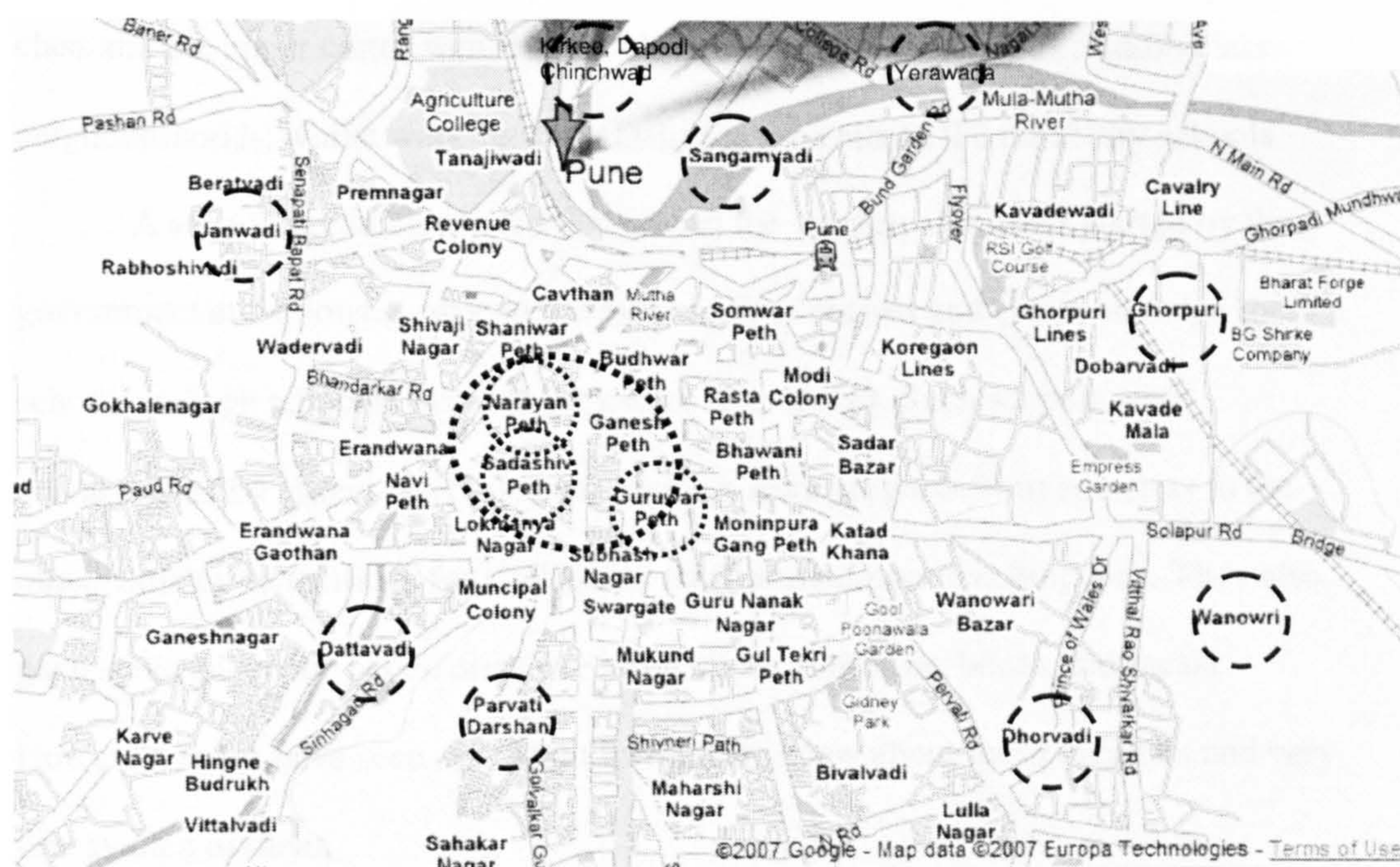
<sup>337</sup> The New English School of the Deccan Education Society (1878) is on Tilak Road which is in Sadashiv Peth, the anchor of Brahmans.

<sup>338</sup> Tilak, as in Aparna Basu, *Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920* (Delhi, 1974), p. 213. All emphasis is mine.



work places in and around the police/army barracks of Vadgaon Sheri, the Research and Development Institute and Mental Hospital area of Vishrantwadi, Airport area of Lohegaon, the Southern command military area of Mundhwa and the Kirkee ammunition factory. They also reside in the fallow lands of Chaturshringi left for the untouchables or within some dry lands of earlier Bhamburda (present Shivaji Nagar), which were given to these Dalit communities during the flood relief operations in 1970s. These settlements are often insalubrious, with a very low quality of housing. This creates ongoing health problems for the urban Dalits.<sup>339</sup> At the periphery of the city, the Dalits are denied access to educational institutions in the Sadashiv Peth area. Also see the map below for further clarification.

Map 1: Map of Pune City



Source: <http://maps.google.com/maps?um=1&tab=wl&hl=en&q=travel+guide>

--- Margins

..... Social Polises

<sup>339</sup> I am drawing upon a study by Adonis and Pollard (1997) which states that people in 'good' housing areas live longer and enjoy better health and health care. People in 'bad' housing areas experience poorer health, suffer more long term illness and more symptoms of depression, as quoted in Jane Thompson, *Women, class and education* (London, 2000), p. 57.



Geographically, culturally and economically disadvantaged Dalits have to travel long distances to get to these schools, and even though Pune has an extensive transport system, such travel is not easy for these children, in terms of time, convenience, safety and cost. My informants often spoke longingly about these schools in the hub of the city. The Dalits lives have always been delineated by space – where they live, where they may go, where they may sit, and so on. Educational space was not devised with them in mind.

It is a government policy to make schools available within a radius of 1 km of any residence, so that the poor did not have to travel long distances to get to school. The municipal schools available to them were of poor quality. They also attended some small private schools in the slums, and other missionary schools. The middle class and the upper castes went to schools in the catchment areas of middle-class neighbourhoods, whilst working class Dalit children attend the other city schools.

A school hierarchy existed that placed the municipal schools started by the government at the lowest scale in the system. Poor classes and castes attended these schools in large numbers because they were free of cost. Such schools were characterised by absent teachers, bad teaching, easy progress from one class to the other, little or no facilities for students or teachers and poor teaching aids. They also gave some education accessories like bags, shoes, uniforms, books and meals. However, as we have seen, few Dalit informants knew about these facilities and very few availed of them.

Dalits sent their children to the schools that were available because they lacked the money, the time, the influence or the knowledge to send them anywhere better. In an excellent article entitled, 'Dealing with Deprivation,' Nambissan has written about such schools, describing their very poor physical infrastructure –

dilapidated buildings, leaking roofs and mud floors – a depressing atmosphere, lack of basic amenities – for example, no toilets for girls – as well as a less than adequate number of teachers. She continues: ‘Teaching aids apart from blackboard are absent. This is also revealed in the Government of India Report of 1998, 303—the school of a Dalit girl was reported to be very dirty as ground was swampy and there was cow-dung heaps and firewood all over.’<sup>340</sup> It is extremely hard for Dalit students to study and to do well in such schools.

Furthermore, the bad atmosphere in municipal schools was not conducive to study. Most of the children, especially boys in the slums, did not take up studies seriously. Most of my second-generation informants like Vaishali Chandane, Lakshmi Shinde, Nanda Kadam, and many others complained about their ill-disciplined brothers.<sup>341</sup> These boys were tempted by unskilled labour jobs, which fetched them easy money. Very few of them aspired to study and to advance. They were therefore engaged in odd jobs with irregular payments. They were not much interested in schooling and indulged themselves in troubling teachers and girl students. They were also easily addicted to smoking and drinking, gambling, betting, lottery and other vices. Parents failed to control such boys and protect them from this ‘*katta* culture.’<sup>342</sup> But parents instead bound the little feet of girls inside the four walls of the house to protect them against exposure to such a culture.

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<sup>340</sup> Geetha Nambissan, ‘Dealing with Deprivation,’ *Seminar*, 493 (September 2000). See the web edition: <http://www.india-seminar.com/semsearch.htm>.

<sup>341</sup> Lakshmi Shinde, Matang, Class 12, self-employed, Parvati slum-Pune, Interviewed on 9 October 2000, Nanda Kamble, Buddhist, B.A., Nurse, Parvati slum, Pune, 10 August 2001, Vaishali Chandane, Buddhist, Advocate, Parvati slum-Pune, 10 August 2001.

<sup>342</sup> *Katta* is a Marathi word meaning ‘parapet.’ In Marathi ‘*kattavarchi pora*,’ meaning ‘boys on the *katta*’ has a negative connotation. Boys are generally found idly loitering around such *kattas*, standing/sitting in groups, discussing/chatting, smoking, chewing *paan* (betel leaves), and so on during day time and mostly in evenings. Girls and women are very familiar to such *kattas* with bunches of boys, and consciously avoid such spaces.



### Government Incentives

The flight to cities did not bring any considerable change in the condition of the poverty-stricken Dalits. The Dalits were immigrants and strangers; they had nothing but their labour and the capacity forced upon them by social and economic exigencies. The parents were not educated enough to get white-collar jobs. They lacked the ability to pay school fees, or to buy uniforms or books. In most cases these girls were able to enter the portals of education only when free schooling was available to them. In the pre-independence period, it was mainly Christian missionaries who provided such free education for the poor. Indeed, the missionaries had often provided free food, shelter/hostels, and even money to the Dalits. After independence, however, it was the government that mainly provided free education, along with various other concessions.

In an attempt to increase literacy after Indian independence, the Five-Year plans and financial budgets allocated large sums to the education sector. Fee-free education was made available, and uniforms, meals, milk and other necessities were made available at subsidised rates or even free of charge. In most cases the parents of the first-generation learners were illiterate, and had no understanding of the educational process. Despite this many such parents recognised the importance of education and accepted that their daughters should attend such free schools.<sup>343</sup> Free education was provided for the under-privileged even at college-level. Urmila reported:

It was only when I came to Mumbai that I felt that I am so close to the college. It had an evening college; I did not have to pay any fees like the others. So I told myself to avail myself of this significant opportunity. Earlier when I was in my village I did not

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<sup>343</sup> M.B. Chitnis, 'An Educational, Social and Economic Survey of Milind College Students' as in the Milind College Annual Vol. X, 1973, as in Barbara Joshi (ed.), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, (London, 1986), pp. 43-45.

want any of this. But when I was in Mumbai, working, I understood the importance of higher education and concessions given. We have freeship and it has come to us on its own so why not?<sup>344</sup>

Only a few, however, took advantage of the various other concessions that were available on paper. Snehlata said that her school was a *zilla-parishad* school up to class 7, and later she went to the Gram Shikshan Sanstha. She continued, 'I got a uniform, meals, milk and books till class 4 only. We did not have to pay any fees.'<sup>345</sup> Sometimes these facilities by the government proved to be the only attraction for increasing student attendance. 'We went to the school just to get the sweet powder,' said Meera.<sup>346</sup> Thus the sweet powder attracted students to school; not the books, teachers, or teaching. Such cases were however very rare; the majority failed to make good use of the opportunities available. Indeed, most of the informants said that they were oblivious to all these facilities, and they never availed themselves of any concessions. Some agreed that they receive them in particular classes, but such concessions were very limited. Hardly any received scholarships. Ratnaprabha Pawar said that the teachers did not tell her of any scholarships or qualifying exams for them.<sup>347</sup>

These stories clearly point towards the half-hearted way in which these schemes were executed. It is probable that the available funds were in many cases

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<sup>344</sup> Urmila Pawar, Buddhist, M.A. (Marathi Literature), Retired officer, Interviewed on 5-7 September 2004. Urmilatai is a Dalit feminist writer and activist. I stayed at her place for two days. She made *bhakris* (traditional Maharashtrian bread) and Konkani style fish for me. We talked on many issues and I feel privileged to have interacted with this intellectual.

<sup>345</sup> Snehlata Kasbe, Buddhist, B.A., Senior administrative officer, Pune station-Pune, 10 September 2003.

<sup>346</sup> Meera Jangam, a Matang self-employed woman, Class 10 failed, Yashwantnagar, Yerawada-Pune, Interviewed on 1 and 5 August 2004. She is a smart and striking woman who is involved in many social welfare activities and small businesses. She helps the Matang community in the slum by doing paper work for them, by getting them caste certificates (a caste certificate is crucial to fetch concessions for the SCs), by applying for loans on their behalf. She has many projects on mind like a computer centre, tailoring classes, and so on for Matang women.

<sup>347</sup> Ratnaprabha Pawar, Matang, Class 12 and a diploma in education, municipal school teacher, Bibwewadi-Pune, 10 April 2002.



being appropriated corruptly. High caste people continue to make a lot of noise about concessions given to the Dalits, but it is questionable whether many of these benefits have reached them at all.

Indeed, the whole issue of concessions is a sensitive one for both Dalits and non-dalits. They have a historical, sociological, and political aura about them, and are an emotive issue for all. Dalits see such concessions as a right that they have won through prolonged struggle. Nonetheless, they are aware that such positive discrimination has negative connotations, stigmatising them in the wider society. Thus the Dalits are caught in a bind of seeking and not seeking concessions.

Failure to take advantage of these concessions often had a very detrimental effect on a child's education, as is brought out by an insightful article on the state of education in India by Malavika Karlekar that is based on a survey conducted by the Education Commission.<sup>348</sup> Karlekar argues that though the annual tuition fees may be no more than Rs. 120, a parent may have to pay double that amount in books and stationery. Therefore a watchman or a bureaucrat, a Dalit or upper caste often have to pay the same indirect costs. It is not unusual, then, for a 'proportion of students to have no books at all.'<sup>349</sup> The survey report itself had observed that 'in fact, the greater financial burden is not so much of the tuition fees as these other costs.'<sup>350</sup> If this is the state of the general population, what happens to the Dalits? My informants talked about their parents' inability to meet these indirect costs.

Urmila reports that she got free textbooks until class 4. After that her parents had to buy books. Her description of her books reveals the observer in her:

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<sup>348</sup> Malavika Karlekar, 'Equality and Inequality,' in Andre Beteille, *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice* (New Delhi, 1983), pp. 182-242.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 198, and original in the Report of the Education Commission 1964-66, n. 6, p.204.

We always bought third-and fourth-hand books, whatever we could get for studies; with whatever we could understand before, after, under and amidst the graffiti. All this was bought at the cheapest available rates as my mother did not give much money. There were all kinds of pictures in the book; animals, humans, trees, glasses, goggles, names of girls and boys, messages of love, poems, criticisms, filthy language, [...] all kind of things were written there.<sup>351</sup>

This was the shabby state of the books that Urmila used. So, the actual text had to be discerned through this available ‘ocean of knowledge.’

Urmila also remembers how she used old exercise books and textbooks: ‘I used *vahya* [exercise books] made of the old papers and did not trouble my parents for newer ones.’<sup>352</sup> It shows the prevailing poverty of these Dalit parents. This is the best they could provide their daughters. They could not afford the additional burden of books and uniforms. This was the reason why some of the girls kept away from school. Snehlata remarked, ‘I did not like to go to school much because I could not afford to buy the textbooks and exercise books.’<sup>353</sup> Snehlata, Meena and Bharati<sup>354</sup> in unison said that they did not like to go to school much because they could not afford to buy the textbooks and exercise books.

Bharati was ashamed of going to school: ‘I used to also feel ashamed of my dress and got a lot of beatings from my teachers. He said *our* [emphasis mine] clothes were always dirty.’<sup>355</sup> Bharati’s poverty did not allow her to dress well for school, and her teachers and students mocked her. The teachers and the sub-staff of peons and others also commented on the students’ lower caste backgrounds, their poverty and dirty uniforms. Some Dalit children are not spared from the centuries old stereotyped

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<sup>351</sup> Urmila Pawar, 6 September 2004.

<sup>352</sup> Urmila Pawar, 6 September 2004.

<sup>353</sup> Snehlata Kasbe, 10 September 2003.

<sup>354</sup> Snehlata Kasbe, 10 September 2003; Meena Jangam, 5 August 2004; Bharati Kale, Buddhist, M.A. (Marathi literature), Telephone-Operator, 18 June 2002. She has defective eyesight, and is waiting to get married.

<sup>355</sup> Bharati Kale, 18 June 2002.



markings of the 'dirty' Dalit life. These girls feel ashamed to attend the schools that mock at their pasts and presents. However Bharati is a rarity, as she continued ahead.

Champabai suggested that she never had many exercise books:

I used a slate till class 7. Most of our caste children had only textbooks. We did not know exercise books, a pen or a pencil at all. I scribbled all my homework and even the classroom study on one slate. And I remember, we used to write everything in [however] just one book; *all subjects in one book*.<sup>356</sup> My mother bought books very rarely and the father did not pay much attention. He did not know much about my school or my schooling. He never bothered to enquire about it. This was the case with most of the parents of the lower castes.<sup>357</sup>

Snehlata Kasbe remembered the auction that was held after exams to give away old books.<sup>358</sup> These girls later informed their parents about the quoted price, which was frequently too high for the family.

In some cases Dalit fathers could not afford to send the children to schools of their choice, but they still encouraged their daughter's education. One father took out a loan to support his daughter's education. Meena says that her father had to make ends meet to send her to *that* school. She added that, 'some times he had to go for loans to pay off my fees. But he wanted me to be an officer and so he sent me to this school.'<sup>359</sup> Despite financial burdens, this father sent his daughter to a good private school. Such extreme poverty is more prevalent with the first generation learners. Because of their education and employment, the second and third generations were often well settled, and search for better options. Some were unaware of the financial hardships that their mothers faced. They wanted better education. They wanted to attend English medium and Convent schools and some of them could. However, once

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<sup>356</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>357</sup> Champabai Bhalerao, Buddhist, Class 7, housewife, Yerawada-Pune, 20 May 2002. She is my distant grand-mother and our dear Nani. She felt honoured that she was being interviewed and was interested in telling me about her past life, about Nana (her husband) and her managerial skills.

<sup>358</sup> Snehlata Kasbe, 10 September 2003.

<sup>359</sup> Meena Ranpise, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Sinhgad road-Pune, 12 May 2001.

they started their uphill journey they encountered other restrictions.

Some informants told me how they could not attend college through financial hardship, or had to choose 'easier' subjects. Some subjects required regular attendance and students to conduct regular experiments. A lecturer who funded her own education says, 'the university was too far. Economic problems crept in the way. I liked psychology but I could not afford to attend the practicals regularly and so chose political science which did not have that condition.'<sup>360</sup> Thus financial hardships influenced these Dalit girls to an extent that they could not pursue courses of their choice.

The following census tables of the Government of India show that the gap in educational take-up between boys and girls has been narrowing since independence, and that the disparity is less at the lower primary level, and increases at the next two levels.

**Table 1: All-India enrolment by stages of all categories of students by gender (in percentages)<sup>361</sup>**

Year	Primary (I-V)			Middle/Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			High/Hr. Sec./Inter/Pre-Degree (IX-XII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-51	72	28	100	84	16	100	87	13	100
1960-61	67	33	100	76	24	100	79	21	100
1970-71	63	37	100	71	29	100	75	25	100
1980-81	61	39	100	67	33	100	69	31	100
1990-91	59	41	100	62	37	100	67	33	100
2000-01*	56	44	100	59	41	100	61	39	100

\* Provisional

Source: As available online, <http://www.education.nic.in/statscontents.asp-Table 15>

In the case of SC students, the disparities have been similar, though they continue to be greater than amongst the general population. Nonetheless, by 2001-01 the difference had diminished considerably.

<sup>360</sup> Jyoti Gaikwad, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Ramnagar-Pune, 20 May 2002.

<sup>361</sup> As available on, <http://www.education.nic.in/statscontents.asp-Table 15>. Also see Malavika Karlekar, 'Education and Inequality' in Andre Beteille, *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice* (New Delhi, 1983), p. 194. Both the census figures and Karlekar provide numbers in lakhs; however I have calculated the percentages for clarity purposes.



**Table 2: All-India Enrolment by stages of SC students by gender (in percentages)**

Year	Primary (I-V)			Middle/Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Secondary/Hr.Sec. (IX-XII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1980-81	65	35	100	73	27	100	75	25	100
1989-90	62	38	100	67	33	100	74	26	100
2000-01*	57	43	100	61	39	100	63	37	100

\* Provisional

Source: As available online, <http://www.education.nic.in/statscontents.asp-Table 16>

In general, these tables show the rising enrolment of SC girls and boys. They do not however say anything about the quality of the education received, something that we shall now address.

### The Home Environment

Many Dalit girls inhabited a poor home environment that was not conducive to education. Subsistence and indebtedness were perennial problems, and the home could hardly provide a space where difficulties pertaining to homework or school could be solved.<sup>362</sup> Meera stated that:

My father was a drunkard and beat up my mother. My mother used to run to her aunt's place along with her children to protect herself from the drunkard husband. It was difficult to attend school. I never studied at home. There was no space at home. Whatever was taught was only at school. I also did not like to study at home because of some comments made. Our relatives used to visit us sometimes. If they at all saw me with a book, they used to ask me as to what future I had with those books. We were to sell *kach-patra* [glass-tin-rags], they said. Why study then? They also told my mother that I should not be educated much and suggested her to stop my school. But my mother did not listen to them.<sup>363</sup>

Conditions at home were so miserable, she added, that she attended school whenever it was possible. She said that whenever she was with her grandmother's sister who

<sup>362</sup> Most informants from the slum agreed that they did not have enough room at home. Also see works of Geetha Nambissan, 'Dealing with Deprivation', *Seminar*, 493, September 2000; Mohammad Talib, 'Educating the oppressed: Observations from a school in a working class settlement in Delhi,' in Sureshchandra Shukla and Rekha Kaul (eds), *Education Development and Under-development* (New Delhi, 1998); V. Muralidharan, *Education Priorities and Dalit Society* (New Delhi, 1997).

<sup>363</sup> Meera Jangam, 1 August 2004.

lived in the slum near the school, she went to school. Later when they had a 'permanent' *patra* (thin metal sheet) house in that area, she continued her school. Dalit girls such as Meera had nobody to ask them about their education, to talk to them, or guide their studies. There was lack of physical space at home, so that the school seemed in comparison very spacious. Therefore they engaged in studies only at school. Also some Dalits did not believe in their ability to fetch education. What learning did they acquire in such circumstances? Perhaps the *anganwadi* experience of Meera's mother made her educate her daughters.

Some of the parents were either not educated or they had no time to help and encourage their daughters in their studies. They believed that it was the job of the teacher to teach, and of their child to study. This is in a striking contrast with some upper-caste middle-class as well as middle class Dalit families, in which the parents give constructive support in their children's education.<sup>364</sup>

Male Dalit students were often involved in physical labour outside school hours during the daytime, and had time for study only at night. It was however difficult to study at night. Their families had just one small kerosene *batti* (lamp) at home, if any at all. They certainly could not afford electricity. I often heard the common story of studying under the municipality lamp in the evenings and nights. The men's autobiographies, stories, narrations, including those of my father, all talk about the corporation lamp. Hence the street lamp was the only resort. It is a story often reiterated within the community, as it symbolised the difficult circumstances that Dalits faced in order to fetch an education. Of course, girls could not sit under these street lamps. This was mainly the story of men.

I found that Dalit parents who did take some interest in the education of their

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<sup>364</sup> I deal with them in the next Chapter 6.



daughters had in many cases imbibed the prevailing high caste attitude towards learning, seeing it something to be forced on reluctant children through strict discipline, including physical beating to make them memorise their lessons. They believed, like the high caste teachers, that learning could be acquired through formulaic verbal repetition, reminiscent of the *shlokas* chanted by Brahmans. Alaka and Rani thus recalled how:

My mother used to work outside. As soon as she came home in the evening, she would get ready to sit near the stove. She used to make us sit near the *chul* [a mud stove] besides her. She used to beat the *bhakris* [bread] and stir the curry with the other hand. And her mouth used to work too. She used to continuously ask us to read the lessons aloud. She said that the louder we read the lessons the better we would memorise, and hence we had to read aloud.<sup>365</sup>

In this manner, the easier lessons were memorised in the presence of the mother. The father hardly had time for this study taking. Despite this, if the girl failed she was heaped with insults and abuses. Instead of understanding her difficulties, she was blamed. The relatives joined the parents in 'blaming the victim,'<sup>366</sup> and in calling the girl a dullard. They said that her brain did not work and that she was not fit to study ahead. In this manner some girls lost interest in studying further.

Some parents kept girls away from school for family functions like marriages and festivals. Some girls admitted that they had been absent from school at times. Bharati discussed how her parents encouraged absenteeism by producing medical certificates that excused her from school.<sup>367</sup> The girls were engaged in house work during such occasions.

The household was the mother's domain and she was the one who most of the

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<sup>365</sup> Alaka and Rani Kamble are Matang sisters. Alaka has a B.A. and is job-hunting, while giving tuitions from home. Here sister Rani also has a B.A. and works at Dapodi-Pune. I interviewed the sisters at their home in Tadiwala Road slum-Pune, 30 October 2001. Alaka wanted to work for the community.

<sup>366</sup> I am drawing upon William Ryan's argument of/in *Blaming the Victim* (New York, 1976).

<sup>367</sup> Bharati Kale, 18 June 2002.

times socialised and restricted the daughter because of the gendered nature of child-rearing roles.<sup>368</sup> Children are totally her responsibility and not the fathers. Mothers were responsible for the safety of their children in private and in public. Many times, their fears resulted in the end of education for girls after Class 4 or 7. Elder daughters suffered particularly badly. I observed that in most cases the eldest daughter in the family was raised to assume the role of a mother so that she could stand in whenever the real mother was away from the home. The eldest daughters tended to suffer particularly badly in their studies as a result. These were times when the eldest daughter had nobody to direct her queries to. In such circumstances the eldest daughters barely studied or just managed to scrape through each class. Meera's mother was educated only until Class 3 and was compelled to be away from school in order to assist her mother and to look after her younger siblings.<sup>369</sup> Therefore, these daughters have a special disadvantage even after they started schooling.

Many times the mother was left with all household responsibilities, including overseeing the studies of the children. So even if the second-generation women were employed like their husbands, they ended up taking up and completing their children's homework everyday.<sup>370</sup> The fathers did not share equal responsibilities. Hirabai Kuchekar complains: 'My husband did not take up the children's studies. He sat watching the television. He just ignored even if child made mistakes. I had to pay

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<sup>368</sup> Carolyn Steedman writes about how women/mothers socialise little girls into acceptance of restricted futures, forcing them into familiar and genteel ways, and fit them for self-abasement. However, we should also note the parental concern for security of their children/daughters. See Carolyn Steedman, *Landscapes for a Good Woman-A story of Two Lives* (London, 1986), p. 106.

<sup>369</sup> Mrs. Gaikwad, Matang, Meera Jangam's mother, Class 3, staff at a pre-school, Yashwantnagar slum-Pune, 1 August 2004. When I asked this question to Mrs. Gaikwad, she answered and asked the same to her mother who was present there. Her mother obviously had no answer. I got into such confrontational situations sometimes.

<sup>370</sup> I saw Kamal Jadhav solving her son's arithmetic problems during the interview. Kamal Jadhav, Matang, Police sub-Inspector, Kasba Peth-Pune, 16 September 2001.



attention while rolling chapattis.<sup>371</sup> I will deal with the numerous duties of Dalit women in their patriarchal set up in Chapter 8 and 9. It suffices to mention here that most men leave children's upbringing and education entirely to women. However, some men in the lives of the second and third-generation learners prove to be good partners.

High caste children had educated parents who took great interest in the child's schooling and the difficulties encountered. While Dalit parents hardly had the time or confidence to approach the high caste teachers, high caste parents met the teachers at school time and again to check on the progress of their children. There were a few mothers, like those of Urmila Pawar and Lalita Randhir,<sup>372</sup> who visited the schools and boldly faced the teachers. In her interview Urmilatai told me about her brave mother who warned the teacher that if he verbally abused her daughter in the future, she would definitely question him.<sup>373</sup> Another such mother was Lalita Randhir's mother who frequently met the teachers to check her children's progress. However, other parents hardly bother.<sup>374</sup> Dalit parents could not generally afford extra tuition. Students attended tuitions or classes mainly for difficult subjects like English and Maths. Many times, Dalit girls had to try to scrape through these subjects without extra help. However, a few like Mrs. Borade<sup>375</sup> and Kumud Pawde informed me that

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<sup>371</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, Matang, Class 12 (H.S.C.), Clerk, Sinhagad Road-Pune, 8 January, 2002.

<sup>372</sup> Lalita Randhir, Buddhist, Masters in Commerce, Bank Officer, Vivekanand Nagar-Ramtekdi-Pune, Interviewed on 22 May 2001.

<sup>373</sup> Urmilatai Pawar, 6 September 2004, and also see 'Gosh Seshvachi,' pp. 142-147.

<sup>374</sup> Lalita Randhir, 22 May 2001.

<sup>375</sup> Mrs. Borade, Buddhist, Class 9, conducts sewing classes, Dapodi-Pune, Interviewed on 15 July 2002, Prof. Kumud Pawde, Buddhist, M.A. (Sanskrit), Retired, Dhantoli-Nagpur, Interviewed on 16 October, 2005. I spent a whole afternoon with Kumudtai and recorded her interview which was full of personal stories and social activism. We talked while her sisters cooked some spicy Nagpuri mutton curry for us. I stayed for lunch and enjoyed the company of this erudite Dalit feminist.

their teachers did give them some extra readings for the purpose of the scholarship exams.<sup>376</sup>

The lower-class Dalits experienced a lack of an English-speaking culture, in contrast with middle-class. Though they aspired to listen to their children speak English not many supported this education for their children as opposed to the middle-class. I will expand on this discussion on Dalit lower-middle-and middle-class affinity to English language in the next Chapter. In contrast to such middle classes, the slum-dweller Meera had other concerns. For Meera an English-medium, or prestigious schools called for material accessories that she could not afford. She continued:

If I had been in a [English] convent, I would have been different. There are all rich people there and I would have wasted my life demanding things [that my parents could not have afforded]. I would have spoken very good English. I would not have understood life. Here, staying in this environment and with them, and fighting for a good living gives me immense confidence and authority; there I would have lacked it. It is very different to rise from a zero and to have a well-established background.<sup>377</sup>

Meera's slum environment calls for a different struggle as compared to that of the middle-class Dalits.

### Experiences of Slum Schools

Grinding poverty, increased unemployment, and community distress all restricted the kinds of support and recognition that parents could allocate to their children's education. Dalit girls who were in the first generation of learners were *highly privileged to go to school in whatever circumstances*. Whatever the quality of the school, the fact that they could enter the portals of school at all became most important. Kamal Jadhav commented: 'The standard and medium of the school did

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<sup>376</sup> Prof. Kumudtai Pawde, 16 October 2005.

<sup>377</sup> Meera Jangam, 1 August 2004.



not matter at all. We could attend school; that was more than enough.’<sup>378</sup> Champabai

Bhalerao poignantly remarked:

We went to the nearest available school and were *privileged to get whatever we could*,<sup>379</sup> compared to our cousins in the village. They remained illiterate and continued with the small farming. At least we could study a little and get our children educated. My father could afford to send me to school as there were no fees and maybe if there were, I would not have been there. In those times nobody knew about education, or the benefits of education.<sup>380</sup>

Champabai added that the main pressure for the children to attend school regularly did not come from the parents, but from the school: ‘The peons used to come from the school and drag the children there. If a particular child was registered in school but did not attend then the peons used to come and take that child to school.’<sup>381</sup> Draupadi Nagare and others reiterated this.<sup>382</sup> A similar trend was followed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and even later on when the missionaries and leaders like Phule tried to start schools. They had to grab children and make them attend. The missionaries used to go around exhorting the people to send their children to school, and Lahuji Mang and Ranba Mahar helped Phule in his endeavours. The post-independence times were then not very different, and government workers used to do the job of searching for children and taking them to school.

Some girls saw their schools as an escape from their homes in the slums. It provided a break from their household duties. Often, it was the friendships and games rather than the taught curriculum that provided the attraction. These Dalits lived huddled in slums, in ‘match-box’ houses cramped in a small area of few or no

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<sup>378</sup> Kamal Jadhav, she was a Police-Sub Inspector when I met her first. She is now the Assistant Commissioner of Police, 16 September 2001. This was the first time that I talked to a woman police officer in such high rank. I was in complete awe of her.

<sup>379</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>380</sup> Nani, 20 May 2002.

<sup>381</sup> Nani, 20 May 2002.

<sup>382</sup> Draupadi Nagare, Buddhist, Class 7, housewife, Ramtekdi-Pune, 11 September 2004. She is a distant relative and though she is my grand-mother’s age we fondly call her ‘Tai.’

windows and poor ventilation. Sometimes ten individuals lived in a single room. These girls do not know the playground. Lakshmi Shinde suggested that at times some NGOs like the Deepgruh Organisation in the Parvati slum had a *balawadi* (play school) for small children and held classes for the students at a minimal fee.<sup>383</sup> However few children get even such minimal training. The plight of Dalit girls is formidable. Again, the 'unsafe' environment of their *vasti* called for binding of the girls, and the school was one free space where they could play heartily. It was the main motivation for Jyotsna. She responded:

I went to school as I could play with my friends. Studying was a small part. You know the atmosphere in Yerawada [...] and so I liked to play when I was at school. All of us walked together and it was fun being with my friends, playing and studying together.<sup>384</sup>

Jyotsna talked to me as a Dalit brought up in Yerawada. Further, the influence of the peer group is an important factor in academic success, which I will discuss in detail later.

Many informants complained that their teachers did not teach them well.

Jyotsna commented: 'The teachers in municipal schools were very casual. They were not regular, did not teach properly. There was one teacher for 4 classes. They were constantly chatting with other teachers, leaving the students to scribble something.'<sup>385</sup> In many cases, they did not consider low caste pupils 'worth teaching.' They took little interest in the progress of pupils; they merely advance them a grade automatically year by year. Draupadi, Sandhya's mother, talked of her experience of a government school, 'It was just pushing from one class to the other. No grades/marks,

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<sup>383</sup> Lakshmi Shinde, 9 October 2000.

<sup>384</sup> Jyotsna Rokade, Buddhist, Masters in Commerce, Sales Tax Officer, Yerawada-Pune, 15 August 2004. I had to interview the working women on national holidays. They saw to it that they finished all their house work and were free to talk to me whenever I went for the interview.

<sup>385</sup> Jyotsna Rokade, 8 August 2004.



*dhaklat jaicho* [we were pushed from one class to the next], no standards.<sup>386</sup> There was no discipline, no studies or no proper teaching. There was moreover a high turnover of teachers, as they wanted to get away from the low status slum schools as and when they could.

Jyotsna, who attended the Netaji High School complained that her teacher did not teach properly. She further continued:

Sometimes, if they were new, they were not able to teach properly. Some were least bothered if the class understood their lessons or not. Some of the college teachers were irresponsible. They sometimes did not complete the syllabus for a subject. They also did not know much, could not explain well. So we had to join classes.<sup>387</sup>

I reiterate the Gramscian and Freirean concept of 'banking education' that I dealt with in Chapter 1.<sup>388</sup> In this concept there was only deposition of education by the teacher who was on a pedestal before the students. It is never the other way round. In this manner the teacher always remained a teacher; and the student, a student.

Teachers are essential agents in the process of socialization. They have a significant role to play in the future of a child. Commenting on the role of the pedagogue, Emile Durkheim stresses that 'such a person was essential for the socialization of young minds into the collective representations—the dominant norms—of a particular society.'<sup>389</sup> Working on the child's qualities of habit, discipline and suggestibility, the teacher would develop 'a number of physical, intellectual, and moral states necessary for good citizenship.' John Dewey also states that:

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<sup>386</sup> Tai, Draupadi Nagare, 11 September 2004.

<sup>387</sup> Jyotsna Rokade, 15 August 2004. I followed the Rokades from their house in Mundhwa, to Vishrantwadi and of course in Yerawada.

<sup>388</sup> Chapter 1, pp. 4-5.

<sup>389</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Education and Sociology* (Glencoe, Ill., 1956) and *Moral Education* (New York, 1961). Durkheim deals with the role of the pedagogue at length in these works.

Education is an endless experiment wherein educators' aid students in creating ways and means of actively transforming themselves to secure the most complete and effective adaptation. They should educate the individual's creative and artistic ability as well as their ability to engage in critical inquiry and if necessary, carry out the reconstruction of the existing social order to evolve a better society.<sup>390</sup>

We need to look into the practice of such ideologies in India. Most often there is no sharing of a common value code between the teachers and the students, be it in India,<sup>391</sup> the U.K. or the U.S. for that matter. Many studies have brought to light the fact that there is a need for the teachers to appreciate the fact that a culture that is different from their (middle-class) culture is not necessarily inferior; that it is not the one in need of a reform. Ray. C. Rist<sup>392</sup> and William Ryan<sup>393</sup> argue that race and ethnicity are crucial variables in a teacher's assessment of students. These works highlight that teachers' expectations of students are influenced by non-academic factors and that with high-expectations of teachers (which was decided by teachers for students from particular backgrounds) students became high achievers.

A study by Jane Torrey about a Harlem ghetto argues that teachers were systematically imposing white values, culture, and language on to black children.<sup>394</sup> Children who were unable to adapt to this essentially alien culture were treated as

<sup>390</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of John Dewey* (New York, 1916), *My Pedagogic Creed* (Chicago, 1910). This is what Ambedkar believed in and so wanted to do away with the Brahman teachers who harassed the untouchables.

<sup>391</sup> I have already discussed works of Nambissan, Vasavi, Talib, and Murlidharan in the preceding pages and in Chapter 1. All these scholars suggest that school curriculum does not resonate with working class/ Dalits.

<sup>392</sup> Ray C. Rist, 'On understanding the process of Schooling: the contribution of labeling theory,' in Karabel and Halsey (ed.), *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York, 1977), pp. 292-305.

<sup>393</sup> William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim* (New York, 1971).

<sup>394</sup> I am drawing upon works which deal with the failure of school to make connections with the lives of working class children. Such studies helped understand a parallel process in education on the Indian soil, where teachers imposed Brahmanical norms. See Jane Torrey, 'Illiteracy in the Ghetto', in Nell Keddie (ed.), *Tinker, Tailor....The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 67-74; Carolyn Steedman, *The tidy house, little girls writings* (London, 1982), pp. 2-3. bell hooks remembers that she was mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes. 'For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom. Realizing this, I lost my love for school.' See bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (New York and London, c 1994), p. 3.



potential failures. Teachers who were primary agents in the process of superimposing a new culture believed that speaking and understanding the language of whites and adopting their social manners were essential for the child's general advancement. In the Indian case, teachers also rewarded the 'good' language style of students from an upper caste background who were considerably privileged.<sup>395</sup> I have experienced and observed this since childhood, when my mother and some upper caste acquaintances and teachers asked me to speak the upper-caste 'ho' instead of my lower class/caste 'ha' for 'yes.' Thus Dalit language and culture are different from the standard, and Dalits are constantly erasing such 'ha' vocabulary.<sup>396</sup>

The curriculum selectively depicted the world of the dominant and strong, thus ignoring the marginalized. The marginalized internalised and evolved complex cultural strategies to ignore and forget pedagogic knowledge presented to them at school – 'certified degrada.'<sup>397</sup> Geeta Nambissan reported that SC-ST students found their language and culture are different from the standard.<sup>398</sup> The practice of differentiation and discrimination against the SC (and other subalterns) across a range

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<sup>395</sup> My experience, observation and argument is analogous to Pierre Bourdieu's in his most insightful ethnographic observations about French schooling consist of showing how French schoolteachers reward good language style, especially in essay and oral examinations, a practice that tends to favour those students with considerable Cultural Capital who in general are from privileged family origins (B, 1989c: 48-81). Bourdieu, as in David Swartz, *Culture and Power: the sociology of Pierre. Bourdieu* (Chicago and London, 1997): pp. 75-78. I return to this argument and expand on this debate in Chapter 9.

<sup>396</sup> My experience, observation, and field-work testify this social fact. Carolyn Steedman also offers an analysis of what happens when one changes social class, as well as when one is in a middle-class school. Her voice changed, and her Lancashire accent began to disappear. See Steedman, *Landscapes for a good woman* (London, 1986), p. 38.

<sup>397</sup> The pioneering researches of some scholars like Talib, Muralidharan, and Nambissan, underline my conjectures and argue that the curricula do not resonate with Dalits. Their contention regarding the disjunction between the contents of school textbooks and the culture and environment of lower caste children, resonates with the western postulates that I delineated earlier. See footnotes 72, 73, 75. In, the lower caste (SC) context, Talib observes that the life of the oppressed, such as the quarry workers' children does not find expression in the life and thoughts of the privileged in society, thus ignoring them altogether. Talib, 'Educating the Oppressed,' pp. 200, 203-05.

<sup>398</sup> Geeta Nambissan, 'Dealing with Deprivation', *Seminar*, 493, September 2000. Also see Chapter 1, p. 23.

of social institutions and practices, including curriculum and distribution of knowledge, continues through the system of education.

In an analogous manner one Dalit writer, reflecting on his school experiences, remembers how a Brahman teacher had thrashed him hard to make him pronounce the word '*vyombi*' – fresh and tender raw wheat from the fields – correctly. He continues:

I used to follow my cousin to school. I did not have clothes to attend school. My mother asked a pair from someone and I wore that. I had a feeling of inferiority when I went to school with the well-dressed students. I used to sit in a corner. I had a Brahman teacher. Whenever he was angry he used to call us, '*dhedgya, mangatya*.'<sup>399</sup> If we did not wear caps, he used to yell 'you *haramkhor* [bastard], are you Ambedkar's heir? But that won't work here.' He used to use bad words and cane us thoroughly. He used to make other children laugh calling us names, '*dhedraje*' [King of Dheds], '*maanagraje*' [King of Mangs]. All children laughed at us. We were tortured immensely when he used such caste names for us. He used to ask us to leave the class for want of a *topi* [cap]. He used to beat us up thoroughly and some Dalit boys left school due to this.<sup>400</sup>

The upper caste teachers thus use all sorts of physically and psychologically corrosive language against Dalit pupils, in the process encouraging many to drop out of the educational process. Despite such adverse circumstances many Dalit students continue to endure insults and to educate themselves to whatever extent possible.

A study by A.B. Wilson and J.W.B. Douglas in the UK finds that the neatly dressed children and those whom the teachers felt came from 'better' homes tended to be placed in higher academic streams than was warranted by their measured IQ.<sup>401</sup> In an analogous manner, in the Indian context, teachers are prejudicial and place the children from upper caste and middle-class backgrounds in higher academic levels and Dalits at a lower level. The case is worse for Dalits, in that, even if Dalits are

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<sup>399</sup> Contemptible words for untouchable castes, like '*Mhardey*' for Mahars, '*Dhedgya*' for Dheds, '*Mangtya*' for Matangs, and so on.

<sup>400</sup> Anonymous, 'A little school, a little community,' in Vilas Wagh (ed.), *Sugava-Deepavali Special Issue on Dalit middle-classes* (Pune November-December, 1986), p. 13.

<sup>401</sup> Karlekar, 'Education and Inequality,' p. 205.



neatly dressed, there is no equal chance of their being treated well. Their neat and clean uniforms are not enough to *erase* their 'dirty' background.

Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in their provocatively titled work *Pygmalion in the School*, systematically dwell on the teacher's attitude, which makes or mars students.<sup>402</sup> It is worth quoting them at length here:

Even before a teacher has seen a pupil deal with academic tasks she is likely to have some expectation for his behaviour. If she is to teach a "slow group," or children of darker skin colour, or children whose mothers are "on welfare," she will have different expectations for her pupil's performance than if she is to teach a 'fast group', or children of an upper-middle-class community. Before she has seen a child perform, she may have seen his score on an achievement or ability test or his last year's grades or she may have access to the less formal information that constitutes the child's reputation.<sup>403</sup>

Therefore, the teacher's expectations, however derived, can serve as educational self-fulfilling prophecy. Such teaching techniques make '*pygmalions*' – 'pygmys' – of the disadvantaged. This includes the Dalits of my study.

In earlier pages I dealt with the ignorance of the culture of the Dalits, the stereotypes about the Dalits, and the low expectations and negative labelling by predominantly upper caste teachers. The consequences of structural inequalities exacerbated by caste, class and gender, the intransigence of social attitudes and the implicit ideologies that supported them are always going to be deeply contentious and contested territory. In India, the caste system indirectly constrained the educational opportunities of lower caste children despite constitutional guarantees of equality. Some scholars have argued that teachers may unconsciously treat low-caste children differently from other children or have reduced expectations of them.<sup>404</sup> My evidence

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<sup>402</sup> Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher's Expectation and Pupil's Intellectual development* (New York, 1993).

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii-ix.

<sup>404</sup> Shahrukh Khan, 'South Asia' in Elizabeth M. King and M. Anne Hill (eds), *Women's Education in*

showed however, that the teachers often discriminated consciously.

Lakshmi said that in some cases, the lower caste pupils got back at the high caste teachers by adopting a *goonda*-like personality. She reflected, laughed, and continued:<sup>405</sup>

The few upper caste teachers were scared. This was because the school was located in a slum dominated by Dalits and the number of lower caste teachers in the school was higher than the 'other' caste. Occasionally, the students behaved very arrogantly in the presence of the teacher. I also used to sometimes walk out of the class, when I did not like it. The teacher did not say anything. They were easily scared by the presence of boys from my *vasti* who were *goondas*.<sup>406</sup>

This was the municipal school atmosphere in a few slums. Some boys did not allow teachers to teach in class. They harassed them. It seems that the school itself was under the student's control.

Meera said that she did not have a teacher for mathematics because, '*pora tiku deta navhate ek hi shikshak*--the boys did not allow any teacher to settle down in the school for long.'<sup>407</sup> The majority of students suffered due to this misconduct of a few boys. The schools in the *vasti* are sometimes an *adda*<sup>408</sup> for miscreants. Most of the Dalits in the slums were victims of such misconduct and are further attracted to anti-social behaviour, which many a times leads to making them juvenile delinquents. This picture is rampant in the subaltern ghettos over most of the world.

Some of my respondents also had to face sexual harassment in school. Parents often complained about insecurity for girls attending schools. Instances of abduction, rape and molestation of girls dampened the enthusiasm of parents and girl students in pursuing education beyond a certain age; thereafter they remained bound to their

*Developing countries: barriers, benefits and policies* (London and Baltimore, 1993), p. 226.

<sup>405</sup> *Goonda* means an anti-social element, in this case a 'bad guy.'

<sup>406</sup> Lakshmi Shinde, 9 October 2000.

<sup>407</sup> Meera Jangam, 1 August 2004.

<sup>408</sup> *Adda* is a place where miscreant youth would congregate.



homes. Parents were hesitant to send their girls to schools that had only male teachers. Nearly all committees and commissions that have looked into illiteracy have recommended increased recruitment of women teachers. In an article entitled 'Are Girl students safe?' Deepti Mehrotra highlighted the fleeting attention that is given to the rape of a girl in school, which hides the systematic harassment and violence that so many are subjected to.<sup>409</sup>

Misbehaviour by teachers was responsible for large number of girls dropping out of the education system around puberty.<sup>410</sup> Sometimes girls had to grant sexual favours in order to get their work done. Multiple cases can be cited of harassment in formal and non-formal education. There are numerous incidents in urban colleges and universities where girls are sexually abused. If this is the abuse of girls from the general population, what can one say about the plight of Dalit girls who have been treated as 'public' property for centuries?<sup>411</sup>

In the context of my project, eve-teasing was a particular problem in the slums. But, of my informant, only Meera was prepared to be vocal about it. The other respondents simply denied it, stating that it was not of great significance for them.

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<sup>409</sup> Deepti Priya Mehrotra 'Are girl students safe' *India Together* (30 April, 2005), as available online on <http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/apr/wom-girlsafe.htm>, <http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/jun/edu-barriers.htm>

<sup>410</sup> Deepti Priya Mehrotra, 'Girls without power' *India Together*, (8 March 2006), in <http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/mar/wom-intlday.htm>. Wahidul Hasan Khan, 'Barriers to girl's education,' *India Together* (June, 2004), as available online <http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/jun/edu-barriers.htm>. A 2002 study of Mumbai municipal schools by Vacha Kishori Project Team notes: we tried to raise the issue of unnecessary touching and attention by male teachers. The girls resented the behaviour of male teachers and expressed their discomfiture to us. The principal of the school did not believe the girls, despite the fact that two municipal school teachers had been arrested for confinement and molestation of girl students while school was on. In one school, a teacher wrote graffiti on the walls of the girls' toilet; the girls did not want the research team to intervene because this would render them even more vulnerable. See Deepti Priya Mehrotra 'Are girl students safe?' *India Together*, (30 April 2005), as available online: <http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/apr/wom-girlsafe.htm>. Also see a report by as Research team under Sonal Shukla, 'Primary education: Gender context of girls in primary schools in Mumbai and Ahmedabad' IDPAD Newsletter, 2, 1 (January-June 2004), pp. 13-16. <http://www.idpad.org/docs/Vol.%20II%20No.%201%20January%20-%20June%202004.pdf>

<sup>411</sup> I have already argued this in Chapter 3, p. 12 and I reiterate it here.

Perhaps, they wanted to keep silent on a sensitive issue. From my experiential knowledge, such silence and ignoring is often a defence for women who feel that they would invite trouble and even shame on themselves if they spoke out. They feel that they cannot do much against the masculine forces and learn to be oblivious to such comments. Meera, who was abused by one of her teachers at a private maths class, said:

When I was in Class 7 I used to go to this Bhujbal class for maths. We had a teacher who liked me very much. I did not like him at all. He used to hold me close wherever I was. He bit me on my cheek once. I told my mother. My mother complained to the higher authority and that teacher was then sacked. After that I did not go to any class as such.<sup>412</sup>

Instead of maintaining silence, Meera's bold mother complained to the authority and later stopped her daughter from attending any class. Due to this experience Meera grew so apathetic towards classes that even during S.S.C.<sup>413</sup> when most of the students went for extra coaching, Meera opted to study on her own.

Clearly some teachers did not spare the girls. Again, they know that they will invariably get away with it, as they are teachers and the girls are students. This is compounded for Dalits girls, whose double weakness – of caste and sex – means that they are highly unlikely to complain at all. Such incidents and the rising atrocities against low caste women once again underscore the indelible markings of 'low caste women as public property,' as *muralis*, *jogtinis*, and *devadasis* who are sexually 'touchable' and 'loose' women.<sup>414</sup>

Not all teachers were however bad – there were a few good willed and idealistic ones who went out of their way to help their Dalit pupils. The most famous example is Ambedkar's Brahman teacher who gave Ambedkar his last name.

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<sup>412</sup> Meera Jangam, 5 August 2004.

<sup>413</sup> S.S.C. stands for the Secondary School Certificate examination or Class 10.

<sup>414</sup> See Chapter 3, p. 74-75.



Ambedkar's family name was Sankpal, but in order to avoid its low caste connotation he took his village name – Ambavade – so it became Ambavadekar. However, his Brahman teacher, who was named Ambedkar, showed great concern for the young boy and also provided him a daily lunch to relieve him from walking back a long distance to his home. It was in the honour of this teacher that the boy's name was registered as Ambedkar.<sup>415</sup>

Some of my informants had similar experiences. They had, they said, one or two teachers who took an interest in their progress and gave them good advice about further opportunities. Poonam Rokade, now an engineer, praised her teacher:

During my school, my teacher did help me in Mathematics. He spent some extra time on my coaching and did not charge me any fees. The engineering syllabus was tough and I felt like dropping out at times. I repeatedly failed in one particular subject and I could not figure out the reason. I thought it was caste discrimination. However, one day, I gathered the guts to face the teacher of that subject and asked him the reason of my failure in his subject alone. He was a [upper caste] Maratha, named Chavan. He explained that my method of writing answers was faulty. He asked me to solve previous years' question papers and to get them reviewed by him. I followed his advice and succeeded.<sup>416</sup>

A few teachers were said to be innovative and implemented changes for the interest and benefit of the students. They asked them to teach in the class or to help other students. Such tendencies were nonetheless the exceptions rather than the rule.

### **Caste Discrimination and Humiliation in Schools**

Mohammad Talib has described the experience of working class children in a school located in an urban village on the southern outskirts of New Delhi.<sup>417</sup> He observes that the teachers always say, 'this child was deficient in the *ruchi* [interest]

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<sup>415</sup> These are some stories I have grown up with. Also see Gail Omvedt, *Ambedkar: towards an enlightened India* (Viking, 2004), pp. 4-5.

<sup>416</sup> Poonam Rokade, Buddhist, Engineer, Mundhawa-Pune, 15 August 2004.

<sup>417</sup> Talib, 'Educating the oppressed,' pp. 199-209.

necessary for aspiring education of any kind.' One student said, 'my teachers have always told me so. They told me that my head does not contain brain but *bhoosa* [dry grass]. They said so because I do not understand the lessons in the class.'<sup>418</sup> Therefore convinced, he dropped out. Such qualitative information is relevant to understand the reason for rising drop-out rates of Dalits rather than just blaming them for their non-attendance in schools. Such children are very often persuaded by their upper caste teachers to believe in their lack of aptitude for education.

When I approached these informants for this project, many of them thought that I was investigating caste, casteism, untouchability, and Dalitness. Without enquiring about the research, some started narrating their experiences of being discriminated against and the nauseating attitudes of 'touchable' higher castes. After explaining to them the real purpose of the research, I inquired into their experiences of being cast away by society and by educational institutions. Some of the informants like Nani, Draupadi Nagare, among others just denied the experience vociferously and said that none of 'that' existed and they did not face any of 'that.'<sup>419</sup> I do not deny that some have escaped caste discrimination. However, Dr. Shalini More and Nanubai Pagare did not want to speak about such experiences.<sup>420</sup>

Such narratives, in particular create conditions for the 'unspeakability' of caste. I interpret their silence as a result of their being so damned by the obnoxious caste system, and the sentiments enveloping it, that they refuse to remember their past, to relate to their 'untouchable' background. In this way psychological and mental violence corrodes the Dalit subject from within.

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid., pp. 200, 203.

<sup>419</sup> Both Nani and Tai were brought up in Mumbai during their childhood. Nani (Champabai) Bhalerao, 20 May 2000, Tai (Draupadi Nagare), 11 September 2004.

<sup>420</sup> Dr. Shalini More, Buddhist, MBBS, owns two clinics, Sinhgad road-Pune, 1 June 2002, Nanubai Pagare, Lalita Randhir's mother, Buddhist, Literate, housewife, Yerawada-Pune, 20 May 2004.



From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century social reformers preached about the evils of untouchability. Both Dalit and non-Dalit leaders strived hard to wipe off this stigma of untouchability from the fabric of India. Ambedkar made immense efforts to erase the marks of the earlier lives of the Dalits. Along with a million followers he converted to Buddhism to escape the caste structure of Hinduism. Ambedkar also enshrine the 'right to equality' for the citizens of India in the constitution, thereby discrediting any unequal practices like untouchability. However, the practice continues to take its mental toll, sometimes very openly but most of the time subtly.

Many Indians, both upper and lower caste, deny 'untouchability' in modern India, but the testimonies of these Dalit women were living evidence. Such anomalies question the very nature of citizenship for the Dalits in post-independent India. Do the Dalits have any equal rights? Or do they have only duties to perform? Are they 'independent' in post-independent India or do they still have to live upon the mercy of the upper castes? Though the practice of untouchability has visibly declined in the cities, some villages support the practice today.<sup>421</sup> Newspaper reports testify to this fact. In my own ancestral village, Takali (Ahmednagar), I remember being shouted at by an old Brahman woman. She asked me to stand at a distance while her daughters-in-law filled their pots. When I questioned the Brahman woman's stance, my brethren told me it was always that way. Dalits were 'polluting' and were to remain away. These dehumanizing, written (shastric) laws are followed by some Dalits without any hesitation, questions or any arguments. They know that they will have no source of drinking water if they end up in fights. Though the practice is dying out, caste discrimination persists in minor forms. The Dalit women I interviewed thus agree to

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<sup>421</sup> A recent study by Thorat and the collective reveals that untouchability is present in 80% of rural areas. Thorat et al., *Untouchability in Rural India* (New Delhi, 2006), p. 65.

this proposition and say that they did face discrimination sometimes, but that they are better prepared today to challenge any discrimination. Is education is a factor in empowering them?

The humiliation faced by Dalit girls at school was the rule in most cases.<sup>422</sup>

Monica Sathe was troubled because despite fetching higher grades her teachers encouraged the 'others' (upper caste students) not her. She stated: 'in my case they never acknowledged that I was doing well. I did not like it, but still I studied to prove myself.'<sup>423</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar was reminded of a Brahman teacher during her 7<sup>th</sup> class:

He was really harsh. He asked me, "what are you going to do with education?" He further continued, "These people will never improve. You will never understand this maths; it is not meant for you."<sup>424</sup>

Brahmans and upper caste Hindus often dominated educational professions.

Historically, Brahman or other upper castes that discriminated against the lower castes have dominated teaching, and hence we find continuing caste discrimination in the schools. These girls were the first Dalits to attend formal schools, and the high caste teachers discouraged them thoroughly, rather than trying to help them in any small way.

In many of the municipal schools, the majority of pupils were of low caste, and there was no discrimination between pupils. Suvarna Kuchekar reported:

I did not face anything in school as it was a corporation school dominated by backward children. The teachers also even if from the open category did not trouble

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<sup>422</sup> In what follows, I have drawn upon Philip Corrigan's work, which is very Foucaultian in its oeuvre, and I have already dealt with it in Chapter 1, pp. 5-6. In his scholarly paper Corrigan demonstrates the way students' bodies are taught and disciplined. He also argues that the school system works to arrange and reflects a series of rewards and punishments, in which, of course, punishments can be rewards and vice versa. A similar argument is engaged with by Jennifer M. Gore, see Chapter 1, p. 7.

<sup>423</sup> Monica Sathe, Matang, Masters in Social Work, Karve nagar-Pune, Interviewed on 30 July 2005. Note that 'Sathe' is a last name also shared by upper castes. Lower castes with such last names cannot be identified.

<sup>424</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.



as such. My friends also know my caste and are fine with me. They come home and I go there and we are quite close. I have never hidden my caste.<sup>425</sup>

When, however, there was a number of high caste children, the humiliations could come from them also. Bharati complained, 'children teased me a lot. They said that I was from a *'dirty caste'* and so should stay away from them. They hid my bag and stole my only pen. So I did not like to go to school.'<sup>426</sup> Ratnaprabha Pawar, now a teacher, stated: 'the "other" girls used to put their skirts tucked in properly, so that they would not touch mine when we sat on the benches. They had separate groups also and stayed away. I never had friends from the upper castes as such.'<sup>427</sup> Such was the caste-friendship practised in the schools. Jyotsna Rokade, Ratnaprabha Pawar, Hirabai Kuchekar,<sup>428</sup> and others mentioned such impenetrable caste groups. The caste children had been well socialised by the parents and teachers, and practised whatever had been preached to them, leading to such discriminatory practices towards their classmates. Such casteist, derogatory, and insulting remarks crippled many Dalit pupils.

Some sought to hide their caste background if at all possible. Meena Mahajan thus said:

In school I told my friends I was a Maratha. I had a terrible complex. I thought that 'they' would not talk to me if I revealed my caste. Once when I was in Class 10, one teacher loudly asked me "*tu Hindu- Mahar na ga*"? [you are a Hindu-Mahar right?]. I felt so bad I stood with my head down. I was the only one in that class. Further, I never told my address as Mangalvar Peth [because it] has Mahar *aali* [ghetto]. I don't

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<sup>425</sup> Suvarna Kuchekar, daughter of Hirabai Kuchekar. Suvarna is a Matang with a Bachelors in Commerce, job searching, Sinhagad road-Pune, Interviewed on 8 January 2002.

<sup>426</sup> Bharati Kale, Buddhist, M.A. (Marathi literature), University of Pune-Pune, Interviewed on 18 June 2002.

<sup>427</sup> Ratnaprabha Pawar, 10 April 2002.

<sup>428</sup> Jyotsna Rokade, 15 August 2004; Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002; Ratnaprabha Pawar, 10 April 2002.

tell my caste openly even today. Why tell if it is not required? I declare that I am a Brahman.<sup>429</sup>

Meena's testimony brought out the ways in which Dalits sometimes try to 'pass' as upper caste. Stereotypical markers identify Dalits; their place of residence is one such marker. In this instance, to hide her markings, Meena concealed her address. Another way of doing this was to speak in public in a prestigious nasal-toned Marathi, a Marathi very different from the one that they spoke in private in the precincts of their homes. Meena was also fortunate to share an upper caste last name, 'Mahajan,' and due to this nobody could discover her actual lower background.

I interject an anecdote here. During my fieldwork, I attended the INEB Conference, Nagpur.<sup>430</sup> I came across a British woman who had been in India for ten years, and was working with a Buddhist organisation in Pune. She was interested in me, my work, and my goals for the future. After talking to me for a while, she said, 'Oh! You are a Dalit? You don't look like one. Also, your [spoken] English is very good.'<sup>431</sup> I was so confused that I could not reply to her; I felt insulted and hurt. At the same time the ambiguous subaltern in me wondered if this was a compliment, and I did nothing more than smile sheepishly. Such probing questions along with the wounds made by the stock of stereotypical markers are immensely abrasive. Further, this was coming not from an upper caste member but an outsider, a foreigner from the country that once ruled India, demonstrating a prejudice shared with the upper castes. Such stereotypes were social facts; some Dalits, especially the lower-middle-and-middle-classes seem constantly engaged in contesting such facts.

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<sup>429</sup> Meena Mahajan, Buddhist, Class 12, housewife, Ghorpade Peth-Pune, 29 April 2002.

<sup>430</sup> International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) Conference, on 'Transcending Barriers: Dr. Ambedkar and the Buddhist world,' organized at Nagaloka-Nagpur (India), 9-16 October 2005.

<sup>431</sup> INEB Conference, Nagaloka, 11 October 2005.



## Future Prospects

Several studies as quoted by Chatterjee like those of Shah and Thaker and Suma Chitnis,<sup>432</sup> and as undertaken by Kakade have argued that neither students nor their relatives experienced caste discrimination or ill-treatment associated with their caste status.<sup>433</sup> Perhaps these scholars failed to pick up on casteism in their studies, for few Dalits would like to talk about such discriminatory practices. We have to also note the silences that these investigators and scholars have turned a blind eye to. In my opinion, it requires courage to voice these oppressions. As opposed to such claims, my informants reveal that caste continues to be a source of major oppression in modern cities.

The Dalits looked up to schools for some critical knowledge, for that 'capital' which they lack at their homes. Who else if not the schools and the teachers would work on these assets for the Dalits? However, if the teachers also blindly followed the fixed curriculum and did not entertain any exchanges of knowledge and fruitful discussions in the class how could these Dalit students benefit? Hence, free access to education was not in itself enough; efforts had to be made in order to make the access meaningful. Only then could reservations, affirmative action and other concessions bear fruit.

The municipal Marathi-medium school is at the lowest level in the school hierarchy. Most Dalit students from these schools had low aspirations. I observed that most of the respondents had no aspirations during their school days. They were first-generation learners who could at least attend school, which their parents could not. Most of them suggest that they never thought about their career or future. It is only

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<sup>432</sup> Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, pp. 283-84; Chitnis, *A Long Way to Go*, pp. 278-81.

<sup>433</sup> S. R. Kakade, *A study of the integration of the SC in Indian society-a case study in Marathwada*, (PhD Thesis, University of Pune, 1979).

the second and third generation learners who talk about this vociferously. Most of the first-generation learners were married off very early before they started making use of their education for employment. To begin with they did not dream of anything, and by the time they started doing so their dreams were shattered.

Most of the first and some of the second-generation respondents were transferred from one class to the other. They wanted to make use of their education for employability and teaching provided the best opening in this respect, as the basic qualification was to pass class 7. Hence everybody in the community including Ambedkar<sup>434</sup> insisted that girls must be taught until matriculation so that they could apply for a teaching post. Further, teaching is seen popularly as suitable occupation for women. Most of the women I talked to stated that as girls they had the desire to become teachers. Snehlata Kasbe says, 'I used to look at my teachers who moved around the class with a stick. I also wanted to imitate that. I thought the profession *commanded more respect* [emphasis mine].'<sup>435</sup> Such Dalits thought that at least the 'divine' profession of teaching would bring respect. Nonetheless, there were others who took on different occupations, becoming clerical staff, nurses, officers, doctors, police, and so on.

Most of the respondents feel that lack of English-medium school provides a hindrance in career. With English, they would have been more confident, outgoing, bold and outspoken. They thought that English brought prestige and a sense of superiority which they lacked. Snehlata reflected that an English medium school would have made a world of difference. She asserted:

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<sup>434</sup> Also see Chapter 4, p. 87-88.

<sup>435</sup> Snehlata Kasbe, 10 September 2003. Emphasis is mine. Some Dalit thought that at least the 'divine' profession of teaching would bring them respect.



If I had been to an English medium school it would have made a big difference. I would have been able to converse fluently in English with you. I would have been able to attend the parents-teachers meetings for my eldest son and talk to his teachers. I never did that. Besides this the students from an English medium are very confident and also do well in life. The Marathi-medium students lack this confidence. They waste a lot of time in building it up. Everything is different about English schools and in Marathi schools half the time is spent in coping with so many problems and complexes.<sup>436</sup>

Snehlata therefore directly compared the English language and the English school with confidence. That confidence she thought was missing in the Dalits. I continue on this debate on the significance of the English language and other predicaments of Dalit girls from middle classes in the next chapter.

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<sup>436</sup> Snehlata Kasbe, 10 September 2003.

### Chapter 6: Escaping the Slum

This chapter focuses on the ways in which Dalits sought to escape from the predicament of slums, poverty and social exclusion. It examines what may be broadly categorised as the experience of the emerging Dalit middle class. Another aim of this chapter is to reveal how the teachers and parents believe in and practice the dictum of the classic Marathi proverb, '*chaddi lage chham chham, vidya yeyi gham gham,*' which means 'the harder the stick beats, the faster the flow of knowledge.' In this way parents and teachers sought to discipline the children into 'doing well' in order to reap a fruitful future.

In some Dalit families, a strong individual could develop a vision for a different future. In some cases, this came from political engagement in the Ambedkar movement. However, it could be for other reasons. As pointed out by many scholars and also suggested by most of my informants, the significant motivation for advancement and progress was and is Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. None of my Buddhist (presumably Mahars) informants said that they were inspired by Gandhi, Nehru, or Indira Gandhi – the first woman Prime Minister – they all unanimously vocalized the essence of Ambedkarite ideals and of Ambedkarism—education, self-respect/identity, intellectual achievement, and power. During these decades, Ambedkar has been the rallying point for All Mahars and some Matangs; they see him as their redeemer, even their 'God.' A few Matangs looked upon Indira Gandhi and their leader Annabhau Sathe as their ideals.

I agree to some extent, with academicians who argue that Dalits should not deify Ambedkar, because he was simply a human being. I have already critiqued Ambedkar for some of his postulates regarding education for women in Chapter 4. However, he has had huge significance for Dalits, and particularly Mahars. Eleanor



Zelliot has argued for Dalits 'Ambedkar is a symbol of achievement, protection and their own rights.'<sup>437</sup> Ambedkar brought pride and self-respect for Dalits as opposed to Gandhi who made them feel merely pitied and patronised. The Dalit response in Mumbai and Pune to mine (from 2000-2005) and also to Zelliot's question about the meaning of Ambedkar was all in personal terms: 'inspiration, courage, identity and a surprising one, peace!'<sup>438</sup> 'There are many meanings to Ambedkar: inspiration for the educated, hope for the illiterate, threat to the establishment, creator of opportunities for Dalits and discomfort for the elite.'<sup>439</sup>

In some cases, the escape from slums could be physical, as to army life in a cantonment, or to a better neighbourhood, or a mission school. The Dalit children attended schools in the vicinity of the Christian Missionaries. The Christian missionaries readily adopted Dalit children and admitted them to their schools. Christian missionary schools could be found near the Dalit *vastis* in Vadgaonsheri, Yerawada, Kirkee, Shastri Nagar, and in the Cantonment area.<sup>440</sup> It is obvious that the missionaries targeted lower castes residing on the margins of the city; as well as those lower castes employed with the British in the Cantonment area. Christian missionaries along with some Brahman, Non-Brahman, and Muslim reformers were the pioneers of education in India. Despite their long efforts in Western India since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, I came across only a few first-generation learners who were admitted to the missionary schools. One reason for this could be that when the independent Indian government started engaging with the planned economy, concentrating on education, the mission schools started waning.

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<sup>437</sup> Eleanor Zelliot, 'The Meaning of Ambedkar' in Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and Dalit Challenge*, Vol. 2 (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 135-37.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>440</sup> One could refer to the map in Chapter 5, p. 100, and also the Appendix for clarity purposes.

Another possible reason, as pointed out by Sandhya is that the slightly more well-to-do Dalit parents did not want their children to be converted to Christianity.<sup>441</sup> The missionaries had converted many Dalits to Christianity by giving them an alternative religion to Hinduism, along with food, education, medicine and moral support. When the missionaries started proselytising right from the early nineteenth century, they got immense support from the lower castes. Their schools proved popular because they provided free food, uniform, and boarding facilities to the untouchable children. The question of fees did not arise at all. Dalits could not afford all these amenities due to their poverty and they did not mind if they or their children were converted to Christianity. Many Mahars and Mangs turned to Christianity for their deliverance. There were Dalit conversions in great numbers in Aurangabad, Ahmednagar, Srirampur, Rahuri and other places in Maharashtra. These places were mission stations, the base of missionaries, and we find many Dalit Christians residing in these areas. They have some prestigious missionary schools, libraries and well-equipped mission hospitals. There are reports of mass Mang conversions in the city of Aurangabad. Ahmednagar was a strong centre of missionary activities along with Pune and Bombay.<sup>442</sup>

Sandhya mentioned her warm and loving English and Marathi teachers at her mission school in Pune cantonment. Whilst Sandhya was sent to the free mission school her two brothers were sent to convent schools. Christian missionaries run both these schools, but there was a difference in standard, status and prestige. Sandhya went to the traditional mission school that did not charge her anything and also concentrated on Marathi teaching and speaking. One of her brothers, Pramod, went to

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<sup>441</sup> Sandhya Meshram, Buddhist, Masters in Social work, Ramtekdi-Pune, 11 September 2004. I know her since my childhood.

<sup>442</sup> University of Birmingham, Church Missionary Society Records, G2 I 3/0, 1927, Document no. 11, *The Mass Movement in Western India: A Survey and Statement of Needs* (London 1926).



the highly prestigious St. Vincent's school, the topmost convent high school for boys in the city of Pune which charged enormous fees and instructed only in English. Sandhya's other brother studied in another good convent institution, St. Ornella's High School. It is very significant that Sandhya's father aspired to educate only his sons in good convent schools. He managed to afford the high fees *only* for his sons but not for their *only* daughter. Sandhya was tormented by it even today, when she a 45-year-old mother to a 20-year-old, talked of this discriminatory attitude of her parents which she felt blighted her life.

Bebi Jagtap, who studied at the Shirur Hostel, remembered her difficult circumstances and legitimised her father's actions:

So when he came to know about this Christian mission hostel he admitted us there. I liked the atmosphere there as the condition at home was not very comfortable. We didn't have enough to eat or wear. I had made good friends at the hostel and the Christian sisters were very good. So, I preferred to stay there. Life was very disciplined. We got up in the mornings, we had a common assembly and then we entered the classes. The sisters were very loving. They taught us well and did not discriminate as in the earlier school. They also took up our studies in the evenings and made us understand.<sup>443</sup>

This was a rare instance to find someone talk about the Christian mission school. She talked about the 'disciplined'<sup>444</sup> life of the mission school. We do not have much information about the girls in the boarding schools of missionaries or even those that attended Phule's schools. What did exactly happen to them? Up to what levels did they study and what did they do later? There is also not much information on the educated girls and the hostels established for them by the Non-Brahman leaders and Ambedkar either. Suffice it to say that some girls did attend schools.

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<sup>443</sup> Bebi Jagtap, Matang, Class 12, Typist, Sinhagad Road-Pune, 5 February 2002.

<sup>444</sup> I am once again drawing upon Foucault's 'disciplinary power' which turned the educational space into a 'learning machine.' Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish-the birth of the prison*, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979), pp. 148-149.

Once parents were in a middle-class occupation and locale, education was much facilitated. These socialised parents encouraged better study habits, coached them, and put pressure on them to succeed in their studies. Manini, Malavika, and her brother were under constant pressure to perform better. Both the sisters underscored their parent's pushing them towards the science stream, when neither liked it.<sup>445</sup> The parents also coaxed their son into science when he did not approve of it either. They wanted their children to be doctors. When I asked their mother about this, she said:

There was no doctor or any other professional of that high rank in my family. Most of them were in clerical services or were teachers. Both of us, my husband and I, were earning and we thought that we could afford good education for our children. We wanted our children to avail of this opportunity and do their best. We had no facilities or choices, but we could bestow them upon our children. In those times we could just think of making them doctors or engineers and so we pushed them towards that. However, we did not take into consideration our children's choices. Also we did not think about their non-English background and how they would have to fight the English world. Those were different times; we acted in a craze.<sup>446</sup>

Such Dalit parents wanted their children to reach great heights unknown to the community in the past, and their present. In doing this they did not take into consideration the choices or particular talents of their children, and simply forced their own designs on them. The two sisters were critical of their parents in this respect even today, after 10 years.

Such lower-middle and middle-class subaltern parents generally emphasised a 'respectable' middle-class lifestyle, as they want their children to be well behaved. They also want the majority to know that their children come from good homes – that

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<sup>445</sup> Manini and Malavika are Urmila Pawar's daughters. Manini Pawar, Bachelors in Science, Borivili-Mumbai, 6 September 2004. Manini is a *Kathak* dancer and interested in other arts and crafts. However, she is working at a laboratory to earn her living. Her elder sister, Malavika Pawar, has a Masters in Sociology and Bachelors in Education, Borivili-Mumbai, 5 and 6 September 2004. Mala (as we all call her) is an accomplished singer.

<sup>446</sup> Urmila Pawar, 6 September 2004. When Mala and Manini criticized their mother in her presence, their mother (Urmilatai) simply left the room. However, later on she explained the reason.



they themselves are people of good character.<sup>447</sup> In this way, they sought to counter the many negative stereotypes that existed about Dalits. For girls, a respectable demeanour was seen to be necessary to ward off dangerous attentions from males. In this way, many middle-class Dalits tried to give a good image of themselves to the upper castes in the hope that they might be accommodated within the hegemonic structure of power.

Middle-class Dalit parents often believed that strict discipline was required to achieve such ends, and in particular to make a child succeed in education. In this, they followed the old Marathi proverb, '*chhadī lage chham chham, vidya yei gham gham*' (the harder the stick beats; the faster the flow of knowledge). Fathers, and sometimes mothers, often used corporal punishment to compel their children to attend school and study hard, whether they wanted to or not. Urmila thus stated that in the beginning she did not like school but still attended it because she was afraid of her father.<sup>448</sup> Her parents often beat them with a stick, building a psychology of fear in their children. Nonetheless, after her father's death that she continued to attend school, feeling that she should fulfil her father's dreams. She said, 'I started looking seriously at school only after his death. I just thought I should follow his advice, as he used to bash us up to attend school.'<sup>449</sup> Kamal said that, 'my father saw to it that I was never at home, that I never missed school.'<sup>450</sup> In such an atmosphere, it was seen as a moral failing to express any dislike of school. Although Ivan Illich has rightly

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<sup>447</sup> Stephanie Shaw makes a similar argument in the case of African American women. I am drawing upon Stephanie Shaw's insightful work on 'middle-class' African-American women, *What a woman ought to be and to do: Black Professional women workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago and London, 1996), pp. 15-23.

<sup>448</sup> Urmila Pawar, 5 September 2004.

<sup>449</sup> Urmila Pawar, 5 September 2004.

<sup>450</sup> Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001.

criticised this disciplinary attitude towards education,<sup>451</sup> the attitude of informants like Urmila reveal a certain ambiguity on the issue – they abhorred the discipline, but understood their father’s wider motives. Amita thus spoke about her father’s expectations and ideals that she said above all encouraged her to attend school diligently.<sup>452</sup> Dr. Jyoti Kadam talked about her school days,

My mother taught us initially. She taught us till she could cope and later the father took over. He made me sit late in the nights solving arithmetic problems [...]. My father sat with me the night before the exams. He beat me up till I found the logic of solving the problems. It was after that [beating] that I started to look at the root of any problem. This training has gone a long way in making me what I am today. The teachers could not do what my father did.<sup>453</sup>

Most second and third-generation learners appreciated their parent’s interest in their education, and were prepared to excuse the harsh methods that might be used to make them study.

There existed among such Dalits a general belief in the importance and utility of education. The children came to share their parent’s desire for good education. They believed that education strengthened opportunities for employment. It placed them in a good position compared to their parents, and so they took pains and encouraged their children. Most parents and students felt that children who did not attend formal school were failures, and hence they aspired to succeed in life by attending school.

One second-generation respondent suggested that competition, the race for standing first in the class and having an edge over the others was a great motivating factor. Dr. Jyoti said,

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<sup>451</sup> Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (1st edn, New York, 1971); Bourdieu and Paul Willis also critically write about this disciplinary aspect of the education system.

<sup>452</sup> Amita Pillewar, Buddhist, Masters in Social work, Karve nagar-Pune, 30 July 2005.

<sup>453</sup> Dr. Jyoti Kadam, Buddhist, Doctor (M.B.B.S.), Dapodi-Pune, 11 June 2002.



I was told at home that I had nothing else to fall back upon but education. I was also good at studies and it was always at the back of my mind that that I had to stand first in the class. My parents insisted upon it and it came from within me. I did not want to lag behind others and wanted to score the best and stand first.<sup>454</sup>

Dalits who aspired to a middle class way of life put great pressure on their children, demanding that they be first in their class. There are many newspaper reports of students attempting suicide, because they were unable to withstand this parental pressure. Such Dalits knew that the struggle to become middle class was a cutthroat one. The Dalit middle class is sometimes depicted as a new type of caste in India – one that can be entered through achievement in education and employment.<sup>455</sup> In such a way, some Dalits believed that they could – to some extent at least – escape their caste by becoming middle class.

Middle-class Dalit parents fund and encourage extra coaching. During the past few decades, coaching classes have become an essential part of education in India. Many teachers have almost stopped teaching in colleges and they compel students to attend their private coaching classes. In the urban as well as rural areas almost all middle and lower-middle class students are enrolled in some or the other coaching class. There are vacation batches, regular batches, and crash courses for all student needs. Private coaching is getting commercialised and is an ever-growing market. On the whole, Dalits cannot afford to attend such classes, but those who have the means will find the money, as their children are otherwise unlikely to achieve good results.

Besides parents, other family members – such as grandfathers, uncles, aunts, and siblings – could play a significant role in ensuring that a child studied diligently.

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<sup>454</sup> Dr. Jyoti Kadam, 11 June 2002.

<sup>455</sup> Sugava Issue, 1986 and 'Ambedkari Prerana Visheshank-Dalitanna Brahmani saunskrutiche Akarshan (Dalit attraction for Brahmanical culture)' (Pune, 1994), also see works of Veena Das, Andre Beteille, in *Castes in Contemporary India*, Lelah Dushkin, 'Scheduled Caste Politics,' in Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India* (Arizona, 1972).

Jyotitai Lanjewar reflected: 'my grandfather used to take us to school. He sat till the school was over and brought us back home. He taught us at home. He told me to appear for Class 5 exam and admitted me to high school after I cleared that.'<sup>456</sup> In such cases, the home became a learning-friendly environment. In Sandhya's case, her uncle and her siblings helped her with her studies.<sup>457</sup> A habit was inculcated of regular reading. First generation pupils in municipal schools rarely read anything beyond their textbooks. Indeed, some Dalit parents actively discouraged wider reading habits, believing that schools offered the 'ultimate' knowledge and anything besides that was a waste of time and was irrelevant. Kamal's (second-generation respondent) father reprimanded her when she tried to read storybooks; she said: 'we were to engage in studying school text books only.'<sup>458</sup> Sandhya, however, remembered that her uncles obtained books and discussed them with her and her siblings at home.<sup>459</sup> In this manner reading habits were nurtured in these children. On the whole, the reading was confined to newspapers, some Marathi magazines, and lightweight books. The reading of serious novels and intellectually more-demanding books was a rarity. The thickness of a book appeared to arouse some kind of fear and awe. Some were involved in other activities, such as sports, or singing.<sup>460</sup> When Dalit parents were economically comfortable they attended to the over all development of their children. Such extra-curricular activities hardly existed for the

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<sup>456</sup> Prof. Jyoti Lanjewar, 10 October 2005.

<sup>457</sup> Sandhya Meshram, 11 September 2004. I know the Nagare (Sandhya Meshram's maiden name is Nagare) and Meshram family since my childhood. One of the Nagares was my neighbour in Siddhartha Nagar-Yerawada. We fondly call her Sandhya *akka* (elder sister). The Nagares and Meshrams are well-educated and well-settled.

<sup>458</sup> Kamaltai Jadhav, 16 September 2001.

<sup>459</sup> Sandhya *akka*, 11 September 2004.

<sup>460</sup> Interviews with Manini and Malavika, 5-6 September 2005, Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001, and Dr. Swati Waghmare, Buddhist, Doctor (M.B.B.S.), Vishrantwadi-Pune, 12 November 2004. While Mala and Manini were engaged in singing and dancing, Swati was a cricketer. I have seen Swati since my school days. I remember her tightly ironed uniform when she attended Mount Carmel, a convent school. She carried her cricket equipment on her shoulders. She lived in the Yerawada slum earlier, and moved to Vishrantwadi later.



first-generation learners. In this way some second and third-generation Dalit women gained the habit of taking an interest in activities outside the curriculum to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>461</sup>

Some parents realised that involvement in such activities might give their children an extra edge in their school careers. They thus encouraged them to participate in craft-making, dancing, music, drawing, and sports, and took a pride in their achievements. Urmila Pawar boasted of her activities as a student:

I was very bold and smart during my school times, *very unlike the rest of the Dalits* [emphasis mine]. I used to read stories and whatever I could lay my hands on. I got them from the school library. Mumbai made a big difference, and I started reading more. In school I participated in plays. I once played the role of a king. *It was very unlikely for a Dalit girl to get that kind of role* [emphasis mine]. But I fetched it because I was a good performer and singer too.<sup>462</sup>

In this, Urmila Pawar revealed the negative stereotypes she held about Dalits being passive, stupid, and shy. She was struggling to set herself apart as a ‘non-Dalit.’

Such were the predicaments of the Dalits who want to claim a Dalit identity while at the same time distancing themselves from the mass of their community. We should also note that Dalits were not as a rule granted main roles in the theatre. Urmilatai further very proudly continued about her daughters’ attainments:

I wanted them to do something else; not the usual rut of everyday school and college. Something to relax, and engage in [...]. My younger daughter is a Kathak dancer and has performed on stage a few times. The older one is a *Sangeet Visharad* [higher degree for singers] and is still learning ahead and also conducts classes for beginners.<sup>463</sup>

Thus the second and third-generation learners wanted their children to engage in different activities. Moreover, they were thoughtful of their daily grind and wanted

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<sup>461</sup> I deal with this in detail in the second section of Chapter 9.

<sup>462</sup> Urmilatai Pawar, 7 September 2005.

<sup>463</sup> Urmilatai Pawar, 7 September 2005.

some intellectual and spiritual pursuits. I came across a Dalit activist family in which their only daughter is a model, a theatre actress, and was also aspiring to be a theatre director.

Most of the first-generation and second-generation learners were educated in municipal schools. Only a few from the second-generation and more from the third generation studied in better quality institutions. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that the quality of the private schools was far better. The private school system was characterised by less caste discrimination, more attentive teachers, and competition for quality; whereas the government schools were marked off as highly discriminatory, of poor quality, and lethargic. Historically, teaching has been dominated by Brahman or other upper castes who discriminate against lower castes. Initially, these were the teachers recruited by the government and hence we find more caste discrimination in these schools. However, some private schools run by Parsis, Sindhis, and foreigners did not bother much about the purity taboo. Some Dalits are prepared to find the money to pay for private/English-medium schools that were not so dominated by Brahmans.

This was the experience of Nani, a first generation Mahar learner from Mumbai, who said:

I do not remember anything really significant when it comes to caste. My teacher was an Israeli. I was with her children and she treated me like her child. We were at her house the whole day. The other castes were also there, but there was nothing like caste discrimination. At that time Ambedkar's struggle was going on strong and everybody was aware of it. So may be they knew that it would be very harmful if they behaved in that manner.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Nani, 20 May 2000.



According to Nani, there was sufficient awareness in the society to prevent open discrimination. However, it was significant that her teacher was not from an upper caste.

### **Marathi or English Medium of instruction?**

In India, English education was promoted by the British from the 1830s onwards as a means to inculcate 'civilisation', which is what we nowadays describe as 'modernity'. English education and modernity are in practice interlinked in India. Now, it is the mark of the progressive, cosmopolitan Indian, and of course also a matter of prestige. Aparna Basu has underlined the way that Western and English education was an important determinant in the growth of a nationalist politics in Bombay and Bengal.<sup>465</sup> Right from Tilak, Chiplunkar, Agarkar to Phule and later Ambedkar, English education was a doorway to Western ideas, which sharpened their political insight. Tilak spent the first eleven years of his public life spreading English education, since he believed that 'the English language was the milk of the tigress,'<sup>466</sup> and that if the youth of the country were fed on this strong diet, India's liberation could not be delayed.<sup>467</sup>

English education was seen to foster in young men a 'haughty spirit [...] producing graduates who would not be "cringing, devoid of self-respect, ignorant of their cultural heritage and indifferent to the humiliating inferiority" which faces them on all sides.'<sup>468</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century Brahmans dominated such education disproportionately. For example, in 1921-22, there were in India about

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<sup>465</sup> Aparna Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920* (Delhi, 1974), pp. 191-192.

<sup>466</sup> Ambedkar believed that 'education itself was the milk of the tigress.'

<sup>467</sup> Basu, *The growth of education*, p. 213., and original in D.V. Tamhankar, 'Lokmanya Tilak (London, 1956), p.23.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214, and original in M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life, Volume I, 1873-1922* (Bombay, 1958), p. 22.

20,522 Brahmans and 29,008 Non-Brahmans in Secondary Schools and about 2,141 Brahmans and 1,558 Non-Brahmans in English Arts Colleges for boys.<sup>469</sup> The following table will further clarify the disparities in the matter of education among different communities.

**Table 3: Education in Bombay Presidency from 1882-1928**

Classes of population	Primary education, Students per 1,000 of the population of the class	Secondary education, Students per 100,000 of the population	College education, Students per 200,000 of the population
Advanced Hindus	119	3,000	1,000
Mahomedans	92	500	52
Intermediate Class	38	140	14
Backward Class	18	14	Nil (or nearly one if at all)

*Source: Ambedkar, 'Education of Depressed classes,' BAWS, Vol. 2, p. 421.*

The disparity in educational progress between the Brahmans and non-Brahmans – which was particularly pronounced in Maharashtra – was partly responsible for the rise of the anti-Brahman movement. By the 1920s many non-Brahmans were developing a taste for Western ideas, knowledge and language with its associated prestige and liberating potential.

Many of the English medium schools in India were patterned on the English public schools model, and this continues to be the case even today.<sup>470</sup> These schools are known for inculcating a high degree of sophistication. Zweig has commented on such education in the British context:

What was, in my view, important and interesting was to ascertain which of the students came from famous public schools [...] one could immediately notice the

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., p. 218., and original in Report of the D.P.I on the Progress of Education in Bombay, 1921-22, Vol. I, General Table 3 (a).

<sup>470</sup> Karuna Chanana, *Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded visions, expanding visions* (Jaipur, c2001), p. 269, and original in Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama* (1968), p. 1706.



polish of these boys, their greater self-confidence, their characteristic manner of speech and dress [...] and their wider interest in the arts and public affairs.<sup>471</sup>

This was very true of India also, where English education provided the passport to better colleges and universities, and later on better jobs as well. Most of these private schools charged high tuition fees, and attendance was restricted to families that could afford to send their children to them.<sup>472</sup> This in itself barred such esteemed and expensive institutions to the large majority of Dalits.

Despite this, many aspire to providing English education for their children. In an article in *The Times of India*, Gail Omvedt has reported on the increasing use of English language amongst Dalits, arguing that they prefer it because ‘the vernaculars have been *colonised* by Sanskrit for thousands of years.’<sup>473</sup> She notices how some Dalit activists and publicists are even starting to fetishise English. The Dalit writer Chandrabhan Prasad has thus started celebrating the birthdate of Thomas Macaulay on 25 October – Macaulay being the British colonial ruler who is more than anyone else associated with propagating English education in India. Condemned for this by mainstream nationalists, Macaulay has become an unlikely hero to the Dalits. Prasad stated during this celebration that all Dalit children should hear their ‘A-B-C-D’ right from birth and went on to claim that: ‘English *the Dalit goddess* is a world power today; it is about emancipation, it is a mass movement against the caste order [...]. It is a key to the world stock of knowledge and the wealth and success that depends on it.’<sup>474</sup>

Another reason for the preference for English-medium schools has been that

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid., p. 269., and original in F. Zweig, *Student in the Age of Anxiety* (Illinois, 1964), p. 10.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., p. 269., and original in Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama* (1968), p. 1707. Myrdal engages similar arguments about English public schools. However, I am using it merely to refer to highly prestigious private English schools.

<sup>473</sup> Gail Omvedt, ‘Why Dalits want English?’ *Times of India* (Mumbai, 9 November 2006). Emphasis is mine.

<sup>474</sup> Prasad, as in Omvedt, ‘Why Dalits want English?’ *Times of India* (Mumbai, 9 November 2006). Emphasis is mine.

Marathi-medium schools tend to be dominated by Maharashtrian Brahmans. Kamal, a first-generation learner who studied in a Marathi medium school said that she purposefully admitted her children in an English medium convent school of the highest quality. She stated the reason:

In Marathi medium schools, even the highly prestigious ones, caste discrimination is practised and I did not want my children to face *that* [caste discrimination, emphasis mine]. Hence, I put them in English-medium schools and moreover, convents where *this* [caste discrimination, emphasis mine] does not exist. We also want them to be prepared for a competitive future and English medium instruction is good for developing a well-rounded personality.<sup>475</sup>

Perhaps, Marathi medium in itself stigmatises pupils. Most of the respondents who attended only Marathi-medium schools felt that an English-medium school would have positively affected their life and careers. They would have been more confident, outgoing, bold and outspoken. They thought that English brought prestige and a sense of superiority, which they lacked. Malavika and Manini both complained of their mother's 'wrong' decision to admit them in a Marathi-medium school.<sup>476</sup> Kamal said that if she had gone to an English medium school, she could have attempted the national level U.P.S.C. exam.<sup>477</sup> She would not have limited herself to the state level M.P.S.C. exam. She felt that her lack of English education had made it impossible for her to have any chance to gain entry to the highest cadre of the administrative service – the IAS. It is noticeable that those educated in English medium (including myself) think highly of themselves. This is mainly observable in the second-and third-generation learners. They seem to be at an advantage compared to those who do not understand the language. Many children are no doubt able to rattle off some English poems or songs at the insistence of their parents, but without prolonged English

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<sup>475</sup> Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001.

<sup>476</sup> Mala and Manini Pawar, 5 and 6 September 2004.

<sup>477</sup> Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001.



education they lack that air of confidence that impresses everybody around. In this way, the English language has become an obsession for people of all classes in India, as well as transnationally.<sup>478</sup>

This hierarchy in the education system is an insidious one, stretching even to the reputation of different English-medium schools. Girls from certain 'better' convent schools are thus supposed to have higher standards. Most of the students studying in convent schools – the highest in the hierarchy – look down upon the rest of the students who attend a private/government school, any other school for that matter. Such educational hierarchies are found in many different countries of the world, and it invariably parallels the socio-economic hierarchy. Scholars like Geoff and Whitty, Padma Velaskar who I have discussed in Chapter 1 have studied such hierarchies in education.<sup>479</sup> In India, we find upper caste/class pupils in convents/public/private schools, and lower caste/class pupils in government-run municipal schools.

In some cases, fathers had put their sons in convents while their daughters were sent to Marathi-medium schools. I already dealt with Sandhya's experience of being sent to a Marathi convent school while her brothers were admitted to prestigious and expensive convents.<sup>480</sup> Jyotsna Rokade stated that: 'I was admitted in Netaji High School in Yerawada, whereas my brother attended St. Vincent's High School. My parents paid great attention to his schooling and his higher education.'<sup>481</sup> She went on to say that she always wanted to go on to Wadia College, which attracted

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<sup>478</sup> An article by Nazia Vasi 'How the Chinese learn English,' who teaches English to Chinese in Shanghai. Vasi highlighted English as the new opium of masses. See the My Times/Times Review, *Times of India* (Mumbai, 25 March 2007).

<sup>479</sup> Padma Velaskar, 'Ideology, Education and the Political struggle for Liberation: Change and Challenge among the Dalits of Maharashtra,' in Shukla and Kaul (eds), *Education, Development and Under-development* (New Delhi, 1998), pp. 210-240.

<sup>480</sup> Sandhya Meshram, 11 September 2004.

<sup>481</sup> Jyotsna Rokade, 15 August 2004. We should note that in Jyotsna's case, both her father and brother attended St. Vincent's High School, the most prestigious school in Pune.

a cosmopolitan crowd. But her mother put her into Garware College, a Marathi-medium institution, because her father was on official transfers most of the time. This may have been because her mother wanted her to be in the company of upper-castes from the 'polis,' in order to Brahmanise her. Jyotsna's mother—Sulochana Kadam – was silent when Jyotsna and I pointed out how she supported her son as opposed to her daughter.<sup>482</sup> Ignoring our comments, Mrs. Kadam very proudly continued talking about her son and his intelligence. There was none of this for Jyotsna. Jyotsna was very angry when I posed this question and looked at her mother with chagrin; she was almost on the verge of tears. She was questioning her mother's past behaviour, while her mother just ignored her and looked off into space. However, in a few moments Jyotsna realised that there was no use getting angry over the matter as it was all in the past. Her mother's actions could not be undone. Jyotsna told me that she herself had ensured that all her children were educated in good convents and all of them, including her daughter, got equal opportunities. Moreover, she is rearing her granddaughter as she would a male child.

This mother-son cord, a privilege of boys, which dissolves the mother-daughter tie, deserves special mention. A few mothers, did not pay enough attention to their daughters' education or development, as compared to their sons. They made avenues available to the sons, and the daughters were many times left behind.

Some Dalit girls from the second-generation who went to Marathi-medium schools were not content with those schools, wanting better-quality education.

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<sup>482</sup> Sulochana Kadam is Jyotsna Rokade's mother. She has a Bachelor in Science and was educated at Fergusson College, Pune, during the early 1940s. She narrated her experiences at the prestigious institute. I interviewed her on 15 August 2004. She has served in higher positions and was a state government employee. I visited the Kadams on all my trips to India (2004-2006). I had some engaging conversations with Mr. K.N. Kadam who has written on Ambedkar. I enjoyed the Kadam's generous hospitality and I hope to continue this friendship in the future. Sulochana Kadam also told me that Ambedkar's family approached her as a prospective bride for Ambedkar's son, Yashwant Ambedkar. However, she did not like him, and things did not work.



However, it was hard for a person coming from a vernacular medium and with a lower 'cultural capital' to succeed in such prestigious institutions. Some Dalit students felt diffident in such cosmopolitan colleges, which drew students from all sorts of backgrounds, from all classes. They often harboured an inbred inferiority complex of belonging to a lower caste. This hardship is made worse by the fact that they have been instructed in Marathi. Also their experiences in vernacular-medium schools sharpen their inferiority complex and make life difficult for them. The situation is immensely complicated by the crystallization of gender discrimination. Indeed, Dalit girls are rarely able to move successfully from a Marathi to English-medium educational institution.

While several informants vented their anguish about not being able to study in English, some others felt that even an English-medium school did not have much effect in the long term. They argued that Marathi schooling was as good as the English medium, and at times even better. Snehlata Kasbe said:

I do not think it would have made a big difference if I studied in a convent. I have always been confident. If I was there, I would have worn short clothes and spoken in 'fluent' English which is many times grammatically wrong.<sup>483</sup>

For Snehlata instruction in English brought merely a superficial veneer of Westernisation, with sometimes-farcical language skills. Such westernisation could always be achieved later in life. Girls like Sandhya and Snehlata agreed that whatever they had had was best.

For Dalits, there has been a percolation of Western ideas from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The Dalits have been exposed to this discourse of rational thinking and western ideas. Like Ambedkar and his followers, the Dalits believed that dressing in western clothing and the use of the English language mark a

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<sup>483</sup> Snehlatai Kasbe, 10 September 2003.

higher status and prestige. I wonder at the ease with which the men adopted and adapted westernisation, including western dress. For women it was more difficult. The parents desired their children to attend English medium schools and also nag their children to speak a few lines in English. It does not stop at that; the children were made to address their parents as 'Daddy' and 'Mummy' *only*. Some like Kumud Pawde, a first-generation scholar expressed their affection for English language.<sup>484</sup> The second-and-third generation women do not find the language difficult, as they are mostly educated in semi-English schools that have a good culture of English teaching. Only respondents studying in a school with Marathi instruction have special problems with English. English is important and remains a language of mobility. The second-and-third generation respondents think that can give the best English education to their children; however, they fail into consideration the other difficulties that Dalit children have to face.

### **Gender Discrimination**

In some cases girls were not considered worth educating properly. I have already discussed the experiences of Jyotsna and Sandhya who were admitted to ordinary Marathi schools unlike their brothers who could access prestigious convent schools. Girls often suffer as compared to boys, even in middle class Dalit families. Some of the educated parents thought that their daughters should attend school only up to a particular level, and after reaching a certain level she should seek a job. This job was not only for the economic independence of the daughter, but also to help the parents financially.

The idea that women are better suited to certain subjects has been commonly

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<sup>484</sup> Kumudtai Pawde, 16 October 2005.



held all over the world.<sup>485</sup> These subjects are implicitly considered to be ‘inferior’ and less important ones. The ‘natural order’ in most communities and classes is still widely assumed to be one in which men should supply leadership, provide protection and resources, exercise authority, and carry out all forms of socially important forms of work. The spectacle of women gaining independence through education and gaining independence from male control was seen to pose a threat to social order.<sup>486</sup> Colonial and post-colonial India was no exception to this transnational phenomenon. The nationalist agenda (as I have discussed earlier) wanted women to achieve a ‘cultural education.’ Girls were to learn ‘scientific cooking’ and ‘home accounting/budgeting,’ ‘managerial skills’ for the home and nothing beyond that.<sup>487</sup> Ambedkar and many parents reinforced this agenda. Some of these parents were convinced that girls had limited abilities and potential, and felt that it was not worth spending much on their education.

Poonam’s father was one such Dalit father.<sup>488</sup> Despite her brilliant performance in her studies, he held a very low opinion about her calibre and her aspirations. He did not want to spend money on giving her a science-based education and told her that she should take up Arts or Commerce, which would cost him less money. He also thought that the disciplines of science and engineering were for men, they that they were no good for girls. ‘What were girls going to do with all science

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<sup>485</sup> Even Bourdieu admits such feminization of secondary and higher education in France. See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London, 1977), pp. 77-80. For Bourdieu the traditional division of labour assigns to women familiarity with things of art and literature. See Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA., 1984), p. 57.

<sup>486</sup> I agree with Jane Thompson in *Women, Class and Education* (London, 2000), p.69, Bourdieu and other scholars make similar arguments.

<sup>487</sup> For detailed discussions see Partha, Chatterjee, ‘Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India,’ *American Ethnologist*, 16: 4 (November 1989), pp. 622-633. This paper has been published in many versions. Also see Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History* (New Delhi, 1998); Liddle and Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India* (New Delhi, 1986).

<sup>488</sup> Poonam Rokade, Buddhist, B.E., Engineer, Mundhwa-Pune, 15 August 2004.

and engineering?’ he asked. In this particular and exceptional case, Poonam’s mother supported her decision to take up the subject of her choice. Alaka’s father considered that arts, drawing, painting, and crafts were best suited for girls.<sup>489</sup> Teachers also often believed girls to be less capable than boys in subjects such as mathematics; consequently, they failed to use teaching techniques that might have improved the achievement of girls in that subject. Girls thus tend to be channelled into domestic science, handicrafts, and biology, while boys are directed towards chemistry, mathematics and vocational subjects.

In a few cases, women buttress these notions. Some mothers also considered certain subjects more suited for their daughters, and did not support their higher education. Their fears were however different to those of the fathers. They saw that many Dalit boys failed to achieve higher education, and felt that they would be unable to arrange the marriage of their daughters if they were better qualified than their potential husbands. They also saw the boys loitering around colleges, and feared for their daughter’s safety and reputation.

Some Dalit parents were imbued with some middle-class aspirations, and want their daughters to fit that model. It is intriguing to note that ‘middle-class’ patriarchy demands daughters to qualify as ‘*gruhinis*’ (lady-like) first. Some mothers therefore insisted that their daughters engage in housework—in cleaning utensils, washing clothes, rolling ‘round’ *chapattis*, decorating the home, and learning art and craft to please the husbands. Alaka laughed sarcastically when she remembered her mother’s training: ‘She asked us to do housework first and study later. We had to get up early mornings to study and do house work which was equally important. She wanted us to

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<sup>489</sup> Alaka Kale, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Karve road-Pune, 1 July 2002.



be equally capable on all fronts.’<sup>490</sup> Most of the times it was the mother who expected and made these girls serve the household.

Housework is a significant and integral to the female subject just as the kitchen is to the house. Despite the plans for higher education, employment, and perhaps in preparation for marriage, traditional norms of domesticity were important aspects for the newly emerging middle-class Dalit women. Also, strong patriarchal forces require daughters to be suited to nurture the future generation. The second-and-third generation respondents were entering the lower middle-class spaces and therefore they were called upon to be ‘feminine.’ Dalit women have always been working outside in the fields; the new phenomenon of middle-classness called for domesticating Dalit women. And in practice, only knowing how to perform mundane domestic tasks was not enough; these women had to learn to do them well. The parents’ emphasised achievement in both the public and private spheres and saw domesticity as a complement to success in the public domain. Furthermore, Dalit parents also believed and hoped that along with these behavioural conditions, formal education would help to place their daughters beyond some of society’s dangers. These parents like any other lower class/status parents did not want their daughters to end up in menial jobs. Further they wanted their daughters to lead comfortable lives.

Many times the fathers did not interfere in these ‘private’ affairs. Universally men have been in the public domain leaving the private to their women. However, a few fathers understood that housework interfered with their daughter’ studies, and insisted that they not be made to work at home. Kamal’s father always reminded his wife that Kamal had a lot to study, and that she should not ask Kamal to engage in

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<sup>490</sup> Alaka Kale, 1 July 2002.

domestic duties.<sup>491</sup> Kumud Pawde also smiled sarcastically when she reflected on how her mother instructed her to be a 'decent' woman, good at domestic work: 'she stood for independence of women, but running a household efficiently needed some good training.'<sup>492</sup> But, Kumud's father always fought with his wife arguing that Kumud could pick up these skills later in life, when she was at her in-laws. She needed to study during her school days he said. But Kumud's mother was scared about the 'failed' image Kumud would carry and so she made her work. Such housework was for girls alone. The fathers and brothers rarely helped with domestic tasks. How could one blame the mothers? The mothers were left alone with only the daughters to help them out. Because of this, most of the girls hardly got time to study as they were exhausted after school and the subsequent housework. In some cases, the girls could not complete their school homework due to such home duties. The, next day, they feared attending school due to their teachers' beatings for undone homework. In some cases, though, girls did not want to attend school and resorted to excuses like having to do housework.

### **Brahmanical Hegemony**

Sandhya's son, Chetan, who is studying genetics, stated empathetically: 'Things can be learnt only from the Brahmans. They tell you how to live, how to fight and progress in life. I would marry only a Brahman girl alone, even if I have to undergo a second marriage.'<sup>493</sup> I shall let this statement hang here, in order to develop further analyses.

An interesting process that I underlined in the lower middle class Dalits is the penetrating Brahmanical hegemony over the Dalit subject. School going girls

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<sup>491</sup> Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001.

<sup>492</sup> Kumud Pawde, 16 October 2005.

<sup>493</sup> Chetan Meshram, Buddhist, Second year-Bachelors in Genetics, Ramtekdi-Pune, 11 September 2004.



'mingled' with girls from other castes. They compared themselves with these communities. They tried to imitate the Brahmans who were and are at the helm of all social, cultural, and educational affairs. The Brahmanical hegemony dominates every miniscule aspect of their history, culture, language and education. The Brahman dress code, standards of hygiene (not to mention the stuffy and unclean Brahman households one comes across that reek of stale ghee), even the style of draping a sari is thought to be the best. Kamal said: 'We liked to dress up like them. *Ti brahmanan saarkhi sadi nesayachi* – we want to drape our saris like the Brahmans did.'<sup>494</sup> She did not question why this Brahman style of draping a sari was supposed to be the best. I agree with Ambedkar who forcefully noted, 'Brahmin enslaves the mind and Bania the body.'<sup>495</sup> I am concerned with this mental enslavement of the Dalits.

Some Dalits observed Brahmanical habits and characteristics and tried to emulate them in their own daily lives. They perceived the Brahman food habits – their vegetarianism (not to mention that historically the Brahmans were beef-eaters, as argued by Ambedkar),<sup>496</sup> consumption of ghee and culinary skills – to be matchless. Similarly, they tried to avoid jazzy colours and clothes. They imitated Brahman *shuddha marathi*, with the correct tone of speech. I noted during my interviews with Dalits that sometimes *shuddha* Brahmanical Marathi intruded into the Mahari voice and tone. I discerned this process in some of my respondents from all of the three generations. Bourdieu's analysis of how the dominant classes exercise this power in society through their language, dress, culture, tradition, food habits, and so on,

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<sup>494</sup> Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001.

<sup>495</sup> Ambedkar, 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables,' BAWS, Vol. 9, p. 217.

<sup>496</sup> Ambedkar has analysed, 'Did the Hindus never eat beef?' According to him, 'that the Hindus at one time did kill cows and did eat beef is proved abundantly by the description of the Yajnas [in the various Vedas, Brahmanas, Sutras, and so on]. The scale on which the slaughter of cows and animals took place was enormous.' See Ambedkar, BAWS, Vol. 7, Chapter XI, pp. 323-328. Also see Vol. 7, Chapter XIII on 'What made the Brahmins become vegetarians?' pp. 334-349.

resonates here.<sup>497</sup>

Upper caste hegemony is extended and their symbolic power is executed through 'Pedagogic Actions' that incorporate the education system, along with other systemic agencies.<sup>498</sup> Eventually, the prevailing common sense marginalizes, illegitimizes, suppresses, and annihilates the lower classes (the subalterns, Dalits). I stand by Bourdieu who argues:

The sanctions, material or symbolic, positive or negative, juridically guaranteed or not, through which Pedagogic Authority is expressed, strengthen and lastingly consecrate the effect of a Pedagogic Action. They are more likely to be recognized as legitimate, i.e. have greater symbolic force.<sup>499</sup>

Therefore the historical Brahman hegemony in social and cultural domains is reproduced in pedagogic practices. This domination brings about the subaltern's sense of cultural unworthiness and an extirpation of their acquirements, even if they themselves at times do not consider the dominant culture as the legitimate culture. This is reflected in the everyday lives of some Dalits; they tend to delegitimize their own culture. They disparage their own medicinal knowledge, art works, traditions and culture and crafts and they imitate the so-called 'purer' forms of language, dress, food, occupation, culture and pedagogy. Though such a Bourdieuan postulate denies agency to the subaltern, this tendency of annihilating the caste identity is nonetheless a reality in some Dalit lives. This is the psychological violence that undermines Dalit identity.

Middle class Dalits have a split consciousness in this respect. On the one hand they know that their Dalit identity has economic and political benefits. On the other

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<sup>497</sup> I would like to point out that I grew up observing these things. I read Bourdieu who has theorized this later in my academic journey.

<sup>498</sup> In what follows, I am deriving from Bourdieuan postulates in Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in education, society and culture* Translated from the French by Richard Nice (London and Beverly Hills, 1977).

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.



hand, they want to erase the cultural markers of such an identity. For example, some Dalits shed their last names, which signifies their Dalit origin, and take up the 'kar' suffix which is associated with the upper castes. An example is the family of Nagares. Some Nagares are Christian converts from Ahmednagar District (commonly known as 'Nagar' District) who have changed their last name to 'Nagarkar.' This is the way last names are generally constructed using place names. Some 'Kambles'<sup>500</sup> and 'Salves' changed to 'Punekar,' Sankpals changed to Ambavadekar.<sup>501</sup>

### Caste-discrimination

Some teachers made a point of identifying Dalits in front of their whole class. I myself experienced this form of routine humiliation. I studied from class three to ten in a small English-medium school in Pune where there was overt caste discrimination.<sup>502</sup> A clerk came twice a year into my class and commanded: 'Will the SCs stand up? I have to check the list.' The few SC students in the class stood up and the rest of the class looked at us. I felt like burying myself and vanishing away when I saw him approach the class. I simply half-stood with my head hung, pretending to work on something in my books. I felt insulted, but I could not voice it. Why could I not voice it? The system has down trodden me so much that I felt that this was just a minor incident. I had to be prepared for other similar, and perhaps worse experiences. I wondered to myself: 'Why does he have to come twice a year to do this marking? The official records has our names while we continue to study in the school, so why can they not they devise some discreet way to record our consessional status instead of making us stand up in the class for three whole minutes?' However, I remember

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<sup>500</sup> One 'typical' Dalit name is 'Kamble' and hence Dalits want to do away with it.

<sup>501</sup> This was the change made by Ambedkar's father.

<sup>502</sup> I studied in this school in Tadiwala Road, the railway quarters behind Pune railway station. Bama refers to a similar discrimination in schools in her autobiography *Karukku*. See Bama's *Karukku*, Translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom (New Delhi 2000), p. 15. Also read about Bama's other experiences of being identified and marked as a *paraya*, a S.C., at school, pp. 16-18.

that while I stood with my head hung, my fellow SC classmate stood straight with an emotionless face. He was not embarrassed about his background and appeared to be oblivious to the denigration involved. However, such Dalit youths are few and far between.

Hirabai Kuchekar referred to the common social stereotype of the lazy and dirty Dalit and said that she continued to suffer such slurs from her upper-caste friends.<sup>503</sup> Some respondents refused to discuss questions of caste or discrimination.<sup>504</sup> However, I reiterate the complexities of investigating the 'silences' around not only 'difficult' memories but the 'every day' living of Dalits. Most of the Dalit women agreed that they face verbal abuse. They did face casteism to some extent in their work places. However, they reported that the picture is grey rather than completely black.

Kumud Pawde narrated a school incident when her upper caste friend's mother advised her daughter not to play with Kumud or to touch her, because Kumud was a Mahar.<sup>505</sup> Another friend of Pawde introduced Pawde as a 'Kunbi'<sup>506</sup> to her grandmother who had rigorous rules of '*sovale*,' that is the taboo of purity and pollution. Pawde also writes about the immense hurdles she faced when she attempted to learn the Brahmanical 'divine' language of Sanskrit. However, undeterred Pawde got her Masters in the language and went on to become a Professor of Sanskrit.<sup>507</sup> A recent newspaper reported how some upper caste teacher purified the classroom precincts by sprinkling cow's urine.<sup>508</sup> Kumud Pawde similarly

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<sup>503</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

<sup>504</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 15 and Chapter 5, p. 20.

<sup>505</sup> Kumud, Pawde, *Antahsphot*, (Aurangabad,1995): 24

<sup>506</sup> Kunbi-Maratha are touchable upper castes.

<sup>507</sup> Pawde, 'Mazhya Saunskrutchi Katha' (the story of my Sanskrit), in her own, *Antahsphot*, pp. 21-31.

<sup>508</sup> Raksha Shetty, 'Dalits still easy prey in Maharashtra,' CNN-IBN (Mumbai, 30 April 2007).



remembered that Dalits were not allowed to touch the utensils to drink water at school:

We had to drink water at the corporation tap which was very far. Then I wondered as to why should I do it, and I started to rebel, but the maid there abused me badly and took me to the teacher. The teacher bai, beat me up with a *danda* [a stick].<sup>509</sup>

This experience of Kumud Pawde mirrored in Bombay. In 1927, in the municipal schools of Bombay city, Dalit children were given separate '*lotas*' (pots) for drinking water.<sup>510</sup> Such teachers/citizens did not care what consequences their behaviour may have on the minds of Dalit children.

Janhavi Chavan said that her friends who belonged to 'other' castes expressed negative opinions about SCs and about affirmative action.<sup>511</sup> Almost all respondents agree, and my experience illustrates that even if we have friends from a mixed-caste background there is an imminent tension when discussions touch issues of caste or positive discrimination. Janhavi went on to say, however, that caste was never much of an issue in friendship and that most of her friends were 'good' to her. Meenakshi Jogdand reported:

I was always surrounded by Marwaris, Brahmans, and Marathas [upper castes]. I felt shy to disclose my caste. I had an inferiority complex about it and wanted to hide it. *Chehera padato tyancha* [they frown, lose interest] when I mention my caste. My being fair, they did/do not expect that I would be a Matang. When the ladies in the train asked me my caste, I told them that I was a Maratha [upper caste]. However, I have started revealing my background. I am happy to work in this bank of SCs. The

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<sup>509</sup> Kumudtai Pawde, 16 October 2005.

<sup>510</sup> *Bombay Chronicle*, 20 October 1927. Despite the School committee resolution for the municipal schools in the city of Bombay that there should be no caste discrimination in the municipal schools, Dalits were given separate pots. They feared that the change would be resented by caste Hindus, evidently the resentment of the 'low' caste Hindus did not count much. See BAWS, Vol. 2, p. 457.

<sup>511</sup> Janhavi Chavan, Buddhist, Bachelor in Computer Science, Works with a firm, Yerawada-Pune, 21 May 2001.

atmosphere is different. Some times, I am happy that I belong to this caste as I get concessions despite scoring low grades.<sup>512</sup>

Meenakshi was not the only one to hide her caste. Furthermore, Meenakshi remarked about her 'passing' as a Maratha and her split consciousness as a Dalit.

I would like to underline here the Indian mental habit of digging into the genealogy of an individual especially if one is from a lower caste, in order to identify a person's caste status. One is asked village name, last name, part of the region one belongs to, and so on in order to understand that a Bhalerao residing in Pune is not a Brahman because s/he comes from Ahmednagar which has no Brahman-Bhaleraos; therefore one is Puneri (coming from Brahmani/Brahmanical Pune), but not quite.<sup>513</sup>

In my own case, throughout my time at college I made immense efforts to hide my caste. Brahman friends surrounded me. When they expressed their disgust at affirmative action measures and I kept my mouth shut. I discreetly found means to fill up the fee concession forms that were required for SCs. I also hid behind the garb of my last name. My maiden name is Paik, so at times (other) people just heard the 'Pai', which is a Konkanasth Brahman surname. I felt that it was a victory for having 'passed.' Again, with my married name, 'Bhalerao' there was no problem of being identified as a Dalit, as the name is shared by Brahmans, Marathas and somebody told me that there are some Muslim 'Bhalerao.' When I interacted with Brahmans, many a times they thought that I was from an upper caste, to some extent because of my deceptive colour and due the sanitized, Brahmanised *Puneri* Marathi language that I spoke. Only in recent years have I developed the self-confidence to proclaim my Dalit identity with pride.

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<sup>512</sup> Meenakshi Jogdand, Matang, Bachelor in Commerce, works as a cashier in a bank, Bhavani Peth-Pune, 13 March 2002.

<sup>513</sup> This can be paralleled to the African-American case, 'one can be white in dress, language, and residence; but not quite.'



## The Stigma of Reservation

The term, 'scholarships' in the Dalit context often arouses mixed feelings among Dalits and non-Dalits. There is again a vast amount of literature on and around affirmative action for Dalits;<sup>514</sup> however, I am concerned with the mental violence/abrasion caused by such policies. For many Dalit girls 'reservations' meant the concessions that they had secured as their right. However, they were also troubled by the negative connotations associated with the 'concessions' or 'affirmative action,' or 'compensatory discrimination.' I already discussed in Chapter 1 that Dalits are/can be *marked* by certain indices, and reservations or positive discrimination is one of them.<sup>515</sup> Some Dalits affirm that such concessions 'stigmatise' them, hence Dalits are caught in a bind of seeking and not seeking reservations.

Positive discrimination definitely helps Dalits' material advancement; however, it mars them psychologically and spiritually like other denigrating practices. Most of the women I interviewed wanted reservations as they feel that the community is like a lame horse just trying to gain strength to walk; nonetheless some middle class Dalit women underscored that reservations are a Dalit signifier, and that to some extent they make Dalits lazy. The irony of the situation is that even when the Dalits attempt to do away with these, the 'others' do not allow them to do so. A Dalit friend appearing for a national exam did not want to avail of the lower fees for the purpose of writing the exam. Maintaining his identity, he paid the full sum. A few days later,

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<sup>514</sup> Lelah Dushkin, 'Backward Class benefits and Social class in India,' pp. 661-7; Dushkin, 'Scheduled Caste Politics,' in Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India* (Arizona, 1972), pp. 165-226; Sureshchandra Shukla and Rekha Kaul, *Education Development and Under-development* (New Delhi, 1998); Anjali Kurane, *Ethnic identity and social mobility* (Jaipur, 1999), Suma Chitnis, *A Long Way to Go....: Report on a Survey of Scheduled Caste High School and College Students in Fifteen States of India*, A Project Sponsored by ICSSR (New Delhi, 1981); Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward classes in India*, (Berkeley, c1984); Andre Beteille, *The Backward classes in contemporary India* (Delhi, 1992); Alistair MacMillan, *Standing at the Margins: representation and electoral reservation in India* (New Delhi, 2005), and so on.

<sup>515</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 9.

he received a letter from the board instructing him to pay the lower fees meant for the SCs. He was compelled to maintain his Dalit status even when he wanted to do away with the economic benefits. The disciplinary and systemic state does not allow the Dalits to entertain any fantasies that they are 'normal' citizens – they are held to their Dalit status whether they like it or not.

Some Dalit women adopted an aggressive attitude towards this issue. Sudha Bhalerao thus asserted that she had never tried to hide her caste, and went on to say:

I have given many facilities to our caste people. I have helped Dalit seek jobs; I have given concessions in case they are late to office. I agree that I am biased towards them. I am just protecting them the way Brahmans do their kin, so what is wrong with it?<sup>516</sup>

I had no answer to her question. Competition, influence, and favouritism is rampant, nobody is free from it.

Normally, however, the power lies with the high castes. This is the case generally with reserved posts. By law, colleges and other government institutions are required to appoint a number of staff from the reserved quota. This leads to much controversy, as the upper castes claim that standards are being compromised for the sake of political correctness. Often, such bodies, which are dominated by the upper castes, devise a range of ways to avoid having to make such appointments, so that the reserved places remain unfilled. This can lead to some tortuous internal politics. Meena Ranpise was thus suspended for a while when she was serving as a Lecturer on a part-time basis. She reported:

They wanted a person from the open category. However, I fought back. Things are fine now. My colleagues speak against affirmative action and also mark that all SCs are unworthy of the jobs they get. The upper castes are good at *kava karne god bolun tey kaam karoon ghetaat* [cunning, they get things done with their sweet talks]. I lack

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<sup>516</sup> Sudha Bhalerao, Bachelor in Commerce, Bank officer, Ramtekdi-Pune, 1 Octo 2004.



these qualities and I should pick them up for success ahead. I do face verbal abuse, but that is for all, not for me specifically.<sup>517</sup>

Thus Meena remarked that most of places reserved for the Backward Classes remain unfulfilled due to malpractices, most importantly Dalits are blamed for failing to 'make it.'

Some Dalit girls are never given encouragement for all the efforts they are making.<sup>518</sup> Very few felt strong enough to fight for such recognition in class. Kumud Pawde was however fortunate in this respect. She stated: 'A sir, Gadgil, in the 5<sup>th</sup> class, knew I was good at English. He always said that "a Mahar girl was going ahead and [pointing to upper caste students] you are the stones of Narmada [river]." I gradually progressed to Class 8.'<sup>519</sup> In this instance the teacher underlined the progressive reputation of the Mahars and asked the 'others' to overtake this Mahar girl.

The peer group is an important motivation in a student's academic life. Amita told how she and her friends studied together.<sup>520</sup> Sometimes they all gathered at her place to study. She noted that they were all Dalits. Did these girls make any friends from the other castes? The schools catered to other classes and castes, but did the children mingle? I observed that especially in the Marathi-medium schools and in the municipal schools castes communities tended to bond together. Dalits felt most comfortable with other Dalits as they lacked the confidence and courage to face the upper castes. Some of them selected streams and subjects on the basis of what their friends had chosen. They refused to change their institutions due to this reason. The upper caste pupils excluded the Dalits for different reasons. Thus, most of the times,

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<sup>517</sup> Meena Ranpise, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Sinhagad Road-Pune, 12 May 2001.

<sup>518</sup> See discussion in Chapter 5, p. 20.

<sup>519</sup> Kumud Pawde, 16 October 2005.

<sup>520</sup> Amita Pillewar, 30 July 2005.

schools did not function as ‘melting-pots’ as many scholars would like to argue.<sup>521</sup>

These divisions were not rigid, but there was a tendency towards the development of caste-specific peer groups. Thus once again, I highlight the reproduction of the ‘organic caste system’ in the education system. This was compounded by the fact that most first-generation parents did not allow daughters to stay outside with friends or visit them; however, this began to change for the second-and-third generation informants. These girls said that they had friends from other communities, particularly during their college days. A few of them were fortunate enough to be included in the peer groups of knowledgeable and influential people.

Some girls attempted to distance themselves from their caste, through shame.

Lalita Randhir said:

I have always preferred Brahman friends. My brother always had Brahman friends. They came home but my brother never went to their place. He picked up a lot from them. I also liked Brahman friends, because my mentality and the mentality of the other Backward Caste students did not match, I did not like their thinking, behaviour I looked down upon them. In my school and college I had some ‘other’ friends who liked me as I was clean.<sup>522</sup>

Lalita is just one example of such Dalits. Some Dalits (including me at one time) think that some Dalits and Dalit girls are ‘backward’ and not an encouraging company. Some Dalits from lower and middle-classes entertain this ‘blaming the victim’ attitude and make attempts to drift away from the community.<sup>523</sup> Instead of blaming them, we need to uncover the hidden processes that entrap them in such quagmires. What happens to the subaltern who is not only caught in the trap; but is

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<sup>521</sup> Muralidharan’s study underlines my findings. See V. Muralidharan, *Education Priorities and Dalit Society* (New Delhi, 1997).

<sup>522</sup> Lalita Randhir, 22 May 2001.

<sup>523</sup> I am drawing upon William Ryan’s *Blaming the Victim* (New York, 1976).



also 'torn' because of the callisthenics of 'identity?' I once again underscore the 'mental,' 'psychological' trauma, the 'double-consciousness'<sup>524</sup> of this Dalit subaltern (woman) who is trying to escape the upper caste constellation of humiliation and hurt by befriending them.

### Poor Teaching

Some Dalit girls complained that they were taught poorly. Others said that their school was boring and they preferred to play at home. Some second-and-third-generation informants disliked traditional teaching, and wanted more interaction with their teachers. The teachers did everything possible to maintain their position on the pedestal. Perhaps misguided, they refused to befriend the students and take efforts to portray a strict disciplinarian image in order to command respect. The teachers like elders in the family employed this strictness and aloofness from students.

Some girls mentioned that they were bored with the routine school life. They disliked it as it became a routine. Kamal said: 'I did not find any subject utterly boring or interesting. I just knew that there was no way out.'<sup>525</sup> Sometimes even the very sincere and studious students got bored of studying and did not do well in higher classes. They just wanted to scrape through their education. This spoke immensely about the education system that broke the backs of students. They were over-burdened and hated the sight of books.

Furthermore, due to poor teaching students developed dislike for a particular subject, a certain teacher and then the school/college. They carried this dislike for their entire life. Jyotsna says, 'some students developed a dislike towards certain difficult subjects like mathematics. But it became a *herd mentality* [emphasis mine]

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<sup>524</sup> I am borrowing this 'double-bind' from Du Bois. I have already dealt with Du Bois's explication of 'double consciousness,' in Chapter 1. Also see W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1994), pp. 2-4.

<sup>525</sup> Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001.

that a certain problem was very difficult.’<sup>526</sup> However, there were exceptions and some girls like school. A few girls from the second-and-third generation particularly wanted to attend school or interact with the teachers. Furthermore, a second-generation post-graduate, Amita liked school: ‘I liked the vibrant atmosphere with friends and teachers. It was in this environment where I could learn so much rather than staying at home. I participated in plays and entered all competitions.’<sup>527</sup> The question is how far is this environment available to Dalits and Dalit girls? This was a rare case.

A few students from the second and third generation found the schools to be a fertile ground to nurture their talents. Some girls were fortunate to get better school environments. They enjoyed the attention they got at the school. This encouragement from the school is very essential for a student to advance. Some girls were good at studies and sought the attention of the teachers, and liked school. Amita continued:

My performance was good and my teachers were good. I did well in exams and my teachers *kautuk karaichya* [praised me]. I liked it. There was not much thinking as to why. Only that it was ‘good’ [emphasis mine]. So many things happened there, teachers were good, we engaged in sports and other activities and so I liked it. I was treated well; I wanted more of it. That was another motivation. I was good at studies and other activities and so they liked me. They also encouraged me. They gave me the opportunity to perform at cultural events. My teachers nurtured my talents.<sup>528</sup>

Such encouragement by teachers for Dalit students was however rare. If the teacher was unable to provide such invigorating environment, some students become disinterested in the class. They expect the teachers to solve their difficulties and make teaching more than mere textuality. Amita thought that at times the students felt that

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<sup>526</sup> Jyotsna Rokade, 8 August 2004.

<sup>527</sup> Amita Pillewar, 30 July 2005.

<sup>528</sup> Amita Pillewar, Buddhist, Masters in Social Work, works as a researcher with the National Institute for AIDS Research, Karve nagar-Pune, 30 July 2005. Amita has become a good friend over the years. We are also discussing some future projects and she helped me with two interviews in Pune.



they were smarter than the teachers, and so did not like the classes. They wanted the teacher to suit their requirements, and if she did not she was not good.

### **The Fruits of Education**

Many middle class girls were married off early and thus had no careers. Most of the informants were made to leave school as some 'good' marriage proposals had come their way. The parents did not want to give those up. Deepa Mohite said:

My parents got this boy when I was in class 9 and got me married before the exams. They are responsible for my state. I am a widow; I lost the husband after two years of marriage and have a daughter to support.<sup>529</sup>

Such women had had to look for employment in order to raise their children. Many parents had no high aspirations for their daughters and merely wanted them to study up to basic S.S.C. (Class 10), enrol in a professional course and start earning. They were either pressed financially or did not want to shoulder the burden of their daughter's education anymore. Rather, their earnings were to contribute to the family income. Occasionally, students found completing their education very exhausting and burdensome. They were disgusted at the sight of books, tired of studying, and thought that they had already achieved lot.

There were however a significant number of Dalit women of the second and third generations who had made good use of their education. In some cases this was because their fathers had encouraged them to succeed. Meena Ranpise stated: 'My father wanted me to join the defence forces or to go for U.P.S.C./M.P.S.C. He gave me money to buy books and whatever I required.'<sup>530</sup> Some mothers, like that of

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<sup>529</sup> Deepa Chavan, Matang, Class 9 failed, works as a maid, Ramtekdi-Pune, 22 May 2001.

<sup>530</sup> Meena Ranpise, 12 May 2001. Meena's father worked with the Air Force, Lohegaon-Pune and was very influence by the environment there. He wanted Meena to go for the Union Public Service Commission and the Maharashtra State Public Commission examinations and aspire for higher services. Meena was the only one who was highly educated in the family of three sisters. Her sisters dropped out on the way due to 'lack of interest in education,' as they said it.

Poonam Rokade's, also guided their daughters' careers.<sup>531</sup>

A few girls studied independently and never relied on anybody. They devised strategies for themselves. Dr Swati said, 'I preferred to do it all on my own. I did not like to learn things by heart. I preferred to start from scratch and that is the way I understood it well.'<sup>532</sup> Some took up professional courses right from high school and practise them. Sandhya *akka*, a social worker replied:

During my school days I came across the BC parents dragging their dirty children to school. I made a wry face at the sight. I realised that these children were mistreated due to this. I wanted to know more about the status of my community and understand the social milieu and hence I took up social welfare. I wanted to work for these distressed.<sup>533</sup>

A few like Sandhya were influenced by their circumstances and situations to think about their careers.

Chhaya Bahule, at the Mental Hospital in Pune reflected: 'as a child I watched my mother and aunt who were nurses. I liked their white uniforms, and also liked to serve. Later I expressed my desire to my mother that I wanted to be a nurse. However, she disliked it and hence I entered accounting. And here I am.'<sup>534</sup> A few respondents who were tired of studying voiced their concern for earning money. Prakshoti Pawar was one such case. She said, 'I wanted some short course which would also give me an opportunity to earn a handsome salary in less time. I thought a MBBS degree was time consuming and hence I took up engineering. I had no internship. I was tired of studying.'<sup>535</sup> Prakshoti was a rare girl, in that she was the only Dalit respondent to have her Masters in Business Administration; she was working with the reputable

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<sup>531</sup> Poonam Rokade, 15 August 2004.

<sup>532</sup> Dr. Swati Waghmare, 12 November 2004.

<sup>533</sup> Sandhya Meshram, 11 September 2004.

<sup>534</sup> Chhaya Bahule, Buddhist, Class 12, Clerk, Mental Hospital-Pune, 1 June 2001.

<sup>535</sup> Prakshoti Pawar, Buddhist, Bachelor in Engineering and Masters in Business Administration, Executive with the prestigious Mahindra and Mahindra group of companies, Maharashtra state housing board society, Nagpur Chawl-Pune, 10 April 2002.



Mahindra and Mahindra group.

It was mostly during the college level that these informants developed their aspirations. It was at this later stage of their education that these girls started reading newspapers and magazines, interacting with the public and became inspired to work in a particular field. Some of them were fortunate enough to be surrounded by influential and knowledgeable people who could guide them accordingly. However, while some respondents could advance towards their dreams there were many others who could not do so. Shilpa Pagare stated:

I wanted to teach and become a teacher but there was no one to tell me about it. I had an elder brother but I could never talk freely with him. He was very strict. We all held him in awe. He thought that I should be a graduate and then hunt for a job. May be he did not like teaching. My Brahman friend immediately did her D. Ed and is a headmistress now. I later got married, then children [...], and I am at home.<sup>536</sup>

Others could not pursue their dreams as they would have had to travel far or reside in places away from their homes. The parents did not allow this. A few girls choose courses along with their friends. However, later they found it difficult to complete the course, and they failed.

Once married, it was hard to pursue a demanding career. Nonetheless, in a few rare cases husbands supported the further growth of their partners. In one interesting case the mother-in-law provided the support and encouragement. Sadhana Kharat said: 'I am still studying. My mother in law told me to clear my S.S.C. [Class 10] and also advised me to study further. She shares the housework with me. So I am in my third year of college because of her.'<sup>537</sup> In some cases educated husbands took initiatives and compelled their wives to study. Jyoti Lanjewar a Professor of Marathi remembered that her husband did not allow her to sleep if she had not completed her

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<sup>536</sup> Shilpa Pagare, Lalita Randhir's elder sister, Buddhist, Class 10, Yerawada-Pune, 20 May 2001.

<sup>537</sup> Sadhana Kharat, Buddhist, Third year, B.A., studying, housewife, Bibwewadi-Pune, 10 April 2002.

lessons.<sup>538</sup> Some times these women along with the educated partners have felt the need to improve their educational qualifications, and have progressed ahead.

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<sup>538</sup> Jyotitai Lanjewar, 10 October 2005.



## Chapter 7: Mahar and Matang Differences

Dalits are not a homogeneous group, being fractured into separate endogamous communities each with its own tradition and culture. The two predominant ones in Maharashtra, and Pune, are the Mahars and Matangs. Out of the total population of the city of Pune of approximately 4 million in 1991, SCs constituted 6,31,063 (15.78%); out of which 2,87,795 (7.19%) were Mahars, and 1,93,629 (4.84%) were Matangs.<sup>539</sup> To this day, the different Dalit communities largely resist any intermarriage. The Mahars look down on the Matangs and Chambhars, who in turn consider the Mahars to be 'polluted.' Some Dalits consider that the Mahars are the 'Brahmans' of the Dalits, since they are more progressive, better educated and earning more.<sup>540</sup> However, I also noted that some people of these other Dalit communities referred scathingly to the Mahars as 'Mhardya' or 'Mhardey,' which are derogatory terms.<sup>541</sup> This chapter examines the frequent antagonism that exists between these two communities, and the different fortunes of Mahar and Matang women.

### Mahar-Matang Struggle

Muktabai Salve, a Mang (Matang) student of Phule, wrote in 1855 that the Mahars had internalised Brahmanical values and saw themselves as superior to Mangs. She vehemently attacked them for this. For example, they did not allow the shadow of a Mang to fall on them, an act that mirrored that of the upper castes who

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<sup>539</sup> *Census of India*, 1991, Series 14, Maharashtra, Part VIII (1): SC-1: Distribution of SC population by sex for each caste, pp 66-67. The 1991 census is the latest one based on caste identity.

<sup>540</sup> These are some voices from my fieldwork.

<sup>541</sup> Some of my anonymous informants, obviously non-Mahars, opined this.

did not allow the Mahari shadow to fall on them. Muktabai wrote especially about women who suffered at the hands of such men.<sup>542</sup>

According to the Satara Gazetteer of 1885; 'The Mhars [Mahars] and Mangs are hereditary rivals each longing for the chance of ruining the other.'<sup>543</sup> Many other authorities mention this rivalry in not only Maharashtra, but also in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, without delving into the reasons for it.<sup>544</sup> It is common knowledge between the two castes and this rivalry is prevalent even today. The intention of this chapter is not to sharpen this existing gulf, but to establish a critique and draw upon some common platform for the two communities. Perhaps B.C. Somavanshi is the only scholar who has attempted to understand the causes for this rivalry and struggle between the two castes and to critique it.<sup>545</sup> Here, I shall start by examining the history of this rivalry, and then go on to discuss its effects in more recent times.

One of the reasons why the Mahars considered themselves superior to Mangs during the colonial era was that the latter were characterised by the British police as a 'criminal tribe.'<sup>546</sup> Shankarrao Kharat, in his *Bara Balutedars*, delineates the picture of Banda Matang, who thought he could not earn much from rope making and

<sup>542</sup> Muktabai used the word 'Mang,' hence I have retained that usage. Muktabai, Salve, 'Manga Maharanchya dukkhavishayi,' in Tharu and Lalita (eds), *Women's writing in India from 600 B.C. Vol. I.* (New York, 1991), p. 216.

<sup>543</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol. XIX, *Satara* (Bombay, 1885), p. 112. The Mahar-Mang enmity seems to have been based at least particularly on differing attitudes toward the pig, an animal revered by the Mangs and scorned by the Mahars. Some Gazetteers specify that the Mahar duty did not include the removal of pig carcasses from the village.

<sup>544</sup> D.G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India* (Berkeley, 1970); M.N. Srinivas (ed.), *India's villages* (2nd rev. ed., London, 1960), p. 31; V.R. Shinde, *Bhartiya Ashprushyancha Prashna* (Nagpur, 1976), p. 136; S. Patwardhan, *Change Among India's Harijans* (Delhi, 1973), p. 30; D.D. Kachole, *Matang Community in Transition* (Aurangabad, 1979), p. 308; P.N. Gavali, *Peshwe Kalin Gulamgiri Va Ashprushyata* (Pune, 1981), pp. 49-59.

<sup>545</sup> B.C. Somavanshi, *Bhartiya Jati Sansthet Matangache Sthan ani Mahar-Matang Sambandh* (Aurangabad, 1989). I have translated this and other works from Marathi. I am responsible for all errors and accuracies.

<sup>546</sup> Michael Kennedy notes that Matangs were local criminals, pure and simple. Kennedy has given detailed description of the acts of robberies conducted, planning, execution and distribution of the loot, and this means that he collected information about the Matangs as criminals. Michael Kennedy, *Notes on the Criminal Classes in Bombay Presidency* (Bombay, 1908), pp. 108, 113-118.



therefore took to small robberies that escalated in time into larger acts of dacoity.<sup>547</sup>

Kharat also wrote about the Mang's envy of the Mahars because of their better situation in village life. In contrast to this marginalisation of the Matangs under colonial rule, the Mahars gained a reputation during the late nineteenth century for their loyalty to the British, as soldiers in the Indian Army and as personal servants to British officials. This provided a first step towards their increasing education and furthermore, the learning of English and adoption of a different standard of life. When the British started compulsory education in the military cantonments, Mahars were the first Dalits to benefit. Similarly, the Mahar 'butler's sons' considered themselves superior to other lads.<sup>548</sup> I note here that once again the default subject is male, as in 'sons' or 'lads' – whatever happened to the Dalit girls?

The first major historical reason for the rivalry was the *watandari* system, in which *balutedari* work was allotted to different communities. We have already examined the duties that were assigned to the Mahars in Chapter 2. The Matangs were village musicians and craftsmen who made baskets, ropes, brooms, bangles and so on. In contrast to the Mangs, they had fewer income-gaining occupations of this sort, and indeed during the colonial era many had become landless labourers. It was easier for them to leave their villages and migrate to the 'caste-diluted' urban areas such as Nagpur and Bombay. They got recruited into the cotton mills, as sanitation worker, as dock labourers, and into the army.<sup>549</sup> The Mangs took up the duties that

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<sup>547</sup> Shankarrao Kharat, *Bara Balutedar* (Pune, 1959), pp. 16-18.

<sup>548</sup> My talks with the deceased K.N. Kadam who resided in Pune revealed his life in the Pune Camp area. He was a Mahar butler's son, who attended the St. Vincent's High School (Pune Camp) in the 1920s. St. Vincent's is the most prestigious convent in Pune. 5 April 1999.

<sup>549</sup> Eleanor Zelliott, 'Learning the use of Political Means: Mahars of Maharashtra' in Rajni Kothari, *Caste in Indian politics* (New Delhi, 1970), p. 30. In 1981, one tenths of Bombay's textiles workers were Mahars. See Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in colonial India* (New Delhi, 1994), p. 141; also see Morris David Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: A study of Bombay Cotton Mills 1854-1947* (Berkeley, 1965), p. 74.

were abandoned by the Mahars when they left the villages, and in this way they remained bound to the villages for the time being.<sup>550</sup> These developments were brought out in the 1921 census figures for Bombay Presidency.

**Table 4: Caste-wise working force, Bombay Presidency, 1921**

Caste	Working force	Numbers in traditional occupations	Percentage in traditional occupation
Mahar	290,871	37,948	13.05
Mang	65,284	21,678	33.25
Chambhar	64,099	35,226	54.95

*Source: Census of India, 1921, Vol. VIII, Bombay Presidency, Part II, Tables, (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1922), p. 363. As quoted in Zelliott, Untouchable movement, 2004, p. 29.*

In subsequent years, Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders gave a clarion call for the abolition of *balutedari* work because it stigmatised the *Sudras*.<sup>551</sup> This reinforced the Mahar abandonment of such work.

The rivalry came into the open during the course of Ambedkar's struggle during the 1920s for Dalit access to public spaces, such as sources of water and temples. The Mangs did not participate in the Mahad *satyagraha* of 1927 that was launched by Ambedkar to gain access to public drinking water. This was a key and formative struggle for the Dalits, one that Ambedkar himself described as a social revolution. The leader of the Mangs, Sakat, went so far as to oppose the *satyagraha*.<sup>552</sup> The Mahars resent the Mang's non-participation in this difficult and prolonged struggle. During the Parvati temple entry struggle in Pune, Mangs such as Vayadande and Sakat joined the Brahmans against the Mahars. Ambedkar once said that 'the thoughts of Sakat are coloured by [Brahman] Mate master.'<sup>553</sup> Similarly,

<sup>550</sup> M.G. Kulkarni, 'Report of the serve to assess the program for removal of untouchability in Maharashtra state' submitted to Gokhale Institute of Political Science and Economics (Pune, 1962), as quoted in Somavanshi, *Mahar-Mang Sambandh*, p. 32.

<sup>551</sup> The *watan* was a piece of land held hereditarily by certain families, and *baluta* means the customary rights of a particular community. There is a controversy about whether Mahars could be included as one of the *balutedars*.

<sup>552</sup> Somavanshi, *Mahar-Mang Sambandh*, p. 84.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.



during the controversy over the Temple Entry Bill of 1933,<sup>554</sup> when Mahars wanted to enter the temple at Amravati, Mangs opposed this move. One of the Mang pamphlets said, 'according to the *sanatan dharma* [Hinduism] we are not to enter the temple as it would endanger the religion. We therefore follow the instructions of our ancestors and our ancient religion.'<sup>555</sup> Thus Mangs reinforced their their belief in Hinduism. Further, unlike Mahars, Mangs never accepted Ambedkar as their leader, primarily because he came from the rival Mahar community. Such notions were reinforced when some leaders, like Sakat, wrote in a daily that 'the leader of Mangs is yet to be born.'<sup>556</sup> In a similar vein, D.N. Kamble of Marathawada, Parbhani, said to Ambedkar that 'he was a leader only of Mahars.'<sup>557</sup> Thus Ambedkar remains confined to Mahars, even in contemporary times as some of my respondents suggested. Ambedkar thus failed to integrate the two communities within a common agenda.

The rivalry was compounded by the conversion of Mahars to Buddhism. Ambedkar rebelled against Hinduism, which he saw as enslaving the Dalits and raised his voice for equality. However, the Mahars and not other castes backed him in this; the Matangs resisted the call. Most of the Matangs and Chambhars remained staunch Hindus, preferring Hinduised/Sanskritised labels for their communities, such as 'Matang' or 'Charmakar.'<sup>558</sup> Chambhars and Matangs are against Mahars because *only* Mahars abandoned Hinduism; thus *only* 'Mahars are polluted beef-eaters according to Hinduism.'<sup>559</sup> Some Matangs who converted to Buddhism along with Ambedkar were outcast by Matangs and also by Mahars, as my fieldwork suggested.

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<sup>554</sup> Though initially Ambedkar supported temple entry, later on he declined support to this symbolic Gandhian move. He also issued a statement on this subject to the press. For details see Ambedkar, 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables,' in BAWS, Vol. 9, pp. 108-125.

<sup>555</sup> Somavanshi, *Mahar-Mang Sambandh*, p. 85.

<sup>556</sup> Sakat, as in Somavanshi, p. 85.

<sup>557</sup> Dainik Marathwada, 6-12-83, as in Somavanshi, p. 85.

<sup>558</sup> Also see Chapter 2, p. 49.

<sup>559</sup> I noted this tension during my fieldwork in Pune.

They also faced a lot of difficulties when they had to marry off their children, due to the strict prevalence of endogamous marriages. In this way, even Buddhist Mahars retained their caste prejudices. It is likely that some Matang Buddhists who tired of this oppression returned to Hinduism. The 'protection' 'cultural Hinduism' offers also brings Matangs and Chambhars closer to caste Hindus and they both in turn despise the rebel Mahars.

Due to the development of factory-based mass manufacture, the Matangs could no longer depend on their traditional crafts for a living. This led to their increasing migration to the cities, where their population rose considerably during the second half of the twentieth century. In 1961 there were 11,703 Mahars as compared to 26,479 Matangs in the rural areas of Pune District.<sup>560</sup> In the same year, the population of Matangs in the Pune Municipal area was 17,879, as opposed to 25,000 Buddhists (who were almost certainly Mahars), 6,899 non-Buddhist Mahars, and 7,440 Chambhars.<sup>561</sup> By 1971, the number of Matangs within the Pune Municipality had increased to 28,310.<sup>562</sup> In 1991, as we have seen above, it was 1,93,629.

With the growing concentration in the cities, the scramble for compensatory discrimination became a fresh bone of contention. Matangs and other Dalit communities, especially the Chambhars, argued that Mahars were the main beneficiaries of the reservation policies of the government and were forging ahead of all the other Dalit communities as a result. Some Matangs (which included my Matang respondents) suggested that the government should give reservations

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<sup>560</sup> *Census of India*, 1961, Maharashtra Vol X. Part V-A, Tables for SC-ST in Maharashtra

<sup>561</sup> Sunanda Patwardhan, *Change among India's Harijans*, p. 11.

<sup>562</sup> *Census of India*, 1971, Series II-Maharashtra, Part II-C (i), Social and Cultural Tables. Total SC-55884.



according to their proportion in the population.<sup>563</sup> Some scholars have also argued that the Mahars have responded most actively to the various facilities provided, taking away most of the 'pie of the reservation facilities' provided to the Backward Castes. Census statistics showing literacy rates by community since 1961 do not however reveal such a clear-cut picture, as I shall now show. The first, for 1961, provides baseline statistics for Maharashtra as a whole.

**Table 5: Literacy and education of main SC communities in Maharashtra State, 1961**

SC Castes	Population			Literate		Primary		Matric	Higher
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Urban	Total	Urban		
All SCs	2226914	1175493	1051421	351305	188975	134276	62535	7651	974
%	100	52.78	47.21	15.77	13.8	6.02	5.94	0.33	0.04
Mahar	782008	108020	673988	122692	86006	49930	19113	3416	485
%	35.11	13.81	86.18	15.68	12.76	6.38	2.83	0.43	0.06
Matang	718891	608810	110081	71032	20470	23057	8557	601	54
%	32.28	84.68	15.31	9.88	18.59	3.2	7.77	0.08	0.007
Chambhar	491326	352439	138887	104035	43962	41478	19773	2289	158
%	22.06	71.73	28.26	21.17	31.65	8.44	14.23	0.46	0.03

*Source: Census of India, 1961, Vol. 10 Maharashtra, Part V A, SC-ST Tables*

This table reveals that although the Mahars were far more urbanised in 1961 than the Matangs and Chambhars, their overall literacy rate was greater than that of the Matangs, but less than that of the Chambhars. In the cities, the Mahar literacy rate was inferior to that of both other communities in percentage terms, though in absolute numbers, there were 86,006 literate urban Mahars, as opposed to 43,962 literate urban Chambhars, and 20,470 literate urban Matangs. The Mahars and Chambhars had similar overall rates of primary school attendance, with the Matangs lagging behind. At higher educational levels, however, the Mahars had forged ahead.

<sup>563</sup> G. N. Gawalguru, 'Caste and communal politics with special reference to reservation', A paper prepared for Maharashtra state, Political Science conference (Kolhapur, 1981), p.10, as quoted in Somavanshi, *Mahar-Mang Sambandh*, p. 90. Snehlatai Kasbe suggested this, 10 September 2003.

**Table 6: Literacy and Education of main SC communities in urban areas of Maharashtra State, 1981**

Castes	Total	Literate	Primary	Matric	Higher
All SCs	1413059	666063	190113	489326	35059
%	100	47.13	13.45	10.92	0.78
Mahar	354175	193085	50996	200294	16030
%	21.48	54.51	14.39	12.15	0.97
Matang	301198	99381	31516	69386	3415
%	24.86	32.99	10.46	5.72	0.28
Chambhar	354407	182001	52593	121991	8945
%	40.94	51.35	14.83	14.09	1.03

*Source: Census of India, 1981 Maharashtra, Series 12, Part IX (ii), Special Tables Census of India, 1981, Series 12 Part (IX) I, Maharashtra, Special tables for SC: Tables 4-6.*

In these twenty years, literacy rates among urban SC as a whole had remained stable at 47%. This figure in itself reveals a major failing for state education policies in urban Maharashtra over this period. Amongst urban Mahars, although the total numbers who were literate rose from 86,006 in 1961 to 1,93,085 in 1981, but this rise did not keep abreast of their growing urban population, so that there was a fall in the overall urban Mahar literacy percentage from 86.18% in 1961 to 54.51% in 1981. This is indicative of the poor educational facilities that were provided for the slums in which the majority of Mahars still resided. Chambhar urban literacy rates, however, rose from 31.65% in 1961 to 51.35% in 1981, while Matang rates rose from 15.31% in 1961 to 32.99% in 1981. A whole, 20,470 urban Matangs were literate in 1961, and 99,381 in 1981, a huge increase of 79%. Thus, although the urban Mahars were on average more literate than the urban Matangs in 1981, the gap had closed considerably. Matang educational uptake was slightly less than the Mahars and Chambhars at primary level, but the gap grew considerably between Mahars and Matangs at the matriculation and higher levels. Strikingly, in 1981, 16,030 urban Mahars were in higher education, while half that number of urban Chambhars (8,945) and only about a fifth that number of urban Matangs (3,415) were. It is this, perhaps,



that informed the common perception that the Mahars had benefited most from government policies of positive discrimination.

How did all of this affect Dalit women? We shall now focus on rates of female illiteracy by decades for Pune City, starting with 1961.

**Table 7: Female illiteracy among SCs in Pune City, 1961**

Castes	Population		Illiterate	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
All SCs	63202	30964	51875	28882
%	100	49	82.07	93.28
Chambhar	20758	10408	11859	7597
%	100	50.13	57.12	73.4
Mahar	11703	5504	9495	5105
%	100	47.03	81.14	92.75
Matang	26479	12985	22864	12518
%	100	49.03	86.34	96.4

*Source: Census of India, 1961, Maharashtra Vol X. Part V-A, Tables for SC-ST in Maharashtra.*

This table shows that for all SC in Pune City in 1961, 93.28% of women were illiterate. However, whereas only 73.40 % of Chambhar women were recorded as illiterate, 92.75% of Mahar women and 96.40% of Matang women were.

**Table 8: Female illiteracy among SCs in Pune City, 1971**

Castes	Population		Illiterate	
	Total	Females	Total	Females
All SCs	175,402	85047	119231	68835
%	100	48.48	67.97	80.94
Chambhar	41440	20302	24685	14641
%	100	48.99	59.56	72.12
Mahar	35981	17111	22763	13091
%	100	47.55	63.26	76.51
Matang	69920	34373	52706	30269
%	100	49.16	75.38	88.06

*Source: Census of India, 1971, Series II-Maharashtra, Part II-C (i), Social and Cultural Tables.*

By 1971, the overall female illiteracy rate for the Dalit women of Pune City had fallen to 80.94%. By community, it was 72.12% for Chambhar women, 76.51% for Mahar women, and 88.06% for Matang women. Whereas the rates for Chambhar women had hardly improved at all, 21.16% fewer Mahar women and 8.34% fewer Matang women were illiterate.

**Table 9: Female illiteracy among Mahars and Matangs in Pune District, 1981**

Castes	Population		Illiterate	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
All SCs	189983	91607	103423	61613
%	100	48.26	54.43	67.25
Mahars	46650	22312	21773	13263
%	100	47.82	46.67	59.44
Matangs	81412	39699	53260	31280
%	100	48.76	65.42	78.79

Source: Census of India, 1981 Maharashtra, Series 12, Part IX (ii), Special Tables for SC, Tables 4-6, pp. 1074, 1080, 1086.

This table shows that 59.44% of Mahar women, and 78.79% of Matang women were illiterate. The Mahar women were forging ahead, with 17.07% fewer being illiterate. The Matang women had, nonetheless, improved their figure by a not insubstantial 10.15%. The next table is for Maharashtra as a whole for 1981.

**Table 10: Female illiteracy among Mahars and Matangs in Maharashtra, 1991**

Castes	Population		Illiterate	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
Mahar	1664533	805469	692448	410403
%	100	48.39	41.60	50.95
Matang	494029	242534	297495	124039
%	100	49.09	60.21	51.14

Source: Census of India, 1991, Series 14, Maharashtra, Part VIII (1): SC-1: Distribution of SC population by sex for each caste, pp 66-67.

The 1991 figures revealed an increase in female literacy in Maharashtra as a whole, with, moreover, very similar rates of illiteracy (just over a half) for both the Mahar and Matang women. The Matang women had almost caught up with the Mahar women. Women lag behind the men in both communities, with a Mahar male illiteracy rate of 32.83% and Matang male illiteracy rate of 46.70%. It is perhaps this gap in male literacy rates between the two communities that leads to the popular impression in Maharashtra that Mahars are forging ahead of the Matangs in the



educational sphere. In Pune District itself in 1991, out of an average SC literacy of 62.46%, that of men was 73.46%, while of women it was only 50.64%.<sup>564</sup>

Family situations and culture appear to be the chief causes of the differences in education between the two communities. Dr. Swati Waghmare, whose father was a Matang and mother a Buddhist (erstwhile Mahar), was in a good position to compare the two communities in this respect. This was a rarity, indeed the only such marriage between the two communities that I came across in my fieldwork. She herself was fortunate to be the only child of well-educated parents. She noted that her cousins on her (Matang) father's side were not much educated; the boys did not study much and left school in class ten and twelve.<sup>565</sup> She opined that by contrast her cousins and relatives on her Buddhist mother's side were doing better. At this point Swati's mother stepped in and said that children should be nurtured in a 'proper' home atmosphere. She continued:

The mother especially has to take a lot of care. The children are more of her responsibility. Our relatives who did not study did not get this atmosphere, and are not doing well. However, the present generation kids are admitted in good English medium schools. They are doing well. When I was studying there were (only) six BC girls in a class of 50. They were studying and the community did send them to school and now they are more progressive.<sup>566</sup>

Matang women are generally more orthodox, conventional, and conservative compared to Mahar women. They accepted without complaint their enforced 'sitting out' during their menstrual cycles, when they are supposed to be ritually 'polluting'. I also noted that Mahar women were more actively resisting patriarchy and demanding equal rights to their male counterparts. Matang women did not speak much about their

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<sup>564</sup> *Census of India*, 1991, Series 14, Part XII (A and B), District Census Handbook, Pune village and town wise Primary census abstract (Pune, 1995), pp. 516-517.

<sup>565</sup> Swati Waghmare, 12 November 2004.

<sup>566</sup> Swati Waghmare's mother, Buddhist, B.A., Officer, Vishrantwadi-Pune, 12 November 2004. She was busy and I could not talk much to her.

companionship with their husbands or about their husband's authority over them. Perhaps they are silenced, perhaps they think that their husbands have their best interests at heart, or perhaps they are yet to open their *tratiya ratna*.

There are however signs of changes amongst the Matangs, who are starting to become more self-assertive on their own terms. They are creating their own community heroes whom they can revere rather than Ambedkar. They are now celebrating inspirational figures who were obscure until recently, such as Lahuji Vastad and Annabhau Sathe. Lahuji Buwa Vastad was a Mang who ran a gymnasium in Pune in the mid-nineteenth century. He imparted physical training to revolutionaries like Phule and Vasudev Balwant Phadke. Lahuji Buwa assisted Phule in his attempts to gather untouchable children and make them attend school. Another such hero is Annabhau Sathe, a Mang communist poet, novelist and storywriter. Some political parties like the Shiv Sena and the BJP now raise slogans for Lahuji Mang and Annabhau Sathe in order to gain Matang support and capture their votes. Thus Matangs increasingly support the Congress party, the Shiv-Sena, or the BJP rather than aligning with the Ambedkarite (even if only in name) Republican Party of India. Even in social welfare these castes seem to support their own caste candidates.

In general therefore the educational gap between the different Dalit communities is not as great as often perceived, particularly in the case of women, for there are many poor slum-dwelling Buddhists (Mahars) whose educational attainments are still very weak, and often non-existent. Thus, we find overall literacy rates between women of the two communities now almost identical. Similarly, there are Matangs who have excelled in their education and are now in good careers. For example, Kamal Jadhav, a second generation Matang, mentioned that her family was



doing well.<sup>567</sup> One of her brothers is an IPS (Indian Penal Service) officer and the other is a military officer; her sister is in the first year of college. However, Kamaltai still referred to the perceived competition between the two communities for education and jobs. As it is, far more Buddhists than Matangs are progressing to the higher levels of education.

Despite all this, some Dalits are taking the initiative to bring all SCs, STs, and OBCs under the one Dalit umbrella. One famous ST writer who has a huge following embraced Buddhism recently. I have also attended meetings in Pune that call for 'Bahujan' unity against upper caste hegemony. During my visit to Pune in June 2006 I was told that inter-marriage between Mahars and Matangs is less rare than it used to be. It seems crucial for the future of the Dalits movement that such dissensions become a thing of the past, and that all work together for the Dalit community and for the oppressed as a whole.

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<sup>567</sup> Kamaltai Jadhav, 16 September 2001.

## Chapter 8: Dalit Women in Employment

The famous educationist, J.P. Naik, has argued that: 'educational development, particularly at the secondary and higher stages, is benefiting the "haves" more than the "have-nots." This is a negation of social justice and of "planning" proper.'<sup>568</sup> He and other social scientists have raised doubts as to whether the constitutional goal and nationalist agenda of promoting democratisation through the expansion of education has achieved any significant measure of success. In the case of women, Karuna Chanana observes that there has been no observable shift towards equalisation of educational opportunities among women, with those from lower social and economic strata continuing to remain either unrepresentative or underrepresented in the sphere of higher education.<sup>569</sup>

Studies by several social scientists for different parts of India reveal that it is usually the children from the higher castes who are able to take advantage of higher educational opportunities to gain worthwhile employment.<sup>570</sup> Many have however sought to downgrade the importance of caste *per se*. Chanana goes on to argue that the significance of caste as a determinant of educational opportunity has been overemphasized. She draws upon the works of M.N. Srinivas, Andre Beteille, and M.S.A. Rao to support her thesis.<sup>571</sup> She writes:

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<sup>568</sup> Karuna Chanana, 'Women's Higher Education: Recruitment and Relevance', in her own *Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded Visions, Expanding Horizons* (Delhi and Jaipur, 2001), p. 268.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267-68.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265., also see Edward Shils, *The Intellectual Between tradition and modernity: The Indian situation* (Mouton, 1961), B.B. Mishra, *Indian Middle Classes: Their growth in modern times* (Bombay, 1963), A.R. Kamat and A.C. Deshmukh, *Wastage in College Education*, Gokhale Institute of Political Science and Economics (Poona, 1963), pp. 5-6, B.V. Shah, *Social Change and College Students of Guajrat* (Baroda, 1964), pp. 19-22., R.D. Parekh, *Non-Urban Graduates of Gujarat* (Ahmadabad, 1966), p. 56., J.P. Naik, *Educational Planning in India* (New Delhi, 1965), pp. 22, 108.

<sup>571</sup> As in Chanana, *Interrogating education*, p. 265., and original in M.N. Shrinivas, *Caste in Modern India* (Bombay, 1962), M.S.A. Rao, *Social Change in Malibar* (Bombay, 1951), Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power* (Berkeley, 1965). In what follows I am principally drawing on Chanana's pioneering work on Indian women's education, Chanana, *Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded Visions, Expanding Horizons* (Delhi and Jaipur, 2001).



By and large, the lower castes are poor, and it is their poverty, rather than caste status, which tends to bar them from enjoying the fruits of new educational opportunities. Caste is, thus, important as an expression of the inequalities in the economic structure.<sup>572</sup>

Although it is obviously true that poverty limits employment possibilities, I shall in this chapter question this postulate and argue that caste has played a significant role as a determinant of opportunity. I have already discussed in preceding chapters the difficulty for Dalits in accessing quality educational institutions. The discriminations practiced in classrooms by school staff and students alike, are a clear indication of the fact that caste was also a significant factor in impeding Dalit progress. Very rarely did the congruence of caste, rank, and class work in the Dalits' favour. Furthermore, many women were silenced by the hydra-headed caste monster, and were not able to voice their experiences of oppression. One needs to mark these silences too.

Most of Dalit women wanted to be employed, as they saw their incomes as crucial to their families' economic survival. Historically, Dalit women had always carried out fieldwork and domestic labour, so that the employment in the public sphere outside the home was not new for them. In the past, however, such outside manual work was a mark of their degraded status, for women of the 'respectable' castes were kept within the private space of the home. The 'public' woman was seen by higher castes to be inherently dangerous, as she was seen to emanate an irresistible sexuality that supposedly ensnared high caste males. This fed into a nationalist discourse that placed the ideal woman within the family home. Dalit parents, as well as their daughters, were aware of the historical economic and sexual exploitation of Dalit women in 'public' and they do not want this fate for themselves. Hence, they acquired whatever education was available to them to break away from the

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<sup>572</sup> Chanana, *Interrogating education*, p. 265.

stereotypical caste jobs of domestic labour and agriculture. Some second and third-generation women reported that employability for a stable economic status was the major reason for their education.

Clearly, there is a chance that a person who has a higher level of formal education will find a prestigious as well as a profitable occupation, *ceteris paribus*. However, all things are not equal for Dalit women, very few of whom, historically, could attain higher education. A few years attendance in a primary school would hardly produce the qualifications needed for better and more prestigious forms of employment. Since most of my informants belonged to the lower-middle class or middle-class, they mostly found the lower category jobs—like clerks, municipal teachers, nurses, and so on. In fact, several of my informants noted that low levels of education could not fetch better employment opportunities. Some of the second and most from the third-generation did not face this problem since they attained a comparatively higher level of education. To all intents and purposes, I am discussing the effects of secondary and tertiary level education here.

This chapter maps the complexity of seeking employment and the experiences of employability for Dalit women, and raises a number of questions. Employment brought these women in a newer public sphere where – as in the past - they once more ‘mingled’ with wo/men from different classes and castes, but now on potentially equal terms. Given their newly acquired education, did Dalit women find a ‘suitable’ or ‘healthy’ atmosphere in such work places? How did caste manifest itself, mostly in the urbanized employment arena and space? Did employment bring greater emancipation within the home? The educated employed woman could still be highly exploited in the home and made subject to male brutality. Was this true for middle



class Dalit wives? Did Dalit women gain a more equal status with their male counterparts, as a result of higher education and employment?<sup>573</sup>

In this chapter I investigate the patterns of financial hardships, the experiences of Dalit women at their work places, and the balancing act of family and employment, which Urmila Pawar calls '*tarevarchi kasrat*.'<sup>574</sup> This phrase has its origin in the street display by a nomadic community named the 'Dombaris.' A metal wire is tied between two tall bamboo poles that are dug into the soil at a distance of about fifteen to twenty feet apart. The height of the wire would be anywhere between twenty to twenty-five feet. Children, mostly girls, and women (hardly ever men) perform the feat of tightrope walking on this wire with or without a long bamboo in their hand as a balance. The father or the husband normally plays a drum below.<sup>575</sup> *Tarevarchi-tar* means a metal wire, *varachi* means above, and *kasarat* means exercise, hence the balancing exercise. Women point to this exercise when they say that they are balancing precariously between their families and jobs, between the daily grind of home care and employment outside the home.

### Attitudes towards Female Employment

Home making, housekeeping, and child rearing were all considered 'feminine' jobs that women had a duty and an obligation to perform in addition to any outside work. Shantabai Kamble wrote in her autobiography:

My mother used to work in the fields the whole day and come home in the evenings. We used to all sit outside waiting for her. Because she would get the begged bread

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<sup>573</sup> Karuna Chanana argues that 'experts of women's studies as well as women themselves have often taken the view that their education and employment are fundamental to their enjoyment of equal status [or equality and status]. This is because most of them assumed that better education and employment gave women an earning capacity which in turn enhanced their social status.' See Chanana, 'Educated Working Women in India: Trends and Issues,' in *Interrogating Education*, pp. 335-336.

<sup>574</sup> Urmila Pawar, 6 September 2004.

<sup>575</sup> Here, just as the upper castes make Dalits dance to their tune, the Dalit men in turn make Dalit women dance to their tune.

and also would cook something. After wiping her face with a little water, she used to sit at the *chul* [hearth] to make *bhakris*.<sup>576</sup>

Dalit woman such as Shantabai's mother had no respite and slogged like a 'bullock,' inside and outside the house, from birth to death. In an insightful article, entitled 'Women as Bullocks,' Sharon Kemp discusses the lives of rural women in Gaothan, a Maharashtrian village. In this survey, the women constructed three models of their everyday lives:

Two of these, were women as wives and women as mothers. However, the third was women as bullocks. Women said, 'we work like bullocks. Moreover, they say, "*baikanna ani bailana jasta kam astana pan nav matra purusache hote* [women and bullocks do more work, but the man is named or praised]."<sup>577</sup>

Kemp commented that women were thus regarded 'like an oil presser's bullock. Nothing else! Eyes covered by blinders, work all the time. No rest. No one to say you are tired.'<sup>578</sup> I extend the image of the drudgework of the bullock to my Dalit women in the city, where they were expected to both labour within the home and to supplement their family income through outside employment.

Amongst those women I interviewed who were in employment, most were from the first and second-generation who had managed to reach the seventh class and had found employment as teachers. The second and third generations of learners were more likely to study a little further, and even graduate. Only a few pursued postgraduate work, and there were scarcely any professionals among them. In my sample there were three Doctors (only two with M.B.B.S. degrees) and two engineers. None had obtained a Ph.D.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Shantabai Kamble, *Mazhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (Bombay, 1986), p. 26.

<sup>577</sup> Sharon Kemp, 'Women as Bullocks: A self-image of Maharashtrian Village Women', in Anne Feldhaus (ed.), *Images of Women in Maharashtrian Society* (New York, 1998), p. 217.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>579</sup> Only one, Prof. Jyoti Lanjewar had a doctorate. She is a Dalit feminist writer from Nagpur who is doing a commendable job for women through the Republican Party of India in Maharashtra. However,



Most of the women I interviewed said that their education was a means of economic security, for social prestige associated with it, for good marriage proposals and companionship. Unlike the students of Chanana's study of two Delhi colleges, these Dalit women were not seeking higher education so as to have a 'good time' or 'because everyone got the same college education after schooling' or even 'as a "waiting" to get married.'<sup>580</sup> Most of the first, second and third-generation learners mention the financial hardships they had faced in the process of their education. Most agreed that they sought education and then a good job basically to break free from the clutches of financial hardships. They mentioned their difficulties in obtaining satisfactory employment after qualifying.

Most of my respondents were already married before their employment. So, they often reported the attitudes of their husbands towards their going out to work, and the necessity of having a second earner in the family. Most of the informants agreed that women's employment contributed a lot to the financial stability of a family; financial considerations thus influenced and determined life choices once again. Second-generation informant, Gitanjali Rithe, working with the Karuna Trust,<sup>581</sup> said:

Yes women must work. Employment gives you a different status, prestige and most importantly independence, in order to have a stand of their own in the family and society. My family does support employment as I am bringing in money. Nobody would deny *lakshmi* [literally- wealth]. It has changed me and I have also started understanding more after interacting with people and being in the public. My formal

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she seems to be in a secondary position. Though I did start my interview with her on 11 October 2005, I could not pursue the interview ahead.

<sup>580</sup> Chanana, *Interrogating education*, pp. 274-276.

<sup>581</sup> The Karuna Trust has its main office in England. It is a Buddhist N.G.O. which has done some admirable work in the slums. They have a well established network in Maharashtra. In Dapodi slum, I visited their office which runs different programmes like *balawadi* (pre-school), tailoring classes for girls and women and a small clinic.

education has helped me fetch this job and also to have a stand in other peoples' eyes.<sup>582</sup>

This submission of Gitanjali Rithe resonated with most of the other responses.

Though at times patriarchy deployed its misplaced pride, my respondents, like her, answered in chorus: 'parents and husbands do not refuse *lakshmi*.' It is essential for the benefit of their families and also to get ahead in life, in the community. They thus tended to have a very instrumental attitude towards their education; it had been useful for getting a job. Only a few second and third generation learners spoke about their intellectual advancement through education.

Studies on working women show that, although education and employment have propelled many women out of the domestic sphere, neither has brought about radical changes in societal attitudes, particularly those of men.<sup>583</sup> This was born out in my interviews. Prakshoti Pawar, an unmarried engineer from the third-generation, said that Dalit men should regard their educated and employed wives from a different perspective: 'Dalit men must understand the hardships of these employed women. They have to change.'<sup>584</sup> She declared: 'I want a man, who will be at par with me, would understand. Further, if I cook for four days he should be able to cook for three days at least.'<sup>585</sup> I interviewed her on a Sunday, during the time that she could be found at home. Her father and brother were watching television, and her mother was listening to us while working in the kitchen. Her mother had combined bringing up a family with drudgework outside the home, and I felt that Prakshoti's comments were a reflection on the hard life and continuing low status of her mother. Although she

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<sup>582</sup> Gitanjali Rithe, Buddhist, Masters in Commerce, Ambedkar Society, Pune, 12 June 2001.

<sup>583</sup> Chanana, *Interrogating education*, p. 341, and original in Maria Mies, 'Class Struggle or Emancipation? Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe and the US', *Economic and Political Weekly* (December 15, 1973) as quoted in Chanana.

<sup>584</sup> Prakshoti Pawar, 10 April 2002.

<sup>585</sup> Prakshoti Pawar, 10 April 2002.



enjoyed her work, and was independent, self-confident and assertive, her case reiterates how the traditional norms relating to feminine and masculine duties continue to exist.<sup>586</sup>

Another such case was Hirabai Kuchekar, who had obtained a good job as a result of her education.<sup>587</sup> She emphasized that women have to manage everything, and work hard to get out of the mundane daily rut. She and her daughter revealed that they did not enjoy equal status with their male counterparts.<sup>588</sup> They felt that their employment was taken for granted; there was nothing special or unusual about it to command any special status or respect within the family. The two had to take care of the household while employed, while the males of the family were engaged only with their employment. Men wanted women to be educated, and they decided to admit their daughters in school. The irony is that even when these women were educated, their grievances were not addressed. Rather, their oppression was renewed in a different fashion. Prakshoti's and Suvarna's mothers, and many other mothers, fulfilled their natural roles first and their employed roles also first. This is not a Dalit-specific problem; however, it was prevalent in the Dalit families that I interviewed. Educated and employed women, including myself, have to take care of our natural role as well as our new 'cultural' role. I call it cultural because Dalit women have always been engaged in all activities and shouldered familial responsibilities along with their men. Few of my Dalit informants were however prepared to voice their

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<sup>586</sup> Also see Promilla Kapur, *Marriage and the working women in India* (New Delhi, 1971), Rama Mehta, 'White Collar and Blue Collar Family Responses to Population Growth in India, in Marcus F. Franda (ed.), *Responses to Population in india: Changes in Social, Political and Economic Behaviour* (New York, 1975), pp. 117-163 as in Chanana, p. 346.

<sup>587</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

<sup>588</sup> Hirabai and Suvarna Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

grievances in these respects within the family.<sup>589</sup> Did they expect a negative response? Did they fear maltreatment if they did? Or were they themselves unsure whether they even had a case to make, being acculturated to accept their women's lot in life?

The matter often became more complicated once a woman was married and was living with her in-laws. Notions of the correct role for the family man, the respectful words used for husbands—'*aaho*' (respectable 'You' for husbands) – impregnated the private sphere of the home. Meena Ranpise thus said that her husband did help her in the kitchen, but her in-laws did not know this as they would never approve of the man working in the kitchen, or even helping his wife. Deepa Mohite preferred to work outside in order to escape the torment of her in-laws.<sup>590</sup> Bebi Jagtap reported that her in-laws initially did not support her employment.<sup>591</sup> However, later, when her income supported the family they agreed. She was of the opinion that if the family had sufficient resources she would not have gone outside the house to work. In some cases, an educated Dalit woman refused to marry a husband who would not support her in her work. Dr. Swati Waghmare reported that some Dalit men who were interested in marrying her suggested that she would not be able to practice medicine in a her clinic after marriage.<sup>592</sup> Swati readily rejected such offers. I note this tendency that prevailed amongst some middle-class Dalit men of wanting their wives to conform to the model of Victorian domesticity. Patriarchal norms would not allow the family to survive on a women's income. In general, however, this

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<sup>589</sup> Sometimes when I was talking to the women in presence of their husbands or in-laws they could not voice their opinions openly. Jyotsna Rokade for one changed the place of our interview. We went from her living room to her bedroom when we came to such discussions. 15 August 2004.

<sup>590</sup> Deepa Mohite, 22 May 2001.

<sup>591</sup> Bebi Jagtap, 5 February 2002.

<sup>592</sup> Swati Waghmare, 12 November 2004.



attitude is however shifting. When families have realised that their financial burdens would lessen if both sexes worked, they have allowed women to work in public.

### Education for the Community

In a study of African Americans in the U.S., works of Stephanie Shaw and bell hooks have pointed out that many viewed education as being of benefit to their community as a whole.<sup>593</sup> To what extent does this resonate with the Dalit case? In general, there is in India an idiom of helping in the uplift of ones own community. Communities believe in helping their own, and will take a lot of effort to achieve this. Some examples of caste movements for such ends are those of the Nadar/Shanars of the Tamil South, the Ezhavas of South India, and the Jatavs of North India.<sup>594</sup> The Ambedkar movement is in this vein.

Some Dalit women did indeed deploy such a language of ‘uplifting the community.’ A few women from the first-generation and the majority of women from the second and third-generation did think beyond the immediate goal of education as employability and talked of education for the community. I noted this community consciousness and the commitment to serve the community in the voices of Dalit women mostly from the lower-middle-class and middle-class. This is what Stephanie Shaw rightly pointed out about the Black women whose education was ‘for the race, to uplift the race.’<sup>595</sup> Black parents had a much grander mission than the white parents, she says: ‘they were not educating individuals but manufacturing

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<sup>593</sup> Stephanie Shaw, *What a woman ought to do and to be* (Chicago and London, 1996), pp. 68-76 and bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (New York and London, c 1994), p. 2.

<sup>594</sup> Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad; the political culture of a community in change*, (Berkeley, 1969), Owen Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a city of India*, (New York, 1969).

<sup>595</sup> Stephanie Shaw, *What a woman ought to do*, pp. 68-76, 81.

levers.’<sup>596</sup> Shaw focused not on what the schooling process represented for the student and the subsequent personal advantages it might bring, but on its potency for the community at large. Altogether, the schooling process provided especially effective reinforcement for family and community attitudes towards what a woman ought to be and to do. The school programmes meshed perfectly with the expectations of the family and community and served in a mighty way to accomplish them.

In a similar vein, a few Dalit women from the first-generation and most from the second and third-generation said that every educated woman need not be employed if she was financially comfortable. Rather, they suggested that educated women should serve the community, and help to uplift the Dalits. For example, Alaka said that she was using her employed position to serve the community. She further continued:

If they are financially comfortable they can work for the community. I sought education as a means of employment and also a means to engage with the youth. Teaching is immensely satisfying when I interact with students and can understand their difficulties, their future goals, and advise them accordingly. I take efforts to encourage students especially from the Dalit background to read, write, discuss and work harder towards improving themselves. I conduct extra lectures towards these activities and I am enthralled by the response.<sup>597</sup>

Such Dalit women are working to strengthen the future generation.

Even women who are not formally educated turn what little training they have back into the community. Padma Nikam, who attended school only up to Class 3, is now the leader of the Hawkers’ Union in Mumbai. She was very active in organizing the women selling items on the footpaths of Churchgate, Mumbai. This dynamic woman has fought the state government to get a quota and a part of the seller’s market reserved for women irrespective of caste. She also petitioned the Central Railway

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>597</sup> Alaka Kale, 1 July 2002.



minister to reserve food stalls on every railway platform for women. She spoke of her dream of establishing an organization called '*Mata Ramabai Ambedkar Pratishtan*' (named after Ambedkar's wife) for work amongst Buddhist women.<sup>598</sup> She is also planning to buy land with the help of a co-operative society, where she can establish a shopping mall with food stalls and other shops run by economically and socially disadvantaged women, in order for them to gain financial independence.

Padmatai<sup>599</sup> could not speak on the effect of her education, because, even though she had an opportunity to study with her mother, a teacher, she did not study beyond class three. She mentioned repeatedly that she did not like her studies. Furthermore, she recalled an event when she was asked to speak and to share a stage with other Dalit women activists. She noted the demeaning attitude of the educated, middle-class so-called Dalit feminists who left the stage on her arrival. 'These women,' she said, 'were not interested in talking to an uneducated woman.' I noted the disparaging attitude of Brahmans towards Dalits, of Dalit men towards Dalit women, of mainstream feminists towards Dalit feminists and in this case of the educated middle-class Dalit women towards the uneducated Dalit women. For some middle-class Dalits (in this case), mere achievement of formal education is a primary factor to decide whom one may speak to. Furthermore, I noticed the tension of catering to the 'public' and 'private' in this Dalit woman, who in addition to all of her above activities still runs her own home and family.

The second and third-generation women were aware both of the existing facilities and possibilities for Dalits and they acted and advised them accordingly.

Sandhya Meshram talked about her social work:

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<sup>598</sup> Padmatai Nikam, 22 October 2005. Padmatai was very excited about this project, and also offered me a significant role and a chair in the management of the pratishtan on my return to India.

<sup>599</sup> Padmatai Nikam, 22 October 2005.

I sought employment as I had finished studying. After my Masters I wanted to work for the community. My employment has been wonderful; it has been emotionally satisfying working on so many projects in the slums.<sup>600</sup>

Many such Dalit women like Sandhya akka have opted for a Masters in Social Work to serve the community. These women are attempting to work for the community and feel the need to nurture a collective consciousness. This collective consciousness, which seems to be a given in Shaw's work, is and must be 'consciously' built in the lives of my Dalit informants. Dalits are growing critically conscious about the community and are working towards its advancement.

It was not only Buddhists who talked in such a way. Meera engaged in working for her Matang community by helping students seek admissions in school, in fetching caste certificates, completing paperwork for the illiterate and so on. She was also involved in getting small loans for Matang women from the 'Anna Bhau Sathe Pratisthan.'<sup>601</sup> In order to do this she got to know the 'right' people and the 'right' modes of operation. She filled out forms for the illiterate and provides these services free of cost. I noted that Meera focussed on Matang women, as Sudha Bhalerao focussed on Mahar community.<sup>602</sup> This is another tendency of nepotism among some Dalits when Buddhists support Buddhists, Matang support Matang, Chambhars support their community, and so on.

In general, however, my research tends to show that community work was not considered a particularly high priority; at least, it was not stated as such. Ambedkar propounded that Dalit education should also lead to the uplift of the community. However, in practice, the voices of my respondents demonstrate that 'the uplift of community' was not the primary goal for educating them. It was the persistence and

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<sup>600</sup> Sandhya Meshram, 11 September 2004.

<sup>601</sup> Meera Jangam, 1 August 2004. Matangs look upon Annabhau Sathe as their leader. There is an Annabhau Sathe Foundation controlled by the state government which looks into the needs of Dalits.

<sup>602</sup> Sudha Bhalerao, 1 October 2004.



pervasiveness of caste discrimination, their experiences as Dalits and as women, their process of education and the consciousness through their critical thinking that led these particular women to speak about and to act on behalf of their social responsibility.

### **Liberating the Self**

Some Dalit women wanted a better and more liberated life. Many second and third generation learners wanted to be engaged creatively; they were assertive and insisted on their independence. Amita Pillewar, a socially committed woman, stated:

Employment and moving in the public is necessary as it bestows independence, confidence and information. One is engaged. One must use education to look at oneself and change oneself. We should also see that change in others. My family always supported employment. But my married sisters are at home, their in-laws don't support it.<sup>603</sup>

Seconding Amita, Nanda Kamble said that Dalit women should be engaged in courses, anything to keep them busy and independent. She said: 'It is no use sitting at home and cooking for the family, we must do something and be away from that routine and it will help us economically also. My family supported me and the income helps.'<sup>604</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar said that while education was a factor in her pursuit of employment, moving out in the world made her woman confident, bold, and assertive.<sup>605</sup> Gitanjali Rithe stated: 'Education and employment made me know the outside world. I interact with so many people and learn so much everyday.'<sup>606</sup> Lalita Randhir, a bank officer, was of the opinion that her education and then her job had greatly improved her confidence.<sup>607</sup> As a small girl, I had seen Lalita with a handbag on her shoulders, limping to the office. I was in awe of her. As an academic,

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<sup>603</sup> Amita Pillewar, 30 July 2005.

<sup>604</sup> Nanda Kamble, Nursing Diploma, Nurse, Parvati slum-Pune, 10 August 2001.

<sup>605</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

<sup>606</sup> Gitanjali Rithe, 12 June 2001.

<sup>607</sup> Lalita Randhir, 22 May 2001.

it gave me great pleasure to interview her. She recalled our earlier neighbourhood, our fathers and her active mother, who was a terror then.

In an analogous manner Ratnaprabha Pawar said that she was happier working outside the home, as her house was crowded with in-laws, her nagging husband and demanding children.<sup>608</sup> She found solace in her work place and mingled with the crowd. However, she pointed out that it was not her education, but more her Diploma in education that helped her find the job. She was not the only one who said this. Many women likewise argued that it was technical training that helped them get employed and that employment outside the house was immensely useful. For many of these women, education and employment had opened many new doors for them in their lives.

### **Self-employed Work**

I came across a few women respondents who were self-employed. For them, education had provided only a base; personal initiative had also been vital. Indu Gade was one such person. Before migrating to Pune with her husband, she had worked in the fields. She had been educated up to the seventh standard, and wanted to go on to do a teacher's diploma. However, because of her husband's job transfers, she was unable to do this. Instead, she remained at home raising her daughters until they started schooling. She continued:

Later, my husband said that I could do something instead of sitting at home. He knew the art of binding and so we bought a shop here. I sat there during the daytime and took orders for binding books. He worked on the orders after he was home from work. We also needed to earn a little more to educate our children well. Being away from our in-laws there was no question of their objection. However, even if they did we would have continued with our plans. The shop has helped a lot financially and also helped me develop myself. I have improved a lot because of it. *My language has*

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<sup>608</sup> Ratnaprabha Pawar, 10 April 2002.



*changed a lot and must change if we want to be with a better people, excel* [emphasis mine]. Why stick to something which is not going to benefit at all and is going to be harmful in lives? It is no use. I interact with so many people and have developed good managerial skills with that. I spend my income on my family.<sup>609</sup>

I emphasize in this case that Mrs. Gade's husband thought that his wife should engage in some activities; moreover he wanted her to engage in activities that would bring in money. This is a peculiar fact about the Dalit case; financial constraints are always prevalent, but even the fact that the men allow their women to think beyond their family life is of great significance. The very act of allowing a woman to present herself in public and handle monetary affairs spoke about the freedom granted to Indu. Most Maharashtrians would agree, '*vyapaar karava Marvadyani, Maharani nahi,*'<sup>610</sup> meaning that the 'Marwaris who are a thrifty business community alone are fit for business, not the Mahars who are a low caste.' But, in Indu's case *vyapaar kartoy Mahar, ek Maharin aataa*, a Maharin was doing good business. Nevertheless, her case was a rarity. We should once again note how some Dalits are involved in erasing their identity.

Lakshmi Shinde ran several small businesses from the Parvati slum. This smart, young, Mang woman owned two big vehicles (Tata Sumos) for the tourism business.<sup>611</sup> She was also engaged in employing slum women in a cottage industry involving the embroidering of saris, decorating saris with beads or with glass work or with small shiny *tiklis* (bindis which are put on the forehead). Furthermore, Lakshmi helped her brother in his social activities by focusing mainly on women's issues. She talked to me while feeding her four-month-old baby, because she had no time later. I noted that her mother too has a small business of grinding spices. This mill was inside

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<sup>609</sup> Indu Gade, Class 5, self-employed, Aundh Road, Pune, 15 and 16 March, 2002.

<sup>610</sup> Such stereotypical norms prevail in society where a particular caste is associated with a particular occupation.

<sup>611</sup> Lakshmi Shinde, 9 October 2002.

their small house. For Lakshmi, her own education and her business success were instrumental in making her courageous. She further said that the 'real world was outside' and not at home.

Another successfully self-employed Matang woman was Meera Jangam.<sup>612</sup> She operated from Yashwant Nagar slum in Yerawada, and owned two cooking gas agencies. She was also in the process of starting a sewing class, a computer class for girls, and she was allotting a room in her new house for this project. On the whole, the less educated take this path of self-employment. These less educated like Mrs. Borade who ran a sewing class say that education did not help them much; it was their activity outside the home that helped them progress.<sup>613</sup> They did not value their education.

Women with lower educational qualification tended to enter small businesses. They said that their education had not helped them much. However, it probably gave them confidence, and basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Of course, illiterate and uneducated people who have never attended school also carry on small businesses like hawking and so on, which they have learnt on the job. However, I argue that education clearly helped people to build a better business, to prevent them being cheated, to maintain their accounts, and so on. As Bebi Jagtap stated, the job gives the opportunity to make good use of education; even, presumably, if the education was fairly basic.<sup>614</sup>

I came across a few Dalit women who were completely uneducated but have done very well in life. Such was the case with two *tamasha* (literally: dance/play) performers. Some Mahar and Matang women have made a living from the folk-art

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<sup>612</sup> Meera Jangam, 1 August 2004.

<sup>613</sup> Mrs. Borade, Class 9, conducts sewing classes, Dapodi, Pune, 15 July 2002.

<sup>614</sup> Bebi Jagtap, 5 February 2002.



form of *tamasha* dancing. This was once a highly stigmatised occupation, due to the potential for sexual abuse by clients. Still, this is a danger for such performers, as was made clear by Mangala Bansode in her interview. She is the eldest daughter of a very famous *tamasha* dancer—Vithabai Narayangaonkar, from Narayangaon near Pune. Mangalatai revealed to me that she was fifty-seven year old, and lead a dance troupe comprising of 150 people. She reflected:

In the beginning I was scared to face the audience. However, I could handle the crowd after some time. *Cheshta kartyat, maskari kartyat, pan kunibi haat nhai lavalala ajoin [...] .mee kadak bai haye* [They make fun of me, ridicule me, but nobody has touched me once. I am a very strong woman]. *Mee ek lakh deto, don lakh deto, zhopaya ye [...] ashe mhas prasang hote* [they offer me one or two lakhs to sleep with them for one night, there are so many incidents; but, I never gave in and just continued with my stand]. My family has been attacked; I have faced caste discrimination in my village. My husband has acted like a coward at times.<sup>615</sup>

This was the life of a *tamasha* dancer, insecure, unstable; however, the caravan is always on the move. Mangalatai continued:

The political parties dominant in the village, *sarpanch, patil*, the landlord who gives us this place to put up our stage and the police – all torture us. Anybody can come and bully us, kick us. We are so helpless [...] *hittha log hagatyat titha amhi khato* [public shits *here* and we eat our food in this place and dance *here*. All emphasis is mine]. Despite all this, I have to continue with this, for I have 150 people to be fed. We have to keep everybody happy in this line, and I have been tolerating these people since I was 9. I just smile and get away. Sometimes the public gets mad and political party people are a great nuisance. They start shouting from the gates, *amcha paksha, amhala soda...vis manasa soda* [ours is the ruling party now, give us free entry. Let our twenty men enter for free]. How do we live in such circumstances?<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Mangala Bansode, Illiterate, *Tamasha* dancer, Nagar and Pune, 1 and 15 September, 2004. I am grateful to Mangalatai for having taken care of me when I was in the village in Nagar. I thank her for her generous hospitality. She took care that I could rest amidst her troupe. She talked to me at length despite her many duties. We kept shifting places for our talk, in case her husband or sons overheard us. I was very excited about these interviews about the life of *tamasha* as I was experiencing it first-hand. I just knew of it from Marathi movies, movies, rumour, and newspapers. Mangalatai offered me lunch and I had the best *methichi bhaji* (vegetable made from *methi* leaves) and *bhakri* cooked on an open *chul* (hearth).

<sup>616</sup> Mangala Bansode, 15 September 2004.

Such Dalit dancers are at the mercy of everybody—the upper and lower caste common man as well as the great politicians. Mangala complained that stricter rules are ruining this art of *tamasha*; however, she was a thorough businesswoman who controlled her empire astutely and wisely. We should note these tensions, these paradoxes: performance of the art is exploitative, however it is financially empowering for the Bansode family – including its male members – as well as others dependent on them, such as those employed in the troupe. The government, scholars and feminists are in a dilemma whether such professions and practices that have historically been linked with prostitution should be scrapped or supported. Some feminists argue that the work of prostitutes, bargirls, dancers and the like should be respected as professions. However, what they fail to take into account is the fact that these professions tend to be associated with particular low castes, and are also gendered. Why do 98% of girls trafficked belong to SC communities?<sup>617</sup>

Surekha Punekar is the other *tamasha* performer whom I interviewed. She is from Pune, and has gained a very high reputation for her art in recent years. She is a Buddhist who has changed her name to Punekar.<sup>618</sup> She told me how she had had to struggle hard from 1998 to 2003 to build her career:

I got an opportunity to perform at Rangbhavan in Mumbai and my career took off from there. People talked about my singing and *adakari* [gestures]. I performed not only for men but also women.<sup>619</sup>

When I interviewed her in 2005, she was taking a break from her dancing. She explained why:

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<sup>617</sup> N.G.O. report, Times of India, 18 February, 2006, as in Human Rights Violations, News Media Report from 1 January 2006-19 June 2006, available online on <http://acjp.blogspot.com>.

<sup>618</sup> Surekha Punekar, Literate, Tamasgir-Lavani, Kasba Peth-Pune, 20 September 2004. Sometimes I felt that by enquiring into the caste background of these informants, I was committing violence to them. Surekha for one asked me, 'why are you asking me *that* [emphasis mine], where do we find casteism these days?' However, to pursue my project, I had to know their background.

<sup>619</sup> Surekha Punekar, 20 September 2004.



I had struggled immensely from 1998 to 2003. I have also acted in movies. However, all this hard work got to me, *itka vyap zhala mala, gharcha vyap, satat vyap* [I was and am totally stressed, stress of the home, always stressed]. [...]. I developed diabetes; however, I continued my *ghode-daud* [horse race] for seven years. I used to fall sick but I worked undeterred. I got my brother and sisters married. I got my cousins married. Everything is settled now. I have earned up to Rs. 80,000 for a show, when things were fine. However, I am in debt today and have to start afresh.<sup>620</sup>

Surekha reflected on her *tamasha* and continued that she had done her best to use her talents for the good of the community at large:

I perform *lavanis*.<sup>621</sup> Some of them are very famous.<sup>622</sup> I engaged in a few *Daru bandi, hunda bandi* [anti-liquour, anti-dowry] AIDS *virodhi* [anti-AIDS] government programmes and fetched an honorarium. I travelled to villages for this.<sup>623</sup>

On a later visit to Pune in December 2006, I found that Surekha was performing her first show after her break, and the show was running house-full. Surekha, like many other Dalit women cannot enjoy the luxury of staying for long at home.

Both Mangala and Surekha were introduced to the stage by their parents. They continued to be the breadwinners of their families, both before and after marriage. Moreover, the fact that they were married and don a *mangalsutra*<sup>624</sup> means a lot to them. This was because 'such' women are not normally married to one man; they also may have 'open' marriages. What could one ask about school and education for these Dalit women? Their schooling and education were their dancing and singing on stage. They had to move from village to village to perform and earn their livelihood. When life was on wheels how could they hope to attend school? And how was school or for that matter education going to affect them when they were already earning well. *Tamasha* was their business, feeding numerous families; they were

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<sup>620</sup> Surekha Punekar, 20 September 2004.

<sup>621</sup> *Lavani* is the folklorist singing with *adakari* (gestures) in the art-form of *tamasha*.

<sup>622</sup> Some like '*Ya Ravaji*,' '*Pikalya Panacha, deth kiti hirava*,' and so on are available on CDs sold in the market.

<sup>623</sup> Surekha Punekar, 20 September 2004.

<sup>624</sup> 'Mangalsutra' is the chain of black beads worn by married women as a sign of their wedlock.

handling it efficiently, though being kicked by one and all. They felt gnawed at not only by others, but by the own parents, siblings, and children. This is the life of Dalit dancers always in the 'public gaze' trying to safeguard her 'private.' This is the bind that I referred to in the preceding pages.

### **Reservations and Employment**

Dalits have the advantage of reservations for certain positions, but there were not enough positions to provide jobs for more than a few Dalits. For long time 70% to 80% of all seats were in the open category, and the upper caste who constitute 15% of the population were the ones that benefited most. What is more, over eighty-eight per cent of the reserved seats for Dalits in the public sector remain unfilled or are filled by other castes, and forty-five per cent of such positions in the state banks. A close examination of the caste composition of government services, institutions of education and other services, reveals an 'unacknowledged reservation policy' for upper-castes, particularly Brahmans, insidiously built into the system.<sup>625</sup> According to the National Commission on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR):

Of the total scheduled caste reservation quota in the Central Government, 54% remains unfilled, according to The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' report. Brahmans comprised 70% of the Class I officers in governmental services, though they represented only 5% of the population in 1989, At universities, upper-castes occupy 99% of the teaching posts in the social sciences and 94% in the sciences, while Dalit representation is a lowly 1.2 and 0.5 percent, respectively.<sup>626</sup>

Dalits tend to be placed in lower-grade positions. Their lower positioning in jobs has a history, in that in 1928 there were no Depressed Classes even as clerks in the

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<sup>625</sup> National Commission on Dalit Human Rights, Feb. 2006, available on <http://www.dalits.org/CasteRaceandWCAR.html>

<sup>626</sup> As available on <http://www.dalits.org/CasteRaceandWCAR.html>



Government service.<sup>627</sup> Even in 1942, the communal proportion in the Indian Civil Services reveals that while there were 363 Hindus, 109 Muslims, 9 Parsis, 11 Sikhs, and only 1 SC candidate.<sup>628</sup> The trend continues and Dalits are restricted to lower cadres. The NCDR goes on to note that: 'As on 1.1.2001 the position of the SCs in Central Government Services are as follows: SCs in Group A constitute 11.21%, group B 12.43%, group C 16.24%, group D 17.55% and the lowest category 60.45%.'<sup>629</sup> Dalits are thus concentrated in the lowest categories.

In a nutshell, reserved posts are often not filled, or those who are employed in such positions often suffer discrimination. While reservations have helped Dalits to enter the colleges and universities of their choice, it has not benefited them to the expected extent in the field of employment. On the whole, they have to gain such positions through their own initiative and by demonstrating their calibre. The situation is particularly difficult for Dalit women, who do not get any additional official provision along gender lines, and have to compete with Dalit men. Poonam Rokade thus told me of how she had entered this job market after her engineering degree. She was aware that she had to compete with Dalit men for any reserved posts she would apply for. She stated:

If you are facing a competition you have to take into consideration the requirements of the jobs. You should make efforts to improvise and have an edge over other candidates. The best would be selected given that the candidates do not use their influences. It is a cut-throat competition and we have to make greater efforts when we are racing with the 'other' [emphasis mine] candidates. Reservations helped to enter the colleges, but we have to struggle and prove our mettle to fetch good jobs. My father did not support me earlier; he did not think much about it. However, he

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<sup>627</sup> Ambedkar, 'Safeguards for Depressed Classes,' on behalf of the Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha to the Indian Statutory Commission, Submitted on 29 May 1928 (Bombay). As quoted from the *Times of India* (30 May 1928) and in BAWS, Vol. 2, p. 455.

<sup>628</sup> Ambedkar, 'Political grievances of SC,' Submitted on 29 October 1942, as in BAWS, Vol. 10, p. 418.

<sup>629</sup> As available on <http://www.dalits.org/CasteRaceandWCAR.html>, p. 37.

proudly talks about me being an engineer and an officer with the MSEB.<sup>630</sup> I am the only woman engineer in my department.<sup>631</sup>

Poonam thus brought to light the fierce competition not only with 'other' candidates, but within the Dalits themselves. This gives the lie to those who raise a hue and cry over supposed 'falling standards' due to reservations. Compensatory discrimination allows Dalits enter higher education; however unless they show their competence, initiative and work hard, they cannot as a rule take advantage of it in the sphere of public work.

There are many stories of the ways in which Dalit job applicants for reserved positions are discriminated against in various ways – some subtle and covert, some overt. My respondents told me of the pointed questions, the slurs, and the hidden agendas that they suffered in their quest for such posts. These have continued even when they have gained such employment. A famous Dalit economist reported that though he was nationally and internationally renowned in his work, he suffered the pangs of being a Dalit. On noticing the images of Ambedkar and Buddha in his office, his superior had said, 'Oh! I did not know [that] you are a Buddhist.' After this the superior changed his behaviour towards him.<sup>632</sup> Even Ambedkar, who fetched a Ph.D. from the prestigious American university, Columbia, could not escape these denigrations on his return to India.<sup>633</sup> Lalita Randhir told me in an interview:

They have troubled me and also said that I am a BC and do not know my job. They envied my promotion and said, '*kana magun aali ani tikhat zhali.*'<sup>634</sup> However, over the years, I have learnt [...] *mee jashas tase vagate* [give 'tit-for-tat'] and no one had dared to trouble me after that. *We should be taking pride in what we are; why deny*

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<sup>630</sup> M.S.E.B. stands for Maharashtra State Electricity Board.

<sup>631</sup> Poonam Rokade, 15 August 2004.

<sup>632</sup> This comes from the experiences of Narendra Jadhav. A friend was discussing this with me. 12 September 2006.

<sup>633</sup> Ambedkar 'Waiting for a visa,' in BAWS, Vol. 12, pp. 667-691.

<sup>634</sup> '*Kana magun aali, ani tikhat zhali,*' is a Marathi proverb which means—a substantial achievement despite entering the competition late.



*our identity?* That is *our* past on which we have built *our* present, struggling at every step and we are successfully building *our* futures.<sup>635</sup>

Women like Lalita are learning to fight the insults heaped on them. We should note the reiteration of ‘we,’ a community feeling in Lalita’s voice that is very significant for the Dalit community.

Kumud Pawde similarly wrote a heart-wrenching tale of her efforts to learn Sanskrit and later to fetch employment as a Mahari (belonging to Mahar caste) teacher of Sanskrit. She was ridiculed, avoided, discouraged to apply for jobs; however she eventually got a job due to her Maratha last name—Pawde, which she changed to after her marriage.<sup>636</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar pointed out the social stereotype of lazy Dalits and continued that she had to listen to all such taunts from her upper-caste colleagues.<sup>637</sup> Though marked by slurs regarding their untouchable background, some women like Urmila Pawar, Mrs. Kuchekar, Lalita Randhir, and others are ready to fight back. However, there are many who are silenced. How does one record such ‘silences?’

For Dalit women, their caste is compounded by their gender in this respect. The Dalit police inspector Kamal Jadhav faced such discrimination in her employment with the police services. She reported:

The bosses from other castes favour their candidates and so I could not get promotion for a long time. They spoiled my confidential report [service record] and that affected my service. Since we belong to lower backgrounds we have to work harder

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<sup>635</sup> Lalita Randhir, 22 May 2001. All emphasis is mine.

<sup>636</sup> Pawde, *Antahsphot*, p. 30-31. Kumud Somkuwar after marrying to Motiram Pawde became Kumud Pawde. The change of name after marriage is gendered and is patriarchal. Only women’s last names are automatically changed to their husband’s last name, it is never the other way around. However, recently there have been some changes in this trend. Some feminists take the first names of their father and mother as the last name, others take only their mother’s first name as their last name. For example, the noted activist writer Lata Pratibha (mother’s name) Madhukar (Father’s name). I have an anecdote in this respect: a friend who attempted to change her name and adopt her mother’s first name was prevented from doing so by her mother. According to her mother such an act would signify that the daughter (my friend) had no father. Thus, the presence and name of the father (man) is very significant.

<sup>637</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

as they already call us names. Even our community does not understand our problems. I used to commute daily and the officer from our caste used to complain that I was not punctual. They also try to transfer me to police stations in slums or ones which have less facilities. However, I have learnt to give back now.<sup>638</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, Kamal is an Assistant Commissioner of Police today. She noted the non-cooperation from caste men. She once again highlighted the debate of women being discouraged from taking up challenging jobs like administrative services, police, engineering, scientists and so on. Patriarchal norms have held that women do not have the calibre and commitment required for these masculine jobs. However, these arguments failed to take into account that this woman is not free of her psychological and physical duty towards her family, which comes first only for her and not the man.

This was precisely the phenomenon that most second-and-third generation Dalit women have experienced. They described their painful stories and ended with a sense of accomplishment, confidence, courage to stand, and most importantly to fight any oppression. This is the Dalit movement. These Dalit women and others downtrodden had come a long way in fighting atrocities. They were working hard everyday and dreaming of bright futures for their future generations.

Dalit men disliked this, often for sexist reasons. I note the agony of Dalit men when they have to compete against their women counterparts. These Dalit men (and all men) considered themselves to be 'primary' earners who had to strive to earn a living, and had to look after their families: parents, wife and children. They were of the opinion (as the trade union debate goes) that women (in this case, Dalit women) were secondary earners whose income was used for accumulating durable goods for a

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<sup>638</sup> Kamal Jadhav, 16 September 2001.



family. They were also very agitated over the reservations granted to women.<sup>639</sup> The first-generation learners were not bothered about these debates; however some second-generation and most third-generation learners reiterated such growing competition among Dalits themselves.

Some Dalit men often resented their wives for having good positions, preferring them to forego promotion so that she kept up with her domestic work. I interviewed one Ambedkarite who is the leader of the SC-ST teachers union at a college in Pune. On being asked about his wife's profession and advancement, he replied:

I am happy that my wife is working with a good bank. She is doing well; however, I do not approve of her promotions, advancing ahead at the cost of my family. I am a 'staunch Ambedkarite' [emphasis mine] and believe that my wife should take care of the family first.<sup>640</sup>

There was another such 'Ambedkarite' who said:

I already talked to my wife about her service and her promotions when I proposed to her. I did not and do not support her promotions as that would call on transfers to different places [even remote places] in the state. I want my family to be together, not scattered. Hence, I would not support promotions for her.<sup>641</sup>

Pointing to me, he further said, 'at least you are working for a cause, you are doing your bit; my wife does not even read anything, she does not have to do an M.Phil. or Ph.D. for that matter, so why bother. We are happy the way we are.' I was amazed with the use of the label 'Ambedkarite' that these men applied to themselves. It is a farce to hide behind Babasaheb Ambedkar to justify their selfish beliefs and motives, which called for holding back their 'better halves,' without taking into consideration the opinion of their wives.<sup>642</sup> Especially in the second case, this man controlled his

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<sup>639</sup> The government of India granted 33% reservations for women.

<sup>640</sup> Anonymous, in a talk at Fergusson College-Pune, 7 February 2002. I do not want to name him.

<sup>641</sup> Anon., in a talk at Yerawada-Pune, 2 July 2006. I do not want to name him.

<sup>642</sup> I deal with Ambedkar's postulates regarding marriage and rearing of children in Chapter 9.

wife's bank account, but he never showed his account to her. Nor did the wife have any courage to ask about it; that would be blasphemy. The prevailing attitude is that if the husband is promoted, it is natural for the wife to follow even if she has to give up her job. The same does not apply if it is the other way round.

### **Trends in Dalit Women's Employment**

This section of the chapter briefly surveys the dominant trends in the employment of working women while contextualising the social and cultural structure for the Dalit women. Most of them were clustered in low-paid and low-status occupations like teaching, nursing and clerical jobs. A few were Lecturers at city colleges. Teaching, being a feminised occupation, was very popular among my respondents. It was also easy to be a primary school teacher after some training, precisely as Ambedkar suggested. Teaching was also preferred due to its convenient schedule for family life.<sup>643</sup> The community supported such employment of women due to the myriad benefits mentioned above. These women reported that only a few families were not very supportive.

The rule that the higher the occupation, the fewer the women applies also in the Dalit case.<sup>644</sup> Very few Dalit women have entered medicine, business

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<sup>643</sup> I agree with Karuna Chanana's findings about the most noticeable trends in women's employment. The highest proportions of employed women are teachers. 'Their percentage of distribution in this and other professions in 1966 was: teachers, 74.70%; nurses, 7.10; clerks, 11.80; typists, 1.70; physicians, 1.00; and other professions, 2.45. See Chanana, *Interrogating Education*, p. 337., and original in Bhatti I and Bhatti Z., 'Demographic Portrait of Professional Women Employed in India', in Murial Wasi (ed.), *The Educated Women in Indian Society Today* (New Delhi, 1971), pp. 49-50., Government of India Report, *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India*, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare (New Delhi, 1975), p. 209.

<sup>644</sup> David Reisman puts it very aptly, 'therefore women are clustered either in low status occupations or in the lowest rungs of the prestigious professions. It is worth quoting Reisman's opinion about American women here: 'the rule is a simple one: the higher, the fewer [...]. Once they qualify, the higher-the-fewer rule continues to apply; the higher in terms of rank, salary, prestige, or responsibility, the fewer the number of women to be found. As quoted in Chanana, *Interrogating Education*, p. 337., and original in David Reisman, 'Some Dilemmas of Women's Education', in E.S. Maccia et al. (eds), *Women and Education* (Illinois, 1975). Even Stephanie Shaw points out that Black Women were not an exception to this rule, and they were/are found in feminised professions: they were nurses or librarians.



management, or other high-status jobs, or gained top positions in their institutions. There were only two who were in the police; one was a police officer and the other an Assistant Commissioner of Police. This is a reflection of the limited employment opportunities open to women.<sup>645</sup> Why were Dalits clustered/clumped in such low paying and low status jobs? Obviously, the vicious cycle of low quality education, lower levels of education, hindrances in accessing and in the process of employment, all contribute towards fixing Dalits in lower jobs. Historically the Dalits had been associated with low jobs, and this trend continued. Why this clamour against reservations for the Dalits when they are scarcely seen in higher positions and well-paying jobs?

Furthermore, is the constraint on women due to their preferences, lack of career orientation and commitment, or the discriminatory practices and recruitment policies followed by the employers in the public and private sectors? Perhaps the increase in the general level of education of women or efforts at equality had not led to greater employment among women.<sup>646</sup> Even an International Labour Organisation report mentioned that 'while formal discrimination is tending to disappear, informal policies and practices continue to persist.'<sup>647</sup> If this was the state of women in general, what happens to the 'Dalit of the Dalit,' Dalit women?

Very few of the Dalit informants had career goals. Sandhya Meshram, Dr. Jyoti Kadam, Dr. Shalini More, Meenakshi Jogdand and others were happy with their

Moreover, their commitment to providing a service and their skill at doing so determined their status as public sphere workers. See Shaw. *What a Woman Ought to Do and Ought to Be*, p. 130.

<sup>645</sup> A similar argument is made by Karuna Chanana, *Interrogating Education*, p. 340.

<sup>646</sup> I am drawing on Chanana's findings here. Chanana, *Interrogating Education*, p. 340.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340., and original in Government of India, *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the status of women in India*, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare (New Delhi, 1975).

jobs and thought that it was enough to take care of their families financially.<sup>648</sup>

Moreover, men's careers were highways, steadily rising and falling towards retirement, while women had to limit themselves due to their home responsibilities, child bearing and rearing and in-laws. 'Women are like *'trishankus'* bound between their careers and households and may be reluctant to devote the necessary time and energy to their career.'<sup>649</sup> Many had lost interest in venturing into newer arenas and seemed to have lost interest in struggling ahead.

Nonetheless, a few second and third generation learners had definite career goals and were doing well. Chanana argues that this was evident from the media reports on women in top positions in the corporate world. These reports indicated that women have the drive and the capacity to push to achieve top positions. However, such women were exceptions.<sup>650</sup> Dalit women are further exceptions, as they are shackled by both their caste and their gender.

## Conclusion

Employability to achieve a stable economic status was the major pursuit for getting these girls educated. Most of the first, second and third generation learners aimed for economic gains; however some second and third generation learners also aimed for intellectual advancement through education. Education for the earlier generation was about jobs above all, whereas now it was also about prestige.

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<sup>648</sup> Sandhya Meshram, 11 September 2004; Dr. Jyoti Kadam, 11 June 2002; Dr. Shalini More, 1 June 2002; Meenakshi Jogdand, 13 March 2002.

<sup>649</sup> I am once again drawing on Chanana's work. She is of the opinion that women do not want to drive single-mindedly to top jobs. This is true of even highly educated professional women such as doctors, university professors and so on. As a matter of fact, most of them are reluctant to describe themselves in career terms and continue to look upon themselves primarily as housewives and/or mothers. This is one of the reasons why they are reluctant to take on additional responsibilities, which require investment of time and energy beyond the time limits defined by their jobs. Chanana, 'The Trishankus: Women in the Professions in India,' in *Interrogating Education*, p. 356.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.



Most of the first-and second-generation respondents did not have ambitions for careers or a big future in employment. A few Dalit women trained themselves in different skills like typing, shorthand, and computer diplomas without any support. Further, they enrolled themselves in the employment exchange provided by the government to seek job opportunities. They tended to believe that it was not so much education as employment that had helped them most of all in their lives. Many of the first- and second-generation respondents appeared to have lost interest in venturing into new arenas and trying to better themselves. However, a few unmarried women, and some second and third-generation learners had thought of their careers, their future prospects and were doing very well. Thus there were some significant changing trends in the three generations of women.

Some of the respondents were silenced, and some of them expressed their agony in the face of caste discrimination in work places. Many a times they did not find a 'suitable' or 'healthy' atmosphere in their work place given their newly acquired education. Often, there was no obviously 'touch-me-not-ism,' overt discrimination; however there was ample covert discrimination.

I found that with increasing employment Dalit women were entering into the 'middle-classes.' Employment brought about many changes in the mental and physical make-up of most Dalit women: their rustic language changed to the nasal toned Marathi; their mannerisms with outsiders, guests changed, sometimes their last names changed, and most of the times their locality changed. These 'signifiers' certainly deserve an extended treatment. Markers of 'Dalithood' increasingly trouble such women. They did not want to be associated with their stigmatised background and they were increasingly attempting to wipe them away and mingle with the general population. This could lead to a split persona. To quote an example, one Dalit

feminist respondent spoke to me in a Brahmanised, nasal toned Marathi. However, I overheard her speaking to her daughter in the kitchen in her rural Marathi tone. Obviously, she was trying to impress me with her newly acquired tone, but she could not erase her 'natural' speech.

This chapter once again highlighted the changing trends in the three generations of women. Compared to the first and most of the second-generation women, some second and most third generation learners had greater financial independence. Some men said that they wanted the women of their families to progress, and that they co-operated with them in this. However, this co-operation rarely materialized in everyday practice. I will extend on these themes in my next chapter on marital relations. This chapter has investigated the *tarevarchi kasrat* of Dalit women at their work place, and the next deals with their *kasrat* within the home.



### Chapter 9: Experiences of Marriage and Child-Rearing

Leela Dube has stated: 'marriage is a most problem-ridden subject for study and action in the fields of welfare, law and social and cultural change.'<sup>651</sup> It certainly proved a difficult area of life for me to investigate in my interviews, because women were understandably reluctant to 'wash their dirty laundry in public.' Once I got to know my informants better after weaving around their school and college experiences, their parental stories, and their jobs; I delved into their experiences of marital lives and their rearing of children. Marriage cannot be an isolated phenomenon and it has to be treated in the specific social, cultural, economic and religious contexts: 'An awareness of the tremendous variation in the character of the institution can contribute to the development of criticality in outlook, to the opening up of the possibility of personal choice, and to the end of people's insistence on just one supposedly correct path.'<sup>652</sup> I agree with Dube and engaged my informants in a critical interrogation of such institutions, marriage in this case.

This chapter is devoted to the inter-linkage between education and the most intrinsic duties of universal womanhood, that of marriage and child rearing. Indian nationalists had valorised women as nurturers of man, and hence women were to be educated in order to play significant roles as social and cultural transmitters for the future generations.<sup>653</sup> Dalits were also to some extent imbued with this overarching agenda of education, and we shall in this chapter delve into the child rearing practices

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<sup>651</sup> Leela Dube, 'The Meaning and Content of Marriage in a Matrilineal Muslim Society', in Lotika Sarkar et al. (eds), *Between Tradition, Counter Tradition and Heresy: Contributions in Honour of Vina Mazumdar*, Centre for Women's Development Studies (New Delhi, 2002), p. 123.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>653</sup> See my discussion in Chapter 4, p. 84

of Dalit women, and their striving to build cultural 'capital'<sup>654</sup> in their children. This was not however the only goal for Dalit parents in educating their daughters, as I have already tried to show. One of their aspirations, as suggested by my informants, was so that they could fetch 'good husbands.' What were Dalit women's dreams of 'good' husbands? Their understanding of what constituted a 'good' marriage was often, I found, informed by a belief that Brahman households provided a model for 'egalitarian' and 'liberal' practice. They contrasted the oppressive patriarchy of the Dalit home with that of an idealised 'Brahmanical' family life. We shall investigate such beliefs and practices in this chapter, along with other specificities of the married lives of educated Dalit women. Further, is there a changing trend in marital relations over succeeding generations? I look first at the social and historical context before examining the marriage experiences of my informants.

### **Debates on marriage and child-rearing**

The social reformers of the latter part of the nineteenth century were affected by the deplorable social and economic status of women. I have already taken account of the efforts made by Jotirao Phule, M.G. Ranade, Ambedkar and other leaders to introduce schools in order to remedy the falling status of society. From the middle of the nineteenth century these pioneering male social reformers determinedly took up the task to educate women who could then influence the family. From the beginning of the twentieth century Dalit leaders were equally affected by the waves of this social reformation and made efforts towards schooling of not only Dalit boys, but also of Dalit girls. Conforming to the mainstream nationalist-reformist discourse, many Dalits believed that 'educating a girl meant educating a family.'

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<sup>654</sup> I am drawing upon Bourdieuan conjectures of 'capital.' I have already signalled the 'building' of this capital for Dalits in Chapter 1, 5, and 6, and in the second section of this chapter, I demonstrate this in Dalits' practice.



The four main agents of women's education, as of men's in British India, were Christian Missionaries, Indian social reformers, philanthropic foreigners interested in the cause of women, and the British government.<sup>655</sup> In the early twentieth century, some educated upper caste women also fought to improve the lives of women. The All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), established in 1926, organised 22 local conferences on education in different parts of the country between September and December 1926.<sup>656</sup> In the non-Brahman context, Shivram Janba Kamble, Kalicharan Nandagowli, Bhaurao Patil, V.S. Shinde, Ambedkar and others encouraged Dalit women's education. What was the motivation behind the promotion of education of women in general and Dalit women in particular? What advantages did these various reformers perceive in educating women, and what objectives prompted them to undertake it?<sup>657</sup>

Historically, from the age of the Shastras, women were believed to have an appreciable influence on children and their rearing. Furthermore, universally, women were considered crucial for home-making, housekeeping and socialisation of children. In this way women supposedly played a crucial role in society as whole. Male reformers of the nationalist period wanted women to be educated to provide fitting 'helpmeets' for the new class of Indian men.<sup>658</sup> Uma Chakravarti has rightly pointed out how education was viewed in this respect in instrumental terms, with women envisaged as class socialisers, better domestic managers and fitting helpmeets. Partha Chatterjee, in his paper entitled 'Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Colonized

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<sup>655</sup> Chanana, *Interrogating Education*, p. 90.

<sup>656</sup> Chanana, 'The Social Context of Women's education in India, 1921-47,' in her own *Interrogating Education*, p. 89.

<sup>657</sup> Chanana asks a similar question to the Nationalist agenda of education. Chanana, *Interrogating Education*, p. 92.

<sup>658</sup> Uma Chakravarti, 'Reconceptualising Gender: Phule, Brahmanism and Brahmanical Patriarchy', in *Gender and Nation* (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 273-291.

Women: The Contest in India,' has argued that for nationalist reformers the home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women were to take the responsibility for protecting and nurturing this space.<sup>659</sup> The Nationalists further sought to resolve the 'woman's question' by postulating that no matter what changes took place in the external conditions for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (feminine) nature, they must not become *essentially* Westernised. Though Chatterjee argued his case based on evidence drawn from the experiences of middle-class *bhadra mahila*, this was true for women across class and caste boundaries.<sup>660</sup>

Phule himself had a rather different agenda, and this had its impact on the later Dalit movement. He valued education for women not because then they would make good mates for men, but so as to provide a '*tratiya ratna*,' a third eye—the instrument by which a new mode of understanding of social relations and social oppressions would be acquired. This he saw to be particularly important for lower class women. For Phule, the educated could distinguish between good and bad, between what to accept and what to abandon, and expose the falsity of Brahmanhood.<sup>661</sup> Once this 'eye is opened,' the slave recognises slavery and s/he revolts against it, as later re-inscribed by Ambedkar.<sup>662</sup> Extending Phule's agenda, Ambedkar's aim was to educate Dalit women to a minimum level of matriculation, in order to emancipate them from social, economic, and religious entrapment, and to empower them in both the 'private' and

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<sup>659</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India, *American Ethnologist*, 16:4 (Nov, 1989), pp. 622-633. This paper has been published in many versions.

<sup>660</sup> Also see Chanana, *Interrogating Education*, p. 92, and original in G. H. Forbes, 'Women's movements in India: traditional symbols and new roles,' in M.S.A. Rao (ed.), *Social Movements in India*, Volume 2 (Delhi, 1979), pp. 162-163; Forbes, 'The Indian Women's movement: a struggle for women's rights or national liberation?' in Gail Minault (ed.), *The extended family: women and political participation in India and Pakistan* (1st edn, Columbia, Mo., 1981); Vina Mazumdar, 'The social reform movement in India: From Ranade to Nehru,' in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity* (New Delhi, c 1976), pp. 41-66.

<sup>661</sup> See works by Rosalind O'Hanlon, Gail Omvedt, Uma Chakravarti which I have mentioned earlier.

<sup>662</sup> I have already dealt with the Phuleite and Ambedkarite posulates on education in Chapters 1 and 4.



the 'public' spheres. He saw it as enabling them to find more fulfilling employment.<sup>663</sup> In this manner, he tied the 'personal' to the 'political.'<sup>664</sup>

Ambedkar's childhood experiences and his education at home and abroad had a great influence on him in this respect. His aunt was literate. Girls went to the military school that Ambedkar attended, so he was comfortable with girls and boys being educated together on equal terms. He also celebrated the modern city, in which, ideally, men and women lived and worked together in conditions of equality.

In a speech given at Elphinstone College in 1938, Ambedkar advised parents to stop child marriages. The vicious and brutal practice of child marriage, which had afflicted the upper caste-class Hindus, was equally prevalent among Dalits. In 1942, Ambedkar attended the Depressed Classes Mahila Parishad (Women's Conference) at Nagpur, held under the Presidentship of Mrs. Donde. He once again attacked child marriages, and said that young people be economically independent before getting married. He also suggested that they should not have too many children. The 'Depressed Classes' under Ambedkar took a further leap and proposed that the age of marriage be fixed at a minimum of 22 for boys and 16 for girls.<sup>665</sup> The Mahar Panch Committee after considering the problematic custom of dowry resolved that the expenses at marriage should not exceed a maximum of sixteen rupees.<sup>666</sup> This was a very significant move, as a large lethal dowry could create a huge debt for the girl's father.

The custom of dowry, which was reinforced by the Brahma Marriage Act of 1873, not only affected the upper castes but also some Dalits. The Dalits and other

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<sup>663</sup> Also see Chapter 4.

<sup>664</sup> Scholars like Eleanor Zelliot, Pratima Pardeshi shed light on this. See Pratima Pardeshi, 'The Hindu Code Bill for the Liberation of Women,' in Anupama Rao (ed.), *Caste and Gender* (New Delhi, 2003), p. 360.

<sup>665</sup> *Bahiskrit Bharat*, 1927 as in Pawar and Moon, *Amhihi Itihaas Ghadavala*, p. 88.

<sup>666</sup> Pawar and Moon, *Amhihi Itihaas Ghadawala*, p. 89.

lower classes became indebted through paying dowries, in turn even losing their daughters. The struggle to build up parental finances towards the dowry made a girl child undesirable and triggered female infanticide. However, almost all of my lower and higher educated respondents stressed that they did not pay any dowry. They sometimes 'gifted' the groom a gold chain or ring or some cash. Dowry and exchange of gifts has once again become customary as Dalits are moving into the middle classes. Perhaps very few middle class Dalits would deny this marking of affluence. Further, the Mahar wedding was to be according to simple rites, which did away with the Brahman priest, too. So this measure in turn made the untouchables appoint their own priests at a lower cost. All this went to building up great confidence in the Dalits in general, and Dalit women in particular.

Ambedkar argued that 'women had been denied the right [of marriage and the age/time of marriage] and the right to choose their husband too.' Ambedkar opined that 'a woman was an individual and she had her own rights which had to be respected.'<sup>667</sup> He also pointed out that parents always took into consideration the man's opinion of the woman he wanted in his life; however, nobody bothered about the woman, and many a times beautiful girls had been made to the knot with ugly men. Ambedkar was distinctive due to his scientific and rational temper, which made him bestow individualism on Dalit women who had been subjugated for ages. Only a few male Indian social reformers such as Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar granted such power/agency to women in general and Dalit women in particular. Ambedkar wanted women to have the right to determine their marriages; moreover, he demanded that 'others' respect this right and act accordingly. The Dalits have in general taken a long time to come around to such a view. I noted that few first-and only some second-

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid., p. 89.



generation educated women enjoyed the right to choose their partners. The trend nonetheless changed with most of the second and third generation learners. These women were granted some freedom to 'choose' their husbands.

Conjugality in both the Brahman and Victorian sense is based on the apparent absolutism of one partner and the total subordination of the other. Just as the king reigned over his dominion, so the head of the household (*karta*) ruled over his household. The *karta*, therefore, becomes within the home what he can never aspire to be outside it—a ruler, an administrator, a legislator or a chief justice, a general marshalling his troops.<sup>668</sup> Tanika Sarkar argues:

For the Hindu Nationalist conjugality was one relationship that seemed most precisely to replicate colonial arrangements. It called upon the establishment of moral superiority of [the] one over the other. Success in this endeavour was thought to lend political strength to the opposition against reformist-cum-colonial-cum-missionary intervention into conjugality. The Hindu revivalists conceived conjugality as an embryonic nation, and this relationship could also define ingrained Hindu dispositions that might mirror or correct or criticize and overturn the values structuring colonialism.<sup>669</sup>

Though nationalists thus tied conjugality to the nationalist agenda, leaders like Gandhi and Ambedkar undermined this Hindu ideal by bringing women out into the public sphere of politics. Furthermore, Ambedkar believed in man-woman equality, believing that the problems of society and the family had to be tackled alongside each other.

Keeping with his scientific and liberal values, Ambedkar called upon Dalit women to attend conferences and participate in the struggle. This ignited their conscience, their consciousness and enabled their interaction with other women. They could thus learn from shared experiences. Participation by women also strengthened

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<sup>668</sup> Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 38-39.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

the movement by mobilising a group that had hitherto remained silent. For Ambedkar, 'marriage was a liability.' Furthermore, at the 1942 Mahila Parishad in Nagpur he said, 'don't thrust it [marriage] on your girls, it *hinders* [my emphasis] a girl's progress. After marriage a woman should be an equal partner and a friend of her husband. She should not be the slave of the husband.'<sup>670</sup> Ambedkar was not thus opposed to marriage, so long as it was entered into at a relatively mature age. In this way, it would not impede a girl's educational progress. He also expected a relationship of friendship and equality in married couples. He wanted them to be equal partners in the Western sense. These partners were to maintain the same stance when they enter organizations, too. Nonetheless, he also believed that a married woman should focus on fulfilling their family role first and foremost. He sought to link the emancipation of Dalit women through education with the internal transformation of the culture and ethos of the family, thus making the personal political. He envisaged ways in which they could do this while at the same time supporting the movement. In his Mahad speech in 1938, he asked women to refuse to cook carrion for their men. He also instructed Dalit women not to tolerate or cooperate with their men folk if they act against the decided pledge of the community.<sup>671</sup> This emphasis tended, however, to once more inscribe a separation between the 'private' and 'public' spheres of life, confining women largely to the former. This created paradoxes for women within the movement.

Ambedkar's fight against atrocities towards women was also reflected in the vows of the neo-Buddhists. He embraced Buddhism at a meeting in 1956, in which he gave twenty-two vows to the Buddhists. The freedom and access to knowledge for

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<sup>670</sup> Pawar and Moon, *Amhihi Itihaas Ghadawala*, p. 89.

<sup>671</sup> Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, pp. 70-71, 104-105.



women encoded in Buddhism played a significant role for Dalit women. One of the vows, 'I shall abstain from alcohol' protected women who are subjected to the violence of alcoholic husbands. Dalit working class men frequently drowned themselves in alcohol and beat up Dalit women, so the embracing of Buddhism was a new hope to Dalit women. Ambedkar asked women not to feed their spouses and sons if they were drunkards. He was of the opinion that the new religion would definitely render better and equal justice to women. He said that it was Buddha who gives equal status to women alongside men and that Buddha was a pioneer in the cause towards women's liberation: 'Manu, in fact was responsible for the degradation of women.'<sup>672</sup> This call of Ambedkar is reinforced even today. The Buddhist women at the 'Dhammadiksha Suvarna Jayanti Bauddha Mahila Sammelan,' (Golden Jubilee of the Conversion to Buddhism, Buddhist Women's Conference) held in Nagpur on 10 October 2005, praised the man-woman equality in Buddhism and invited Buddhists to live up to this humanitarian ideal.

This 'Aristotle of the Dalits'<sup>673</sup> clearly understood that there was an inverted ratio between the size of a family and poverty, and argued that large numbers of children in a family hindered the progress of the Depressed Classes. In those days, it was common to find from three to seven children, or more, in Dalit families. In his speech in 1938 to the students at Elphinstone College, he said that 'the responsibility of family planning was for both, the woman and the man. A child was to be cared for and educated.'<sup>674</sup> Ambedkar underlined that so far as children were concerned, quality

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<sup>672</sup> Ambedkar, *The rise and fall of Hindu women* (Calcutta, 1950) and as Reprinted (Hyderabad, 1965), p. 18, esp. see pp. 14, 18-25. Ambedkar examines Manu and his *Manu Smriti* which imposes various disabilities on women. Also see Ambedkar, 'The Woman and the Counter-Revolution,' in BAWS, Vol. 3, Chapter 17, pp. 429-437.

<sup>673</sup> Upendra Baxi, 'Emancipation as Justice: Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy and Vision,' *Ambedkar and Social Justice* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1992).

<sup>674</sup> Ambedkar, in M. P. Mangudkar, *Dr. Ambedkar and family planning* (Poona, 1976), p. 63.

should be placed before quantity. He argued that the survival rate of children (and women) was more important than the birth rate, and birth control would go a long way in improving the health and financial condition of the Scheduled Castes. He asked: 'what was more important; the birth-rate or survival rate?'<sup>675</sup> He steered a non-official resolution regarding measures for birth control in the Bombay Legislative Assembly on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938. He drew the attention of the party in power to some of the fundamental problems in the country in general and Bombay Presidency in particular.<sup>676</sup> In another speech in Bombay of December 1938, he stated:

Several of you might have got married. But what are you going to do after marriage? A heavy responsibility rests on your shoulders. I had a very poor childhood and my parents gave birth to 14 children. I went to Elphinstone bare-footed and used my father's torn coat. I hold my father responsible for all this misery. Now this responsibility rests on you as well as on women. You should see that what I speak is meant, not only for males, but also for females. This is a matter of social welfare and you should think deeply about it. How far will you provide education and other facilities to 5-6 issues [children]? So you should consider that leading a life like a brute is against humanity.<sup>677</sup>

Ambedkar also referred to the problem of over-population in the election manifesto of his Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1936 and stated that over-population was the major cause of poverty in India. Perhaps the ILP was the only party that incorporated this view in its election manifesto.<sup>678</sup>

Leaders like Gandhi were opposed to any artificial means for birth control, placing their faith in self-control. Some members of the Hindu Mahasabha, Muslims, and Catholics – though not Christians in general – also opposed birth control.

Ambedkar analysed this issue in economic rather than moral terms, and this placed

<sup>675</sup> Ambedkar, in Mangudkar, *Ambedkar and family planning*, p. 6.

<sup>676</sup> Ambedkar, in Mangudkar, *Ambedkar and family planning*, p. 1.

<sup>677</sup> Extract from the speech delivered by Ambedkar on 12 December 1938, Bombay, as in *Janata* (17 December 1938) and quoted in Mangudkar, p. 63-64.

<sup>678</sup> This bill, which was later included in the manifesto was presented by Prabhakar Roham in the legislative assembly. See Mangudkar, *Ambedkar and family planning*, pp. 15-16.



him apart from such contemporaries. In fact, only he and Periyar in South India seem to have understood the gravity of this problem at that time. In arguing this, Ambedkar placed great confidence in the masses, asserting that though illiterate they were intelligent enough to understand their interests. However, Ambedkar was too busy to pay much attention to this issue, and he was opposed strongly by many of the upper caste people of Maharashtra.

Ambedkar never tolerated injustice towards women. Pawar and Moon have cited an example of his boldness in this respect:

A party worker in Solapur was going to marry a second time at the age of 56. The reason being, that he could not have children. Ambedkar asked him, “you cannot produce a child, if a fault lies with you, you cannot produce a child. If your wife thinks of marrying another man for this, will you tolerate that? A woman also wants a child like you, probably her desire is more.”<sup>679</sup>

This was a challenging question, and it revealed that once again he could be considered the true heir to Phule in questioning Dalit men for their covert and overt maltreatment of women. In fact, it was Phule, some exceptional women like Tarabai Shinde<sup>680</sup> (a Maratha woman of the late nineteenth century), and Ambedkar who took upper caste and lower caste men to task for ignoring the feelings of women. Few other social reformers had the imagination or empathy to raise such question about childbirth and the wishes of the woman in this respect. Children were assumed by most to be an inevitable part of marriage, with men taking for granted women’s ‘natural’ order regarding their duty of reproduction and child rearing. In many cases,

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<sup>679</sup> Pawar and Moon, *Amhihi Itihaas Ghadawala*, p. 91.

<sup>680</sup> See Tarabai Shinde, *Stree Purush Tulana* (literally Balancing wo/men), reprinted by (Sumedh Prakashan, Pune, 2004). Tarabai Shinde’s essay *Stree-Purush Tulana* was first published in Marathi in 1882, questioned the atrocities of upper and lower caste men to women.. Rosalind O’Hanlon provides a far-reaching discussion of this essay in her introduction to the translation into English, *A Comparison between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 1-71.

women don this mantle themselves, thus absolving men of having to consider the matter.

Drawing upon these Ambedkarite propositions in relation to Dalit women's marital lives, I observed that some of my first and second-generation informants restricted their number of children in contrast with their parents, and most of the second and third-generation respondents restricted the number of children to two children or even just one child per household. The Meshrams, Waghmares, and Ranpises all had only one child. In general, however, most Dalits, like non-Dalits, continued to desire for a male child, and this led to birth-rates that were above the ideal number – as promoted in many Indian government slogans – of two children per family. The high number of children amongst many poor Dalit families worsened their socio-economic conditions and over-burdened them financially. Perhaps, Ambedkar's justification for the 'quality' of children has not yet penetrated some Dalit minds. In some cases parents desire a girl-child and hence produce more children. Kumud Pawde remarked, 'in those days it was all right to have more children. I was craving for a daughter, and I could have her only after three sons, hence four children.'<sup>681</sup>

Thus Ambedkar put forth some daring postulates, which are in accord with those of many modern feminists. Paradoxically, he could not escape the Victorian/Hindu image of the traditional 'power' and 'purity' of womanhood, as seen in the mother situated in the home environment. In the rest of this chapter, I shall not try to be too analytical about the experiences of Dalit women in their marital lives. Rather, I shall quote housewives and others at length so as to convey a sense of the emotional interplays that marriage aroused in a girl's and a woman's psyche.

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<sup>681</sup> Kumudtai Pawde, 16 October 2005.



## Dalit Wives

It was not, I found, easy to gain an insight into the married lives of Dalit women. It was difficult to question them about their husbands in the presence of the in-laws and husbands. Some of them talked about these relations only when the interview was towards the end, after they had become comfortable talking to me. Sometimes it took me several hours, at times several meetings, to obtain such information. I underline that my Dalit background was probably very helpful here in entering into such sequestered spaces in the lives of Dalit women.

One anonymous informant could not control her tears. Her husband was encircling us to check if his wife abused him in the course of the interview. The respondent found that she could not speak freely in his presence and she took me to her bedroom where she could talk to me unhindered. Such is the difficulty of talking about married life. Others suggested that such topics were out of bounds, citing in a critical tone the autobiography of Urmila, a Dalit woman, who has described in it her first married night.<sup>682</sup> They condemned her for her lack of propriety and discretion. Nonetheless, Urmila herself expressed in her interview with me that she was not ashamed of what she had said. A few like Hirabai Kuchekar were very shy.<sup>683</sup>

Not all interviews were so difficult. Some Dalit women informants who had very determinedly struggled throughout their lives melted instantly when they were asked about their marital lives. They reflected back, remembered their marriage and narrated their stories of the early years and their happy daily grind. This part of the interview aroused very different emotions: joy, sorrow, compromise, adjustment, rebellion, peace, and so on. A few women share all their fantasies about marriage and

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<sup>682</sup> Urmilatai Pawar, 6 September 2004. Also see her autobiography *Aaydaan*.

<sup>683</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

men as they had found an ear – a Dalit heart – that would listen to them. Such was Manini Pawar, a second generation informant, who could not control herself and spoke at great length about her expectations of her marriage and her disappointments.<sup>684</sup> She said that she was struggling to lead a peaceful, healthier and happier married life. A few were very straightforward about their marital relationship, like Kumud Pawde, who expressed with delight, ‘he did not accept me, I accepted him.’<sup>685</sup>

Malavika Pawar was a second-generation woman with a Bachelors in Education and Masters in Sociology. She lives in Mumbai. She had had a ‘love-marriage,’ involving a relationship with her present husband before they became married. She talked about the alternative marriage that was about to be forced on her by her parents who did not approve of this relationship, or even the idea of a love-marriage. However, they had to accede to Malavika’s wishes when she took an overdose of sleeping pills. This spoke immensely about the rigid rules of endogamous marriage; caste/religion were important even for the middle class Buddhists. Malavika further reported that it was slightly difficult to adjust to her North Indian in-laws; however, she has a friendly relationship with her husband, as opposed to her parents’ relationship:

I do find a lot of difference between my parents and my marital life. There was no friendship in their relation. I think it was that generation, those times when the love relationship was ironed out. However, I do think that my parents did have a good relation on the whole. My father was less educated than my mother. They had ego problems. They never sat calmly together to handle any problems, the way we do. Husbands dominate universally; *purushpradhan sanskruti aahech* [patriarchy is a

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<sup>684</sup> Manini Pawar, 5 September 2004.

<sup>685</sup> Kumud Pawde, 16 October 2005.



prevalent phenomenon]; but at least my husband sits besides me and takes efforts to make me understand.’<sup>686</sup>

Thus Mala suggested there has been a difference in marital relationships over the generations. Marriage was more a companionable affair in most of the second-and-third generation respondents. Malavika also did not find any difference between her marital life and an upper-caste marital life. I saw her working swiftly and adroitly that evening and morning handling cooking, cleaning, kids, her computer and the maid. In her, I could see the life of a working Mumbaikar woman, at home, on the train, on the bus, in the office and back to the home. She said she was ‘fine’ with her in-laws and her husband. Such words ‘fine,’ and ‘good,’ blanket all the myriad experiences and emotions. They leave some blanks/gaps and call in for the researcher’s judgement. Malavika admitted that patriarchy is a universal phenomenon, and she accepted her subordinate position as any other woman.

In contrast to Malavika’s life was her sister Manini’s, who had been married for three years. Manini spoke at length about her marital life and disappointment with her husband. Manini suggested:

It was an arranged marriage. It was rosy in the beginning as it always is. However, I realize how I slog everyday. He will never say or offer any help with housework; now it is difficult to end these bad habits. I always compromise because I do not want any fights. In my childhood I did not understand the gravity, sensitivity and intensity of this. I blamed my mother then. However, I understand it when I face it, *prakarshane janavate mala* [understand in good light]. I want to be with him.<sup>687</sup>

Manini was trying to balance the *tarevarchi kasrat* of her life by balancing her interests, job, husband, and the home. Manini’s prime responsibility was to run the household because her husband was a freelancer and had no regular income.

Furthermore, I noted that women were always concerned about the health and calm of

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<sup>686</sup> Mala Pawar, 6 September 2004.

<sup>687</sup> Manini Pawar, 5 September 2004.

home. Why did the men not think of this? Why did women compromise unendingly? Sometimes the men failed to understand women; this led to avoidance, neglect and maybe some kind of dislike. Manini's husband also did not like her mixing with other men. While men were free birds, patriarchy bound women in the private and the public.

How did education play a role in all this? Most of my educated Dalit informants were married to educated Dalit men. There were very few inter-caste marriages. As a rule, the husbands were better educated than their wives. Though possibly misguided, some Dalit parents believed that their daughter's marriage to educated and employed Dalit would bring prosperity to her. In a similar vein Dalit men wanted Dalit women to be good companions. The lower-middle-and-middle-class, educated Dalit men wanted educated, sufficiently trained women to rear their children and nurture their progeny. The Buddhist matrimonial advertisements speak about men seeking graduates or university educated women who are also in employment. Therefore education and employment are prime factors for a Dalit woman's successful marriage bid, and this is a big step towards the acquiring of middle class status for these families. The second-and-third generation respondents mainly fall into this category.

Maya,<sup>688</sup> Manini, Malavila, Urmila and many others agreed that education served as a good qualification to find some educated and well-employed men. But, beyond that it seemed all had to contend with similar forces of domination 'inside' and 'outside' the home that women could not escape. Hence these women were Dalits to Dalits. However, to some extent they were more liberated than their parents, and

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<sup>688</sup> Maya Mane, Buddhist, Class 12, Magician, Goregaon-Mumbai, 8 September 2005. Urmilatai directed me to this magician, flautist, *tabla* player mother of two daughters. Mayatai lives in an affluent society. I thank her for her generous hospitality; I interviewed her and stayed at her place that night, because it was too late to travel when we finished the interview at 2 am.



Mala and Manini both agreed to this fact when they compared their lives with their parents.

Some women argued that education did not play a constructive role in marital life, feeling that uneducated couples got along better than the educated ones. Dr.

Shalini More thus stated:

I do not think education plays any role in marital life, it is basically your understanding, your sharing, cooperation that matters. Were my parents educated? No. [Still they lived happily]. My husband comes home, relaxes, watches TV and at times we go out. I think that a woman must be very understanding and adjusting if she wants her family to be happy and do well. She is the one responsible for it.<sup>689</sup>

Women such as Shalini More underlined that in marriage it was the woman who had above all to give understanding, co-operation and compromise, and that education made this harder to swallow.

While Maya had her share of love, Padma Nikam was totally deprived of it by her husband. She showered all her love on her children, her *chapha* (jasmine) tree and most significantly her association with *feriwalya* (hawkers).<sup>690</sup> She did not talk about her married life the way she talked about her social projects. She went silent when I asked about her husband. Only after we had spent three hours talking about her career from *bhajipoli wali bai* (a lunch box maker) to President of the Hawker's Union of Maharashtra did she tell me:

I do not have time to cry for Padma Nikam. I feel for the *chapha* tree that is alone, he [the tree] is alone today. He wanted me to take care of him. I had got some companion in life for once [...]. If it was any male, people would have called me names. I always feel departed from him, he was something to me, *tyacha thararana, paavsaat bhijana* [his shiver, his drenching in the rain]; he was like a yogi standing there all alone. It was awful to see him in the blazing sun, at times only very red

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<sup>689</sup> Dr. Shalini More, Buddhist, M.B.B.S. (Doctor), Sinhagad Road-Pune, 1 June 2002.

<sup>690</sup> Padma Nikam, a second generation, 22 October 2005.

flowers, at times, leaves, small leaves, no flowers [...]. He was beautiful in that too, just blooming.<sup>691</sup>

Padma loved that tree; she showered her love on it and then she broke into tears. She told me that it was the tree she talked to, that she doted on and felt for. Padma Nikam was a fighter throughout her life. She engaged herself in the business of selling eatables and owned two stalls.

Some Dalit womens' voices re-inscribed the existence of the vices of polygamy and of marrying for more children, which were prevalent in society. While women were meant, in Hindu custom, to remain in a marriage for life, men were free to take more than one wife if they had the means or inclination to do so. The indissolubility of a marriage was, in effect, binding on the women alone. Tanika Sarkar has thus reported the words of a widow: 'according to Hindu law, a wife cannot leave the husband, but the husband may leave her whenever he wants to.'<sup>692</sup> Even the so-called Buddhists maintain such Hindu practice. Such are the dilemmas of some Dalits.

One anonymous<sup>693</sup> respondent's husband was absent, because he had left her and married another woman. However, the middle class status of this informant did not allow her to do away with her '*mangalsutra*,'<sup>694</sup> she donned it for her safety, inside and outside the Dalit community. She continued to be regarded as her unfaithful husband's property. She became very emotional and continued:

Every man has two women in his life, one is the actual one and the other is the dream woman. He always has a Madhuri Dixit [a female film star] in his mind, someone whom he likes. He does not talk to his wife though. That is his goddess. That cannot

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<sup>691</sup> Padmatai Nikam, 22 October 2005.

<sup>692</sup> Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, p. 207.

<sup>693</sup> I do not want to reveal the names of some respondents in order to maintain my trust with them.

<sup>694</sup> This is the chain of beads in order to signify a wedlock. Also see Chapter, 7, p. 204 where I discuss the life of *tamasha* dancers who wore such thick *mangalsutras*. This was to signify their monogamous marriage.



be spoken but he is so happy with her in his own mind. Yes, women too have it. And if men go to the bar, nowadays, the employed women can go to hotels. Again a woman has *maryada* [literally-limits], man does not. My husband drank liquor; I was beaten up and kicked even when I was pregnant. Later when children started growing older, I had an attack of TB and was operated on. My husband was already with another woman by then and he lives with her, has children too. He visits us sometimes, but there is nothing between us. I just remember.<sup>695</sup>

Such women were very happy that they had found someone to talk to them about their lives. They simply refused to let me go away, and they continued to talk about their beatings, about their suppressed lives and their daily fights.

Many Dalit women felt that 'Brahman households were different.' This was intriguing as many Brahman women believe in turn that they are the ones who suffer the most oppressive forms of patriarchy, and that lower caste women have always had the privilege of being allowed to move freely about in public. It was mainly in the context of married life that these Dalit women praised the Brahman woman and their households. Shalini More, Smita Khedkar, and many others felt that they had a lot to learn from Brahmans, including their marital lives.<sup>696</sup> Dr. Shalini More said:

Brahman women are more dominating. In our families the males always tell how the wives are incompetent, dependent and discourage, *tula hey samajnaar nahi, tu nahi karu shaknaar hey* [you will not understand this, you will not be able to do this]. Children listen to this and say the same to the mother. Maybe the next generation will do something.

Shalinitai seemed very disturbed by the treatment meted out to her by her sons and her husband. She, along with others, suggested that the educated Dalit men should be called upon to take cognisance of the 'mental' and 'symbolic' violence, and moreover the gender oppression that they were subjecting Dalit women to. As it was, Shalini's

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<sup>695</sup> Anon., Mumbai, 22 October 2005.

<sup>696</sup> Shalini More, 1 June 2002; Smita Khedkar, Buddhist, B.A., job-searching, Ramnagar-Pune, 11 February 2002. I had seen Smita as a school girl. She was also a resident of Yerawada and moved to the middle class and upper class Ramnagar society on Alandi Road-Pune.

Dalit husband and sons treated this highly educated woman her in a way analogous to the behaviour of the upper castes towards the Dalits.

However, a few women like Amita Pillewar, Suvarna Kuchekar, Janhavi Chavan, Prakshoti Pawar, Meena Ranpise and others thought that there was no difference between the Brahman families and theirs. Brahman families also had strong patriarchal arrangements and fights, but they felt that Brahman households had women dominating to a greater extent. Moreover, they agreed that as Dalits they did not have to suffer the practices of dowry, of purdah, of enforced widowhood like the upper caste women. They did not think of themselves lower than the Brahman woman in any sense.

The second and third generation of unmarried women hoped to find educated, understanding, and co-operative companions. However, they noted the great difficulty of finding such males. Dr. Swati Waghmare responded:

I think education makes a great difference. My home atmosphere is very different. Furthermore, mother's education makes a big difference. She can speak to some extent and influence her husband and children. There has to be an understanding. A few educated and settled Dalit boys proposed to me. They were doctors and engineers who wanted their wives to be at home. I instantly refused them. This is a mentality with some of them even today. What is the use of studying then, and my degree will be otherwise wasted if I don't put it to use. The other families from the upper classes have a different atmosphere, *saunskar* [cultural traits], and the parents are very co-operative.<sup>697</sup>

While Swati was talking about herself, her mother interrupted:

However, with the Brahmans the situation is different. The males are dominated and they see to it that they also dominate their wives by taking them into confidence and making them do what they themselves want, in a comfortable manner, using their

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<sup>697</sup> Dr. Swati Waghmare, 12 November 2004.



sweet tongue. Our males fight and their ego is very big. They will not touch housework and expect things to be done fast.<sup>698</sup>

The Buddhist matrimonial advertisements and Buddhists whom I spoke to talked of having employed partners; however, there were still a significant number of 'well-educated' men who wanted their women to be at home and look after them and their children. They regarded the educated and unemployed wife as a better nurturer than an illiterate and employed one. Perhaps some men believe that an educated and employed woman develops '*shinga*' (literally, 'horns to fight') as perfectly put by Urmila Pawar.<sup>699</sup> Swati's mother approved of Dalit women's subjugation. Suvarna Kuchekar agreed that many a times male education was only on paper and not in the mentality. Some men simply acquired higher degrees.<sup>700</sup> Nonetheless, most of these women agreed that the atmosphere was changing.

Some women of what should have been a marriageable age were still waiting to get married. Some had been rejected on many occasions due to their age. Suvarna reasoned that, 'people have all kinds of doubts; they think that I must have some fault and hence did not get married earlier.'<sup>701</sup> Such are the woes of some highly educated and well-employed respondents.

It was a Sunday when I visited Lalita Randhir, a well educated and employed woman. However, she is physically handicapped, and that perhaps is the reason why she was married to a man less educated than her. I saw her working hard in the kitchen, while calling her daughter for a bath, asking her son if he was studying and asking her husband to fill the pots with water. She reiterated that education made a lot

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<sup>698</sup> Dr. Swati Waghmare's mother, 12 November 2004. I could not continue my interview with her as she was busy.

<sup>699</sup> Urmilatai Pawar, 7 September 2004.

<sup>700</sup> Suvarna Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

<sup>701</sup> Suvarna Kuchekar, 8 January 2002. Also see my discussion in Chapter 3, pp. 58, 78-79, in order to understand the specificity of Dalit women's problems.

of difference to their marriages; and their husbands helped them in sharing responsibilities:

My husband helps me at times, getting vegetables, filling water in the kitchen, very rarely though. He takes up the children's studies sometimes. We also fight but then we sit and find out what went wrong. Yesterday only we celebrated twenty years of our marriage.<sup>702</sup>

This was a rare case where the husband was less educated than his wife. Some men feared marrying highly educated women, moreover, women who were more highly educated than them.

Most second-and-third generation informants like Prakshoti Pawar wanted men who would understand them and work along with them:

I don't want a repetition of the things in the community today. In my family also there is understanding and quite a free atmosphere. My father does help my mother to some extent. But in other SC families the males are kings, but their women are not queens.<sup>703</sup>

Prakshoti argued that she had come across couples from upper castes that did not have a good understanding despite education.

Some women work like bullocks<sup>704</sup> inside and outside the home. I noted this domestic slave in one Mayoress:

I wake up at 4-4.30 am. My husband is with the railways. He works in Mumbai. He is a suburban guard. I am engaged in cooking, washing, bathing my mother-in-law, as she is incapable of doing it herself, after I wake up. I prepare my children's breakfast and leave the house at 10 am and return only at 9 pm. My family supports [*sic*] me a lot.<sup>705</sup>

Such were Rajanitai's ideals of motherhood. When this lady talked to me one over-smart male assistant raised his eyebrows. Perhaps he thought, 'oh, what a Question

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<sup>702</sup> Lalita Randhir, 22 May 2001.

<sup>703</sup> Prakshoti Pawar, 10 April 2002.

<sup>704</sup> See my discussion in Chapter 8, p. 190.

<sup>705</sup> Rajni Tribhuwan, Class 10, Mayoress, Pune Municipal Corporation Office-Pune, 13 November 2005



and what an Answer!’ While this lady enthusiastically recorded her activities at home and outside, this man whose face turned wry perhaps thought, ‘why does this lower caste Mayoress have to talk about her daily routine [here, in the Mayor’s office]? Every woman does it, a Mayor is not different; moreover, what is the big point in voicing all this.’ I noted that the assistants who surrounded the Mayoress were upper caste men who were diplomatically dictating terms to her. She was merely a pawn of the ruling party MLA who had ‘gifted’ her that chair and also of these men who controlled not only her moves but also her voice. They made her understand issues the way they wanted them to be handled. This was the oppression of a woman, moreover a Dalit woman who could not have much say, though she is invested with a position that should enable her to speak.

Nani declared that women acted as maids for their husbands; however she paid her respect to the men of the family men by instantly pulling her *padar* (in this context, a veil) over her head in their presence.<sup>706</sup> She refused to face them and turned away immediately if men stepped inside. Meera Jangam’s mother had her share of life; a drunkard husband and beatings everyday.<sup>707</sup> Despite slogging everyday for the families, these women did not receive any love, understanding, care or warmth. They were beaten up unnecessarily; sometimes the husbands got very violent and almost killed them. Mothers did not always support their daughters against their husbands in this. Perhaps they thought that, ‘a married woman’s place was with her in-laws, at her husband’s feet,’ as set out in the Hindu Shastras. Women often support, though sometimes reluctantly, all the men’s actions; whether it was beatings or marital rape. However, there were exceptions to this rule. Shantabai Kamble’s autobiography

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<sup>706</sup> Nani, 20 May 2000.

<sup>707</sup> Mrs. Gaikwad, Class 3, Staff at pre-school, Yashwantnagar-Pune, 1 August 2004.

illustrates that Shantabai's parents took a firm stand against their eldest son-in-law. Even when Shantabai's husband wanted to marry a second time for no reason, her brother and father protected her. They asked her husband to give up the second woman if he wanted to be with Shantabai. They also asked him not to trouble Shantabai.<sup>708</sup>

I noted some feminist streaks in a few women like Urmila Pawar and Kumud Pawde, whose responses flowed expressively as a result of their awareness of my project and their own experiences.<sup>709</sup> I discover how the picture changed from love, to no love. Urmila mentions all such incidents in her autobiography when she feels like '*asaa raag aalaa, ani tyachya dokyat naaral phodavasa vaatala* [I used to get so angry and felt like breaking a coconut on his head].'<sup>710</sup> The very fact that Urmila Pawar expressed this in a detailed written account after her husband's death speaks volumes of the 'silenced' Dalit women. The marital companionship, which was sought by one Mr. Meshram (Sandhya akka's husband),<sup>711</sup> was sought also by Urmila. Further, I perhaps need to reiterate and ask in the year 2007 what Tarabai Shinde asked in the year 1882, 'If men think they are Gods and are to be revered like Gods, why don't they behave like ones?'<sup>712</sup> However, I also wish I could ask this to Urmila's husband to get the response from the 'other' side. I noted here and in Urmila's daughter's case, the Hindu/'middle-class' ideal of indissolubility of

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<sup>708</sup> Shantabai Kamble, *Mazhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (Bombay, 1986), p. 60.

<sup>709</sup> I cannot deal with some of these interesting Dalit feminist accounts here due to lack of space. Pawar and Pawde are very articulate, they also write and talk about their ideas and experiences in their works and speeches; however other Dalit women have found space for the first time and hence I deal with them at length.

<sup>710</sup> Urmila, Pawar, *Aaydaan* (Mumbai, 2003), and in her interview, 7 September 2004.

<sup>711</sup> Mr. Meshram, Sandhya Meshram's husband, Buddhist, 9 June 2001. Since Mr. Meshram was at home that day when I interviewed Sandhya akka, he had a lot to say. I had to ask him to stop interrupting, as I wanted Sandhya akka to speak. However, he helped her make biryani for me.

<sup>712</sup> Tarabai, Shinde, *Stree-Purush tulana*, p. 6, also Shinde as in O'Hanlon, *Tarabai Shinde and the critique of gender relations*, p. 81. This essay written by Tarabai critiqued not only gender relations but also Non-Brahman patriarchy.



marriage, the unacceptable divorce, furthermore, the agony of a perpetual oppression under men.

Women like Urmila who belonged to the middle class felt that private confrontations should never be made public, thus mirroring the Brahman families who rarely displayed their broken wares to full view. Furthermore, Urmila also sought to reveal to Dalit men the ways in which they oppressed women. However, such Urmilas were rare. Some slum dwellers were less circumspect in this matter. Meera's mother said that she would if necessary retaliate against their husband. She was not afraid of any public displays: 'we slap our husbands if they slap us; we are not like the [middle-class] women staying in flats who [often] bear/tolerate all suppression. So we are happy in a way.'<sup>713</sup> Thus, I noticed the confidence and assertion of some lower class Dalit women as opposed to some middle-class Dalit woman who are more oppressed in this way.

All my respondents believed that they were answerable to society. Urmila and others underscored: 'We cannot leave them as it is the nature of the society and a woman has to answer to this society, which a man will not have to. [Such is patriarchy]. All men are the same.'<sup>714</sup> Such are Indian women who have been trained to adjust to be happy. Is this what some mainstream feminists expound about the 'compromise of the East'? Though most of these women were at the receiving ends of oppression all the time, some of them, like Meera's mother, Urmila, Lalita and so on found their 'middle-paths'<sup>715</sup> to keep their families and their individuality growing.

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<sup>713</sup> Mrs. Gaikwad, 1 August 2004.

<sup>714</sup> Urmilatai Pawar, 7 September 2004.

<sup>715</sup> My usage of the term, 'middle-paths' here draws upon the Buddhist philosophy of 'middle-path,' that propounds a balanced life between extreme austerities, and extravagance and indulgence; this is the 'Noble Eightfold Path' of right outlook, right aims, right speech, right action, right means of livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, as discussed by Ambedkar. See Ambedkar, 'What is Dhamma,' in BAWS, Vol. 14, Part Two (Section IV), p. 238.

They confidently and considerately became well versed in the *tarevarchi kasrat* (balancing act) for the happiness of their families. However, my interaction with a Buddhist elder who ran a marriage bureau revealed that many divorced Buddhist women were seeking men. This obviously suggests that Buddhist women are growing assertive and are no longer so reluctant to break up their family ties; they were prioritising their individuality before the family. Hence, their decreasing belief in compromises, or middle-paths.

In the course of the interviews I noted that most of the women, as devoted wives, spoke very well of their husbands. Men fear domination from more highly educated women. However things are gradually changing, we are definitely in different and better times compared to our mothers. Some women agreed that they could engage in a companionable relationship with their husbands, however unequal it was. Some of the second and third generation learners also mentioned that their statuses were no less than their husbands' and that Dalit families were changing and granting independence and greater freedom to women.

### **On Constructing 'Cultural Capital' for the 'Dalit Pygmalion'**

In this section, I shall examine the attempts made by Dalit mothers to obtain a better future for their children by building their 'cultural capital.' I observed that there were distinct differences in the ideas of rearing children between the three generations of women I interviewed. The first generation was happy that they could get whatever little education they received. They were also happy that they could send their daughters to school. A few second-generation learners and most of the third-generation learners were economically stable and they had ventured on the journey towards the 'middle-class.' They harboured some expectations regarding their own schooling as well as the schooling of the children. They desired English medium



education, convents or good Marathi-medium schools for their children. They were also looking for some 'extra' or 'additional' training for their children that would build their 'cultural capital.' In sum, I discerned that as the educated Dalits advanced, they initiated their children into new and unfamiliar learning processes. It is my submission that this was a part of the Dalit struggle of diligently accumulating assets, assembling resources, strengthening themselves and struggling to get ahead towards an upward mobility. What are the constituents of this 'cultural capital'? In this section of the chapter, I propose to deal with the Bourdieuan postulate of 'capital' in general and 'cultural' capital, in particular.

Bourdieu extended the logic of economic analysis to ostensibly non-economic goods and services in order to establish the concept of 'cultural capital.' This included a wide variety of resources, including information about the school system, educational credentials, verbal facility, general cultural awareness, and aesthetic preferences. He suggested that 'culture can become a power resource. He also suggested that it might be called informational capital.'<sup>716</sup> He stated:

This capital refers to the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalised by the individual through socialization and that constitute schemes of appreciation and understanding. Cultural goods differ from material goods in that one can appropriate or "consume" them only by apprehending their meaning. This holds for music, works of art, and scientific formulas, as well as works of popular culture, thus it exists in an embodied state.<sup>717</sup>

For Bourdieu the accumulation of capital in an embodied state began in childhood. He stated: 'the acquisition of cultivated dispositions presupposes "distance from economic necessity" and therefore translates original class-based inequalities into

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<sup>716</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, (Chicago, 1992), p. 19. Also see Bourdieu as in Swartz, *Culture and Power*, p. 75.

<sup>717</sup> Bourdieu, as quoted in Swartz, *Culture and Power*, p. 76. Also see pp. 6-8. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984), pp. 5-14, 120, Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, pp. 177-219.

cultural differences.’<sup>718</sup> The investment of inherited cultural capital returns dividends in school, rewarding those with large amounts of incorporated cultural capital and penalizing those without. Bourdieu’s most insightful ethnographic observations about French schooling consisted of showing how French schoolteachers rewarded good language style, especially in essay and oral examinations, a practice that tended to favour those students with considerable cultural capital who in general were from privileged family backgrounds.<sup>719</sup> For Bourdieu, such capital required ‘pedagogical action,’ the investment of time by parents, other family members, or hired professionals to sensitise the child to cultural distinctions.

Bourdieu’s analysis does not cover marginalised communities who neither ‘inherit’ his theorised cultural capital, nor possess agents like parents/family members/hired professionals who can inculcate it from scratch. He does not thus give agency to those who lack such cultural capital. To what extent, we may ask, are underprivileged groups aware of their deficiencies in this respect, and, furthermore, how can they go about constructing such an ‘absent’ inherent cultural capital? When the subaltern informants in my project boarded the ‘school bus,’ I delineated their journey of access to the *only* school available, and their process of schooling. How and when did Dalit children have the opportunity to accumulate such capital? Did the school and family have any role in constructing such a capital for the Dalit children? I have already dealt with the impoverishing role of schools for some Dalits. I seek to investigate these questions in this section by examining the responses of the better-educated second and third-generation Dalit women.

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<sup>718</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 68-70, also see Swartz, *Culture and Power*, p. 76.

<sup>719</sup> Bourdieu (c1989), pp. 48-81, and as in Swartz, *Culture and Power*, pp. 75-78. I examined upper caste teachers’ marking of distinctions between upper caste and lower caste students and the discrimination practised by such teachers and friends of my Dalit respondents in Chapters 5 and 6.



In Chapter 6, I discussed the middle-class Dalit parents who deliberately encouraged the pursuit of courses of study that would lead to higher status occupations, and who pushed their children to be self-confident and independent high achievers. Nanda Shinde, a second-generation graduate, responded:

Yes my education will definitely help me rear my children differently. My mother could not understand anything; however, *I will guide my children*, tell them about different careers; give them everything [that] I could not get.<sup>720</sup>

Most of my informants referred to the deficiencies in their own education, and how this had taught them how they should arrange things differently for their own children. In this, they hoped to build a 'middle-class' image for their children to give them a better start in life as well as counteract the negative stereotypes of Dalits that were common throughout Hindu India.<sup>721</sup>

Most of the respondents reiterated the importance of a 'better' life for their children. Most of the first and some second-generation women had suffered from blatant social, economic, and religious discrimination in municipal schools and afterwards in their employment. They and their children had been considered privileged to attend schools. Although this experience had made them understand the benefits of a better education, as well as its availability, their continuing poverty stood in the way of realising such a goal. Thus Hirabai Kuchekar, a second-generation respondent who was a clerk with the Zilla Parishad of Pune, expressed her concern that the lower economic status of her family did not allow them to send their children to 'good' schools. She stated:

I have not been able to take 'proper' [emphasis mine] care of my children due to my office hours. I could not send them to a good school. I sent them to a corporation school, which worsened the situation. The teachers did not teach well, the student

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<sup>720</sup> Nanda Kamble, 10 August 2001. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>721</sup> Also see Chapter 5.

crowd was drawn from the surrounding slums. I was in a joint family and had to earn to take care of all the people. I had to neglect my children. I was employed since the birth of my very first child, I had no time for my children and they have suffered due to that. They do not have any hobbies. One son sells vegetables after school and also during vacations. My eldest daughter is working.<sup>722</sup>

She was thus caught in a vicious circle of deprivation. These working mothers could not find even a short amount of quality time for their children. They were overburdened with numerous duties and neglected the over-all growth of their children, while the men of their families were 'free birds.'<sup>723</sup>

However many second and third-generation middle class Dalit women had different expectations and opinions. They were well settled socially, economically, and residentially, and had better knowledge about the education system and the 'public' spaces of the urban environment. Most agreed that their 'education,' and moreover their 'exposure' to the educational institutions and employment opportunities and to the 'public' space had been for them a rewarding experience. This engagement outside the home definitely helped in rearing their children in a healthy manner. I noted their middle-class behaviour in struggling on a day-to-day basis to acquire the best social, economic, cultural and religious 'capital' for their children. They successfully took upon the responsibility of taking good care and striving for the all-around development of their children. Manini and Malavika Pawar, Prakshoti Pawar, Meenakshi Jogdand,<sup>724</sup> and others thus talked about how

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<sup>722</sup> Hirabai Kuchekar, 8 January 2002.

<sup>723</sup> I draw upon Sharon Kemp's paper to illustrate my point here. The rural women in Sharon Kemp's paper also call attention to the oppressive nature of their dependent status and their daily toil and drudgery. The Gaothan women interviewed by Kemp compared men to birds because there are fewer sanctions that accompany their behaviour. The image of a bird with its connotations of freedom, weightlessness, and even playfulness contrasts with the stolidity of the earthbound and hardworking bullocks, i.e. women. Sharon Kemp, 'Women as Bullocks: A self-image of Maharashtrian Village Women', in Anne Feldhaus (ed.), *Images of Women in Maharashtrian Society* (New York, 1998), pp. 236-237.

<sup>724</sup> Manini and Mala Pawar, 6 September 2004; Prakshoti Pawar, 10 April 2002, Meenakshi Jogdand, 13 March 2002.



they wanted to admit their children into English medium schools, of which they expressed a very high opinion. They also wanted to augment such study with teaching at home.<sup>725</sup> A few of such respondents like Nanda Kamble emphasised Marathi culture and Marathi medium education, but they were an exception.<sup>726</sup> Such women also attended the Parents-Teachers Association meetings to ask the teacher about the progress of their children.

Extending a Bourdieuan analysis, I noted that many highly educated Dalit women were trying earnestly to develop a 'taste' for sports, arts, music, dance, culture, science, and so on in their children.<sup>727</sup> While first generation informants like Draupadi Nagare were happy that they themselves could attend school and also that their children could attend school, Draupadi's daughter, Sandhya Meshram,<sup>728</sup> regretted that the poverty of her family had prevented her from taking up drawing classes in her childhood; however, her current employment and her comfortable economic status today meant that she could support extra-curricular activities for her only son, Chetan. She was trying to get him involved in such activities so that he would develop a taste for them. I observed Chetan's grandfather training the boy to hold a chalk, to draw a lion, a rabbit, and so on their house floor. It is a matter of further investigation as to how many Dalit parents and grandparents find the time and have the inclination to work with their children and grandchildren in such respects.

Prakshoti Pawar admitted that her parents had done a great deal for her and also sent her to a dancing class. However, she complained:

All these [hobby] classes are so far [in the heart of the city most of the times] from this place [our locality]. How can a girl cultivate hobbies when she is asked to get

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<sup>725</sup> I discussed the significance of English language and I return to that point here, Chapter 4 and 5.

<sup>726</sup> Nanda Kamble, 10 August 2001.

<sup>727</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 5.

<sup>728</sup> Draupadi Nagare 11 September 2004, and Sandhya and Chetan Meshram, 9 June 2001 and 11 September 2004.

home early? I am not allowed any partying, which I love. I will allow this freedom to my children.<sup>729</sup>

Prakshoti's family lived in the Maharashtra Board Housing Colony (originally the Nagpur Chawl on Airport road), which is beyond Yerawada. This colony was built after some lower class and caste settlements had been pulled down. The state government had resettled these inhabitants and built more apartments for the benefit of the middle class salaried classes. By travelling into the polis from the family home, she and her brother Chetan were able to mix in the company of the middle class and have upper class friends, and she expected her parents to accept 'that' culture. However, Chetan was a boy and Prakshoti, being a girl, was to be home early. Prakshoti underscored the problems that Dalits have in integrating into the 'cultural polis' (Sadashiv Peth) of the city of Pune.<sup>730</sup>

In my own case, my daughter resides in Yerawada with my mother, and now that my mother is trying to send her for some activities she faces the same problem of traveling a long distance to the polis. My mother moved out of the slum itself in Yerawada, and found a house on its margins. Although she believed that she had thus escaped the slum, we have only escaped it to a limited extent. We find it difficult to fetch a rickshaw to reach home in the evenings. No rickshawallah agrees to enter Yerawada after 7 pm. Some ask, 'where exactly do you want to go in Yerawada?' To this question, my family and I give landmarks, 'it is just Nagar Road, it is Kataria hospital, or just the chowk after the Bund garden bridge,' and so on. We have to mention the proximity of all these landmarks in order to make him drive us home. The rickshawallahs flatly refuse to drive passengers into the interiors of the slum, there. Such considerations make it difficult for Dalits in general and Dalit women in

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<sup>729</sup> Prakshoti Pawar, 10 April 2002.

<sup>730</sup> See my discussion in Chapter 5, pp. 97-100.



particular to take advantage of the best-available cultural and sporting facilities that are located within the polis.

Some middle-class Dalit families wanted to inculcate a 'classical' culture in their children. Urmila Pawar thus spoke proudly and incessantly of her daughters' accomplishments in music and dance. She reiterated the need for a passion in life, something that would make one forget oneself and one's sorrows:

I could not get a proper pencil [to study], however, I have striven hard to provide everything to my children. Malavika is an accomplished singer and Manini is a *Kathak visharad*. Manini takes classes in order to improve her singing and also teaches singing. I think everyone should have an art to indulge in; to forget our identity, our sorrows.<sup>731</sup>

In this, middle-class Dalits have ignored their own cultural traditions and art forms. These carried a stigma, as they were associated with a lower class status (such as *tamasha* dancing, as discussed in the previous chapter). The middle classes were rejecting such cultural expressions in favour of the 'classical' culture of the higher castes.

In contrast to the Pawar's cultivation of such 'classical' cultural forms, Meera Jangam looked to sports for such an effect.<sup>732</sup> She wanted to send her daughter for karate training while her son was already playing football at school. Her two children were attending an English medium school, and her priority, she said, was to search for a house far away from her present slum because the slum environment is not conducive for her children's growth. I note the 'distinction of tastes' between the Pawars and the Jangams. While the middle-class Pawars' tastes were 'bourgeois aesthetic,' the lower-class Meera spoke of the 'art of living.'<sup>733</sup> Meera's concern was that her daughter to develop the physical strength and agility to face the adversities of

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<sup>731</sup> Urmila Pawar, 6 September 2004.

<sup>732</sup> Meera Jangam, 5 August 2004.

<sup>733</sup> I am drawing upon Bourdieuan analysis. See his *Distinction*, pp. 40, 41, 47.

the slum environment. She also wanted her son to play cricket and football instead of playing instruments, or dancing or singing.

One Dalit third-generation respondent did not want to be identified with his educated Dalit mother just because he did not find her as 'smart' and 'active' as other, upper caste mothers. Some of such informants said that Dalits are lazy and fatalistic, and that they wanted to avoid being associated with such traits. In this, they revealed the extent to which they had internalised the view of the 'dominant.' Manini Pawar, for example, made statements in this respect that were of the same quality to those found in colonial ethnographies.<sup>734</sup> There was an assumption that Dalits in general were trapped in such a 'backward' culture, and that the only remedy was to disavow one's caste background.

As many articles in *Sugava* point out, there is a marked tendency for middle class Dalits to distance themselves from their parents and their communities.<sup>735</sup> The authors of these articles elaborate on the changing attitudes of the educated and employed Dalits. They speak a different language, dress and eat differently, and reside in a different locality. I have already discussed these Dalit markers, or 'signifiers,' and attempt to delineate the Dalit struggle to erase them throughout this dissertation. Some Dalits move out of their earlier 'untouchable' localities and re-settle in other localities. For example, most Dalits from Yerawada slum have re-settled in the Maharashtra Housing Board colony, in some posh localities on Nagar Road, Airport Road, Ram Nagar and so on, which house mixed-castes and middle-classes.

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<sup>734</sup> Manini Pawar, 6 September 2004.

<sup>735</sup> Vilas Wagh (ed.), *Dalit madhyam varg* (Pune, 1986) and *Dalitanna Brahmani Saunskrutiche Akarshan* (Pune, 1994). These issues focus on the emerging Dalit middle-classness and their Brahmanisation. The authors and editors are cautioning Dalits to be aware of their education and cultural roots.



Surekha Punekar, who earned her living from *tamasha* dancing, did not want her children to be associated with her world of dance.<sup>736</sup> Uneducated, but lucratively-employed, this accomplished dancer had sent her children away to a boarding school at Panchgani. Due to the itinerant nature of her work, she felt that she could not otherwise give them a stable education. When her children said that they would rather live with her, she evaded the issue. Her wish, she said, was to educate her children and keep them away from the world of '*tamasha*'—of dance and of her life.

Diametrically opposite to Surekha's dilemma regarding children was another dancer, Mangala Bansode, who kept her children with her throughout her life. She wanted her children to follow their ancestral calling of *tamasha*.<sup>737</sup> She and others in her family said that they were following their '*khandani*' (literally, 'ancestral occupation'), that *tamasha* was an art gifted to them by their *khandan*, their ancestors, and they were following this traditional art form like other classical arts of singing, dancing, carpentry, and so on. They glorified their status as *tamasgirs* and that of their art of *tamasha*, and considered themselves to a part of a distinguished lineage in this respect. Mangala complained that she could not educate her children much due to various reasons. She said that she was the primary earning member of the family, and she was forced to be on the move (dancing in villages) all the time. Life was never stable for her and her children so as to enable them to attend school. Moreover her children were also not much interested in school. Her son, Nitin Bansode, talked about their business:

I want to go ahead. I have six movies to my credit. We also have CDs of our *tamasha lavanis*. We earn around 1.5 to 2 lakhs, during *yatra* [same at *jatra*, village fair] and at other times it is around Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 40,000. Last year the earning was a little

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<sup>736</sup> Surekha Punekar, 20 September 2004.

<sup>737</sup> Mangala Bansode, 15 September 2004.

low due to the famine. But we normally don't get less than Rs. 30,000. At times we have to spend on our own. During rains there is a loss, now again see due to elections yesterday, less public has come in today, so we have to bear all these losses.<sup>738</sup>

This '*khandani*' is now their 'business.' In this, Mangala and her sons were consolidating her ancestral economic and cultural— providing a way of life for future generations of her family to live upon. While I was with them, I watched live *tamasha* for the first time in my life. I saw this mother-son duo dance on stage, acting as a hero-heroine duo, hugging and so on. Such an occupation demands that an uneducated and lower-class Dalit woman breaks social and cultural norms. The educated and middle-class Dalits and their women would certainly disapprove of such occupations for women.

Nitin was nonetheless in a dilemma about his children's education as he was not able to pay it much attention. He simply aspired to educate them in good schools.

He explicated:

I am doing well in movies, remixes, and so on. This son accompanies me on all my shows. When he will turn 2 or 3, I will admit him in a hostel. I am in *tamasha*, but I don't want my children to follow me there. Everything is changing; the future of *tamasha* is not good. The public is misbehaving. At least now they are a little in control, I don't know what will happen in the future. I am a little confused about my children's future. Those who are studying in the village its fine for them; however this son who is with me [...] *I am confused about him* [My emphasis]. At times I think he should perform on the stage and at the same time I say that he should attend school. If he likes this then it should be just a hobby, and he should educate himself.<sup>739</sup>

In this way, some un-educated Dalits are concerned and confounded by their circumstantial quagmires that hindered them and their children.

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<sup>738</sup> Nitin Bansode, Mangala Bansode's son, Class 3/4 (as he said), Tamasgir, 15 September 2004.

<sup>739</sup> Nitin Bansode, 15 September 2004.



While these were the predicaments of Nitin, some performers had succeeded in organising their children's education and their way of life in a more satisfactory way. Maya the magician thus stated:

My daughters are very understanding and co-operative. I can go outside for my shows because of their co-operation. I did not have to bother much about them, they took good care. Deepti the elder one encouraged me to take to photojournalism. I am very close to their friends from all communities – Gujaratis, Brahmans, Marwaris. I teach them to meditate, to concentrate, and this makes their will power strong, they like it. I see to it that my children experiment, are exposed [to the realities of life] and also enjoy freedom.<sup>740</sup>

It was significant that Maya belonged to an elite upper-class family and lived in an affluent locality. She believed that her children should be brought up to be independent and free. She allowed, indeed encouraged, her daughters to visit discos and clubs. She wanted them to experience everything and learn more. She aspired to send her children abroad.

Furthermore, extending Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in a gendered way, we can articulate this as 'feminine' cultural capital.<sup>741</sup> Some middle-class Dalit girls *had* to acquire the feminine cultural capital of taking good care of the home: cooking, cleaning, rearing bright children, sharing, rather, shouldering the whole household responsibility.<sup>742</sup> Rajani Tribhuwan was a homemaker whose first duty was, she felt, to take good care of her family members.<sup>743</sup> Cooking fresh food, a variety of dishes, washing utensils and clothes were her first priorities in life and she expressed that she felt guilty when her 'public' duty disabled her from fulfilling her 'private' concerns.

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<sup>740</sup> Maya Mane, 8 September, 2005.

<sup>741</sup> I argued in Chapter 6 about the increasing Dalit middle-class and their emphasis on femininity for Dalit women.

<sup>742</sup> For an interesting overview of the debate on the ethics of care including an analysis of the feminist debate initiated by Carol Gilligan.

<sup>743</sup> Rajanitai Tribhuwan, 13 November 2005.

Unlike Tribhuwan's concern for 'warm' food for her children Kumud Pawde, the famous Dalit feminist scholar and writer was more worried about the 'cultivation' of reading habits in her children:

One good thing that I instilled in my children was the habit of reading. I am happy that there was no TV or else they would have taken to that. The *vachan sanskruti* [culture of reading] is dying out today. This is very dangerous.<sup>744</sup>

She regretted that children were getting used to the 'fast' media (TV and internet) and did not want to read books, and she had not wanted that for her children. She further suggested that her husband had coaxed his children to be doctors, as he could not accomplish it for himself.

Padma Nikam, Kumud Pawde (both second-generation educated), Prakshoti Pawar (a more highly educated, third-generation respondent), and the Nikams, among others, supported inter-caste marriages. Kumudtai, a Professor of Sanskrit, stated:

We also believe in inter-caste marriages and in national integration. We ourselves have set an example for our children. One *sun* [daughter-in-law] is a *Gujrathi Bania*. Amit's wife was his classmate in engineering, she is a Buddhist. Another son got in touch with a *Khatri* from UP. When she was here she bowed to all with her head covered by her *pallu* [veil]. My mother-in-law a *Maratha* and this girl get along very well.<sup>745</sup>

One should note that Kumudtai's sons were married to women from Khatri and Bania castes which are touchable and upper castes. The Nikam brothers were also married to Maratha and Brahman women. Padmatai, who was simply literate, had allowed her son to marry outside the community. She said:

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<sup>744</sup> Kumudtai Pawde, 16 October 2005.

<sup>745</sup> Kumudtai Pawde, 16 October 2005.



My eldest daughter-in-law is a Maratha and she wanted to have this *Ganapati*<sup>746</sup> portrait in the living room. I allowed her despite my Buddhist faith and all the taunts made by Dalits. I don't say anything, but make them realize they are mistaken.<sup>747</sup>

I noted that most inter-caste marriages were between Dalit men and upper caste women, and not the other way around.<sup>748</sup> While these Dalit families practiced their belief in inter-caste marriages, thus following the programme that was laid down by Ambedkar,<sup>749</sup> many others could not bring themselves to be so radical. Some Dalits insisted that while marriage between Hindu-Mahars and Buddhists was acceptable, marriage with Mahar-Christians could not be entertained. In this way, Dalit-Christians were marginalized. Not many were therefore prepared to follow the dictates of their revered leader, Ambedkar.

According to S.K. Chatterjee, education has led to a growing Sanskritisation of the culture of the SC.<sup>750</sup> Although no doubt true in some cases, it does not apply to Dalits who have opted out of Hinduism, by embracing either Christianity or Buddhism. On the whole, the cultural capital that well-educated Mahar Dalits have tried to acquire has extended to the sphere of religion. Here, in many cases, they have sought to assert their independence and modernity as Buddhists, regarding Buddhism as an important element in their distinctive culture. Y.D. Waghmare, in a short essay in *Sugava Ank*, with the provocative title of 'My Children need a Religion,' suggested the need for such religious capital for Dalits:

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<sup>746</sup> *Ganapati* is the 'God of knowledge' in Hinduism. This large image of the Hindu god is in Padma's living room. This would offend some Buddhists; however it is not uncommon to find such pantheons of Hindu gods in some Buddhist homes.

<sup>747</sup> Padmatai Nikam, 22 October 2005. Furthermore, I noted the Dalit bind between Hinduism and Buddhism. Though Dalits have converted to Buddhism, they are still entangled in Hindu practices. The Hindu gods and festivals have not been erased from many Dalit Buddhist minds. Normally, they are unconscious of the extent to which they remain trapped within Hinduism in this respect.

<sup>748</sup> Also see my discussion in Chapter 3, p. 77-79.

<sup>749</sup> Ambedkar was convinced that the real remedy for destroying caste was inter-caste marriage. Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste' in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 67. Also see my discussion in Chapter 3, p. 76-77.

<sup>750</sup> Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 285

Instead of following the old sympathetic religious values, I would support a rational, scientific, rejuvenating religion and ask my children to follow the same. Buddhism causes physical progress, the progress of the mind and speech. This is the reason that Indian foreign policy and domestic policy also follow the '*Panchasheel*'. Despite all its virtues, Indians are shy of this religion. There is no other religion with the message of '*atta, deep, bhav*' [Be your own light]; why should we be ashamed of giving this religion to our children?<sup>751</sup>

Many educated Dalit parents have made a point of cultivating Buddhist practices in their children, for example making them sing aloud the *Panchasheel* and other Buddhist prayers. They follow a Buddhism that holds that 'you are [and should be] your own light.' Though trapped much of the times in the many ambivalence that I have delineated, in this sphere they at least appear to be sure of their own culture and values.

### Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the specific roles of the Dalit woman as a wife, a homemaker, and a child nurturer. The behaviour of Dalit men towards Dalit women has paralleled that of the upper castes towards Dalits. Dalit men have subjected Dalit women to much mental and symbolic violence. Hence these women were Dalit to Dalits. However, most second and third-generation informants agreed that Dalit patriarchy was beginning to melt to some extent. In this case, change will not come through movements for Dalit assertion – as is the case in the battle with the higher castes – but through the assertion of Dalit women against the men of their own community.

Schooling, I would underline, was undertaken not merely for 'knowledge-seeking' or 'education' per se; it was also a training ground for students to engage with a wider public. It was understood by many, particularly in the second and third

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<sup>751</sup> Y.D. Waghmare, 'My children need a religion,' in *Dalit madhyam varge, janiva* (Pune, 1986), p. 23. I have translated this essay from Marathi, and I am responsible for all accuracies and errors.



generation of learners, that education should aim not only at individual growth but at cultural growth. Many such Dalits thus set great store on education, and disciplined their children to do well in their studies in an all-round way. This in itself provided a counter to the discrimination practiced in the schools, and by sheer hard work and perseverance, significant numbers of Dalits were able to obtain the educational qualifications and cultural capital that opened up new jobs and worlds for them.

## Chapter 10: Conclusion

Phule and Ambedkar both regarded education as a liberating force against Brahmanical domination. They saw the lower castes and untouchables as being mired within the caste system, and they believed that through education they would be able to develop the necessary critical consciousness to assert themselves against this system of oppression. Developing such a consciousness was particularly necessary in a context in which most schoolteachers were from the upper castes. For Ambedkar, education was the first step on the road to political power for the oppressed, and he himself did his best to make the best use of his own position for the good of his community. Gramsci, who was Ambedkar's contemporary, likewise saw education as potentially liberating for the subaltern classes, and also like Ambedkar, he was also very aware that educational institutions often reinforced the hegemony of the elites. Gramsci thus saw schools above all as one site of struggle within a wider political movement. Paulo Freire also understood education in such terms, as a means for forging the critical consciousness that would liberate the oppressed.

Such a programme existed in a state of tension with the idea that education provided a training that would benefit the child attending the school by making him or her more productive members of society in the long term, which would in turn benefit the economy. The state thus financed education as a form of investment in the future of its citizens and the country as a whole. Theodore Schultz voiced this sort of understanding in his Presidential Address to the American Economic Association in 1960 when he spelt out the implications in the work of economists like Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall that 'the acquisition of knowledge through education should no longer be regarded as a commodity to be consumed but as a productive



investment.<sup>752</sup> In such a light, the people of a country society were encouraged to invest in their own future so as to better their life-chances. The human capital approach to education resulted in a rapid growth of education throughout the world. In India, this led to a phenomenal growth in the number of primary schools, and students in these institutions more than doubled between 1951 and 1978, while those of secondary schools went up sixfold.<sup>753</sup>

Education could thus be approached in two ways, either as a means towards self-liberation and greater democracy, or as training for future employment within a hegemonic social system. Michel Foucault understood education primarily in the latter sense, as a form of schooling that disciplined the body and mind of the individual. For Foucault, education dampened rather than encouraged resistance to oppression. Pierre Bourdieu wrote in a similar vein, arguing that education systems tend to perpetuate privilege and power, and people learn to negotiate the system so that they can deploy the system to their own benefit. In his later writings, Foucault argued that although it is almost impossible to effectively challenge the hegemonic power of such overarching institutions of bourgeois society in direct ways, it is possible to create a liberatory effect by exerting multiple pressures at various strategic levels. In this way, the system can be shifted gradually.

Being raised in a Buddhist-Ambedkarite household, I was brought up believing in the liberating power of education. Later, I was particularly struck by the writings of Paulo Freire, who I felt provided a strong theoretical base for such a practice. Nonetheless, my actual experience of education, as it existed in the form of

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<sup>752</sup> Karlekar, 'Education and Inequality,' p. 184 and original in J. Karabel and A.H. Halsey's 'Educational Research: A Review and an Interpretation' in Karabel and Halsey, *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York, 1977), pp. 12-16.

<sup>753</sup> Census of India tables as available online on <http://www.education.nic.in/statscontents.asp>. In 1950-51. The total enrolment of all category students in 1950-51 was 192 lakhs and that in 2003-03 was 1283 lakhs. The SC enrolment has also increased from 110 lakhs in 1980-81 to 231 lakhs in 2003-04.

schooling found in India, clearly did not live up to such a promise. My investigation was devised to explain why this was so. Why was it such a troubling and often disappointing an experience for Dalits? Why did women so often gain so little from their education – ending as household drudges or in low paid jobs? Might they have been better off not attending school at all? Why did those who negotiated the system successfully so often turn their backs on their communities? Where were the spaces within the system that might empower and liberate the individual Dalit woman? These questions will be addressed in this concluding chapter.

### Schooling

During colonial times, Dalits had to fight for the right merely to attend school. Their presence inside a classroom was in itself a challenge to the hegemony of the high castes. Often, they were forced to sit outside the classroom itself, on a porch or outside a window. Such discrimination was challenged strongly by social reformers, from the time of Phule onwards. These included Arya Samajists, Congress nationalists – notably Gandhi – and then the Dalits themselves led by Ambedkar. By the time of independence in 1947, this battle had been largely won – Dalits were normally permitted to sit inside classrooms. Educational uptake, and the resulting literacy rate, was however very poor, particularly in the villages.<sup>754</sup> Dalits were however on the move, encouraged by Ambedkar and other leaders to abandon their oppressive village life and migrate to the cities, which were seen to be more liberating. Settling largely in slum locales, they had access to free municipal schools.

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<sup>754</sup> I observed that in the year 1961 there were 11,703 Mahars as compared to 26,479 Matangs in rural Poona district. Out of these 9495, i.e. about 81.13 percent of Mahars, and 22,864 i.e. 86.34 percent of Matangs, were illiterate. See *Census of India*, 1961, Maharashtra Vol X. Part V-A, Tables for SC-ST in Maharashtra, pp. Vd 4326-12a. Until 1981, 46.67 percent (21,773 out of 46650) of Mahars, and 65.42 percent of Matangs (53,260 out of 81412) were illiterate out of the total SC illiteracy of 54.43 percent in Pune district. See *Census of India*, 1981, Series 12, Part (ix) ii, Maharashtra, Special Tables for SC (4-6).



Unfortunately, they continued to suffer caste-based discrimination in the cities, though in different ways than in the rural areas.

The quality of the municipal schools was very low for the most part. The high caste teachers generally had a poor opinion of their pupils, they failed to speak and understand the language of Dalits. Further, they imposed the dominant Brahmanical values, culture, and language on children. Few Dalit pupils went beyond the most basic education, and many dropped out even before achieving this. Since most Dalit students from these schools had low aspirations, most left at an opportune moment to take odd jobs with irregular payments. The unsatisfactory quality of municipal schools, which were the only educational spaces available for most Dalits, entangled them in a vicious circle of low quality education and low status jobs. The slum girls who studied in the municipal Marathi-medium school were at the lowest level in the school and socio-economic hierarchy. They suffered particularly because their education was not prioritised by parents, and they received even less encouragement in the schools. In this way, the education system mirrored the socio-economic disabilities that the Dalits and Dalit women suffered in general.

In Pune City, the Dalits were mainly settled on the outer rings, reflecting their marginalized status. I examined the 'tale of two cities' within Pune; the two psyches, one of the *Peths* – the quintessentially Puneri – and other of the *gayarann* (literally the fallow lands) *Vastis*, on the margins. The best educational facilities were in the core area in the heart of the city, Sadashiv Peth. This was the 'polis', inhabited largely by the high castes; it possessed a hegemonic 'symbolic power' in the Punekar's imaginary. In recent years, Pune has gained an international reputation as a centre for information technology. Though this has brought about unprecedented economic growth, the effects have largely bypassed the Dalits, especially those in the

slums and margins of the city. Nonetheless, though this urban space is thus hierarchised, it provides some opportunities for Dalits who can work within the system. If they have the means and abilities, they can strive to gain access to the modern amenities of the city, its variety of schools and colleges, vocational training institutes, and many other opportunities in the business and service sectors.

In these respects, schools have operated as a 'learning machine' that have thoroughly disciplined and ranked pupils. Only those who conformed to the system and learnt to negotiate their way through were able, as a rule, to achieve success on its terms. Paradoxically, however, such discipline was necessary for the Dalits if they were to have any chance of competing with the upper castes. The pedagogic machinery thus crystallized social and political hegemony; further, some Dalit women and men internalised this 'rationality' and aspired to be like upper castes. Thus, upper caste hegemony was extended and their symbolic power was executed through the education system, along with other systemic agencies.

Dalits who had negotiated the system with some success tended to downplay the caste discrimination that they had suffered. Many of my respondents of this sort – who were mainly second and third-generation respondents – were in fact uneasy about such a question being raised. I discussed the complexities of investigating such silences around every day living in a caste society. As it was, when pressed, many agreed that they had in fact faced verbal discrimination and/or abuse and had tried to counter or resist this oppression.

There were, I found, a range of markers in city life that helped to delineate Dalits who, unlike in the villages, could not be distinguished through crude physical markers, such as their form of dress, demeanour and enforced distance. Their localities on the margins of the city were one such new marker. For the upper castes,



the slums in which the Dalits lived were seen as a vision from hell, with their windowless corrugated iron shacks, open sewers, and pig roaming the lanes. They could never envisage living in such filth. They abhorred, also, their meat eating (particularly beef-eating), and looked down on their ways of talking. They noted with disapproval their reverence for Ambedkar, their Buddhism, and so on. In schools, they singled out the Dalit pupils as the ones who were receiving the special benefits that were reserved for the Scheduled Castes. There were public displays of this in periodic roll calling within classes, or in notices on school boards. Many Dalits who were identified in such ways were implicitly shamed before the other pupils. In this way the Dalit body continued to be subjectified, vilified, and exposed to an ongoing mental violence that crushed the spirit of many a scholar.

In reality, however, I found in my research that even the Dalits who had to live in the slums made the most of what little they had. Often, they had managed to construct relatively solid houses. They had fought for and obtained constant water supply, electricity, and they had some modern gadgets. Often, they worked hard and sent their children to school. In this, they maintained what dignity they could. The slums did not on the whole, therefore, conform to the stereotypes of high caste people who in many cases had never set foot inside such places.

On the whole, I found that Dalits of the first and some second-generation learners had an instrumental attitude towards education; they regarded it as a means for gaining jobs. Most of such respondents agreed that it was not education as such, but employment that had helped them most in life. A few such Dalit women had in fact educated themselves in different skills like typing, shorthand, computer diplomas without any formal support. Although this continued to be true for many second and some third-generation learners, I found also that many of the latter valued intellectual

attainment and self-improvement, which was linked in part to a desire for greater social prestige. Often, they had attained a much higher level of formal education. On the basis of this, they were able to enrol in the employment exchange provided by the government to seek job opportunities. In particular, Dalits of this sort were able to best take advantage of reservations. The bulk of the untouchables were not however able to benefit in this way.<sup>755</sup> Only those who were able to avail themselves of such opportunities were able to ride the tide and get ahead.

My thesis has focused first and foremost on the experience of Dalit women in education. I have argued that they suffered a 'double discrimination', as both Dalits and women. Ambedkar had enjoined upon his followers to pay particular attention to the education of dalit girls. He held that 'an educated mother educated a family,' and in turn the society. It was this educated individual, family and community that would then build a progressive and more equal India. Nonetheless, he addressed himself mainly to his male followers – they, paternalistically – were seen to have the responsibility of bestowing education on their daughters. He did not address women directly, asking them to fight for the right to receive education, even against patriarchal opposition. In this way, from a feminist point of view, Ambedkar revealed some limitations in his approach. Nonetheless, he legitimated women's education among his supporters. Gradually, as Dalits moved to the cities, both sexes increasingly took advantage of whatever education was offered to them in government schools.

Nonetheless, the experience of Dalit girls in education was often not a happy one. On the whole, they had to make use of the nearest school available, as their

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<sup>755</sup> Marc Galanter, *Competing equalities, Law and the Backward Classes in India* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 541-46.



parents would not let them travel long distances on public transport to better establishments. The nearest schools were generally the poorest ones. Their mothers in particular feared for their safety outside the home, and were often reluctant to release them from their household duties to attend school. Eldest daughters suffered particularly in this respect. Even those parents who were prepared to let them go to school frequently made them carry out domestic duties after school hours, thus making them neglect their homework. The girls then feared to go to school next day, knowing that they would be punished for their failure in this respect. Home environments were often not conducive to study, as there was no book culture, and fathers were often drunk and violent. In some cases, this made school seem by comparison a haven of peace, which encouraged girls to attend school. Some parents rarely took any detailed interest in their studies, being often unable to tutor them at even the most basic level, and they were shy of going to the schools to interact with the teachers to discuss their daughter's progress. They believed that it was the job of the teacher to teach, and of their child to study. Some had imbibed the prevailing high caste attitude towards learning, seeing it something to be forced on reluctant children through strict discipline, including physical beating to make them memorise their lessons. They believed, like the high caste teachers, that learning has to be acquired through formulaic repetition. Many first-generation parents lacked knowledge of avenues of educational opportunity. Parents of the first generation in the cities generally believed that girls should go to school only up to a particular – rather low – level, and should then seek a job so as to help out the family financially. She was to get married later. It was also commonly held that certain subjects, such as mathematics or the sciences, were not suited for girls.

Many of the informants commented on the low standard of the teaching they

received in municipal schools. Some teachers lacked interest in their jobs, and were often absent. There was a high turnover of teachers. In many cases, they held an arrogant attitude towards poor, low caste pupils, considering them hardly 'worth teaching.' On the other hand, if there were some higher caste pupils, they treated them more favourably. They generally treated Dalit pupils with contempt, refusing to allow them to raise questions in class, and shouting at them and insulting them if they tried. This smothered the Dalit pupils, and most particularly the girls, who had not been acculturated at home into standing up for themselves. Dalit girls, in particular, were accused of being dullards who were 'not worth teaching.' Even some parents and relatives joined in this chorus, agreeing that girls were not suited to study beyond a certain level. In this manner girls lost interest in studying further. It was a rare teacher – and there were a few – who made a point of teaching well and encouraging Dalit girls to excel. These exceptional, often idealistic, individuals guided them in their progression to the next stage of their education, and advised them about scholarships and other opportunities. Teachers such as these sometimes came from minority groups, such as Parsis or Christians.

There was also the problem of the sexual harassment of girls in schools, by both male pupils and teachers. Upper caste as well as Dalit males stereotyped Dalit women as promiscuous and sexually touchable. They viewed Dalit girls, contemptuously, as 'public property'. Girls faced constant eve-teasing by boys. Sometimes they had to grant sexual favours to teachers in order to maintain their progress. Schools with an all-male staff were considered particularly dangerous in this respect. As a rule, teachers were able to get away with such behaviour with impunity. Instances of molestation and rape of girl pupils dampened the enthusiasm of both parents and the girl themselves for education. Because of these fears, many girls



dropped out of education around puberty. Few were prepared to vocalise their concerns and experiences in these respects publicly – most preferred to remain silent so as to preserve their reputations.

On the whole, when Dalit families – normally of the second and third generations – made efforts to achieve a higher level of education for their children, it was the sons who were favoured. The family resources were invested in the boys rather than the girls. Some women whom I interviewed still felt cheated of a good education in this respect. They were above all expected to marry well, and were thus educated to only a certain level, or only in arts subjects, and also trained in housekeeping skills by their mothers. Boys, by contrast, were encouraged to go into the science and more prestigious streams with a view to a future in high-paying employment. Not all girls had such experiences, some told of how their parents had made it possible for them to have good educations as well.

At this level, parents were more likely to take an active interest in their children's education, helping them in their homework, providing extra tuition, and meeting with the teachers to discuss their child's progress. They pushed and coaxed them in their studies – often using corporal punishment – so that they would, hopefully, do well enough in their exams to stand a chance of gaining entry into top professions, such as medicine or the higher grades of the civil service. They would also try to inculcate in their children 'respectable' middle class habits and various extra-curriculum activities. In this way they both sought to build their cultural capital and counter the negative stereotypes that were commonly voiced by the high castes about Dalits. Looking back, my informants sometimes criticised the methods used by their ambitious parents, though they often said that they appreciated their motives for acting as they did.

At the higher levels of education, or in 'better' schools in the middle class localities, the Dalit pupils were invariably outnumbered by caste Hindus, and this created its own tensions. These elite children often harassed the Dalits, passing cutting remarks and even taking very obvious care not to be touched by them. Peer groups often formed along caste lines. Some Dalits felt that they were better off in the 'poorer' schools, where at least they could hold their own, or even predominate. On the whole, at higher levels, English medium schools were preferred, both because English was associated with the sort of non-Hindu modernity that Ambedkar had strived for, and also because they were less likely to be dominated by the Brahmans who staffed so many of the Marathi-medium schools. When they were in a minority in largely caste schools, and if it was at all possible, Dalit girls would in many cases try to hide their origins, trying to 'pass' as high castes. They tried to conceal their home address, or speak in high caste tones.

A notable feature of such attempts to 'raise' themselves socially was that many Dalit girls tried to imitate Brahmanical culture – for example their ways of speech, dress and diet – in their everyday lives. The Brahmans dominated Pune society, and their historical hegemony in the social and cultural domains was reproduced in pedagogic practices. Bourdieu's analysis of how the dominant classes exercise their social power through their language, dress, culture, tradition, food habits, and so on, resonated here. In this way, the Dalit's own culture was marginalized and delegitimated for such girls. They connived in a psychological violence that undermined Dalit identity.

### **Middle Class Dalit Women**

In this way, some Dalits have been able to situate themselves on the ladder of middle class privilege. I found that this led to 'code-switching'. Some of moved into



'better' middle class areas, some adopted caste Hindu names (Nagares became Nagarkar, Salve became Punekar, Kamble became Waikar, and so on). They sanitized their language, adopting a nasal toned Marathi, they changed their mannerisms in interacting with outsiders, and their ways of dressing. Without a backward glance, such Dalits accommodated themselves to caste Hindu culture and the dominant ethos, trying to erase their untouchable identities.

Many scholars have argued that class and educational level have been the chief determinants of employment chances in post-independence India. My study challenged this finding. Caste and gender discrimination, as it operated through the education system, stymied the life-chances of many Dalit women. Very rarely did the congruence of caste, gender, rank, and class work in the Dalits' favour. Many Dalit women wanted to be employed, and there were no caste restrictions on women working outside the home in public, though in the rural past the work was manual, either as field or domestic labourers. Now, educated women wanted to obtain respectable jobs. Dalit parents, as well as their daughters, were aware of the historical economic and sexual exploitation of Dalit women in 'public' and they do not want this fate for themselves. On the whole, the jobs obtained were at the lower end of the scale for educated women, such as clerks or teachers. Several respondents mentioned the difficulty of obtaining satisfactory employment. Some, often those who were less educated, managed to build their own businesses. Most were married before they were in a position to look for a job, and much depended on the attitude of their husbands and their families to such employment. The main attraction of a wife working was that it brought in extra income for the family. Even then, they were often expected to carry out domestic work within the home on top of their outside employment. While the working male was pampered within the home, working

women received no such privilege. I developed here the idea of women as 'bullocks', slogging their lives away both inside and outside the home.

Furthermore, similar to the predicament of women in general, the careers of Dalit women tended to take a winding path; whereas, the careers of Dalit men were like open highways, without major obstructions. Normatively, women were limited by their home responsibilities, child bearing and rearing, and care of their in-laws. Women were valued as 'secondary' earners; however, it did not affect their position/status in the family. In some cases, they had to forego promotion, as this would have meant either more work – and a corresponding neglect of domestic work – or moving to a different location; something the males of the house were not prepared to countenance. Even staunch Ambedkarite men held such attitudes towards working women. This all raised questions about practices of patriarchy amongst the Dalits. In this case, change will not come through movements for Dalit assertion – as is the case in the battle with the higher castes – but through the assertion of Dalit women against the men of their own community.

Once in employment, working outside the home could nonetheless bring a greater sense of self-assurance and independence for women. Some spoke of how it was a relief to be able to go to work, escaping the constant demands of in-laws and family quarrels. They got to know the outside world, and gained confidence in dealing with it. Employment brought about many changes in the mental and physical make-up of most Dalit women. Mingling with the general population, they in many cases adapted their mannerisms and appearance to blend in. Once again, they were trying to wash away their stigmatised background as Dalits. Some middle class Dalit women even voiced stereotypical middle class attitudes towards the poorer people of their



community, blaming them for not working hard enough and not being able to 'make it.' In this way, they tried to distance themselves from their community.

This was not always an easy task, as it was assumed that they had obtained their posts through reservations, whether or not this was the case, and this in itself provided a stigma. As it is, there has been increasing competition between both Dalit women and men to seek compensatory reservations. Dalit women did not get any additional provision, and had to compete with Dalit men. The competition was made greater by the fact that many reserved posts were not filled due to high caste machinations of one sort or another. Once in a reserved post, Dalit women were treated in a discriminatory way, for example being passed over for promotion in favour of high caste employees.

In his book on the Dalit elites of Bihar, Sachidananda has found that, by and large, they have taken little interest in bettering the lot of their less fortunate brethren.<sup>756</sup> This, as we have seen in this thesis, was often the case in Maharashtra as well, where they frequently adopt means to distance themselves from the less privileged groups in their community. My findings reinforce also Suneila Malik's research that showed that some better educated Dalits did not like to use their caste names, because if they did, the outlook of the people around them would change and they would be looked down upon as inferior.<sup>757</sup> Two issues of *Sugava* have the themes of Dalit elites and Dalit Brahmans who have snapped their ties with their communities. This is an increasing concern among the Dalits.<sup>758</sup> However, I underscore the multiplicity of experiences of different Dalits. We should note that

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<sup>756</sup> Sachidananda, *The Harijan Elite* (London, 1976), as in Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 277.

<sup>757</sup> Chatterjee, *Looking Ahead*, p. 279., and original in Suneila Malik, *Social Integration of the Scheduled Caste* (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 50-55.

<sup>758</sup> Wagh (ed.), 'Dalit madhyam varga,' (Pune, Nov-Dec 1986) and 'Dalitanna Brahmani Saunskrutiche Akarshan,' (Pune, 1994).

there are some other Dalits who aggressively guard their Dalithood and Buddhism. There are a few like me who re-invent our selfhood and continue to strive for the community. Such are some conflicts and contradictions of Dalits.

Many middle class Dalits ended with a split consciousness in this respect. On the one hand they sought to inculcate high caste culture and a way of life, on the other they knew that their Dalit identity had economic and political benefits. Although they were thus trying to reformulate their identity as middle class, they could not escape the fact that they had been born Dalits and would remain so throughout life.

### **Buddhist-Matang differences**

In Chapter 7, I examined the relationship between the two rival dalit communities of the Mahars and Matangs. This had deep historical roots, but was expressed in the twentieth century in new ways. While the Mahars provided the backbone for the Ambedkar movement, the Matangs often opposed its struggles during the colonial era. After independence, reservations created a point of tension between Mahars and Matangs, as both have struggled for the same slice of the pie. As the educational uptake and corresponding literacy rates of the Mahars was considerably in advance of that of the Matangs, the Buddhists tended to monopolise the benefits of reservations, to the chagrin of the Matangs.

While the modernity of the Mahars tended, due to Ambedkar's movement, to resist Sanskritising tendencies, that of the Matangs was towards Brahmanical Hindu practice. The Mahars retained their distance from the cultural sway of Brahmanism (posing as Hinduism) by following Ambedkar to Buddhism in 1956, whose antipathy to Brahmanism was evident. Matangs did not assert themselves in this direction, primarily because of the power of Hinduism, and their belief in it. The Mahars have made strong efforts to reinforce their Buddhist religious identity by shedding off



Hindu practices and by following the precepts of Buddhism. However, the community is still grappling with such changes and has not been able to discard Hinduism totally. For Mahars, therefore, modernity was expressed through Buddhism and through non-religious forms of acculturation to high caste culture and values. They have tried to raise their status primarily by acquiring education and using it to improve their economic position and standard of living.

On the whole, there is very little intermarriage between different Dalit communities. In this respect, they maintain rules of endogamy as strictly as the higher castes. I came across only a few exceptional cases in which Mahars and Mangs had married. Even within the Mahar community, Buddhists (erstwhile Hindu-Mahars) would not marry Christian-Mahars. Buddhist and Hindu Mahars would however intermarry. In this way, Ambedkar's strategy of breaking down internal caste barriers through inter-dining and inter-caste marriages has still not impregnated the minds of the Dalits. Nonetheless, I observed some weakening of strict endogamy between Mahars and Matangs in recent years.

I found that Matang women were generally more orthodox, conventional, and conservative compared to Mahar women. Mahar women, on the other hand, tended to be more assertive against patriarchal institutions. Whereas Matang women were silent about any desire for companionship with husbands, Mahar women were more likely to express a yearning for such an ideal. Nonetheless, there are signs of changes amongst the Matangs, who are starting to become more self-assertive. They have created their own community heroes whom they can revere rather than Ambedkar. They look to different political parties to give them concessions in return for their votes. Matang women are becoming better educated, and now literacy rates between

Mahar and Matang women are almost the same. Some Matang women have made good careers for themselves.

Although efforts to unite all Dalit communities under one political umbrella have continued since the time of Ambedkar, success has been on the whole limited and contingent. In the case of the Mahars and the Matangs, I found that there is a continuing mutual suspicion and rivalry between the two communities. This serves to divide the Dalit movement, to its continuing detriment.

### **Dalit patriarchy**

Dalit women are caught in a web of 'intersecting' identities – as women and as Dalits. In contrast to many romanticised views of the supposedly more liberated life of Dalit women, I have sought to show that they are subjected to a double patriarchy, that of the high castes and men of their own community. This I illustrated through my study of the experience of education for women, in which both their parents and their high caste teachers hold their progress back. Neither in the home nor in school can they escape from this stifling patriarchy. While the Dalit male controls the Dalit woman's sexuality in private and public, high caste male teachers both marginalize and sexually exploit Dalit pupils within the school environment. Education on its own therefore does not emancipate women from their subordinate existence in the quotidian domestic life. Some educated middle class Dalit males still dream of the Victorian ideal of companionate marriage, thereby confining women and buttressing the gendered division of labour.

Regarding the private sphere, there is continuing ongoing domestic violence against Dalit women by Dalit men. Disempowered Dalit men try to exercise some measure of power over Dalit women, using physical violence against girls and women of the family. Further, this is not only about physical violence; Dalit men should pay



attention to the 'symbolic violence' they cause to Dalit women. Women are scared to talk at home amidst family, husbands and in-laws, refraining from frank talk in 'private.' They are also insulted as the weaker sex. Obviously, this is due to the strong and strangulating Dalit patriarchal tendencies in the domestic sphere. This stifling is not confined to the 'private,' and to 'community' (of Dalit women) it infiltrates the 'public'; in that Dalit men attempt to control Dalit's women's sexuality in public. Dalit men are also free to undertake their sexual expeditions, which are not confined to Dalit women alone. Dalit women, on the other hand, have to rein in their sexuality. Whatever happened to the Ambedkarite ideal of granting 'personal independence' and seeking 'equal partnership' with women?

Some Dalit men do not support the independence of women 'inside' and 'outside' the home. They curtail their education so that they can get married or find a low status job to support the family. They require them to carry out all, the domestic labour and be the primary nurturers of the children. Once again, like women in general, Dalit women have to perform a '*tarevarchi kasrat*' in order to balance their 'private' and the 'public.' Considerable gender-discrimination was observed in Dalit families irrespective of class.

Not all women tolerate such oppression, and perhaps this is also a reason for the rising number of divorces. By necessity, the first struggle of Dalit women has been against the Dalit men inside the community. For example, an educated Dalit woman might refuse to marry a husband who would not support her in her work. Some second and third generation Dalit women were increasingly assertive, and their education and employment was a significant contributing factor towards this independence. They entered different occupations. Nonetheless, I noted the confidence and assertion of some lower class and less educated Dalit women.

Through their personal initiative, they had made a success of small businesses. Special attention was given to the *tamasha* dancers who had made good careers for themselves despite their lack of formal education. In this case, the life of the family revolved around the woman's career. Traditionally, these were despised and lowly occupations, and such women have to struggle constantly to preserve their dignity and enhance their social status.

The Dalit community is grappling with changes and Dalit women today are definitely in different and better times compared to their mothers. Some feel that their marriages are more 'companionate'; however unequal their relationships with their husbands remain. However, most Dalit men in my project left their children's upbringing and education entirely to women. Some of the second and third generation learners said that Dalit families were changing and granting more independence and freedom to women, and that their status was no less than their husband's. Some Dalit men in the lives of the second and third-generation learners have proved to be good partners. I came across one Dalit man who spoke about his wife's growth and the 'companionship' that she required and deserved. However, such 'friendship' is not as a rule practiced much, even when there is a stated commitment to it in principle. The actions of Dalit men often do not mirror their thinking.

Some middle class Dalit women were better exposed to the institutions of education and to 'public' spaces in the urban environment (of Pune). Living in a middle class locale in itself suggested that the children came from good homes and that their parents – and thus themselves – were people of good character. Like the middle class in general, they make efforts for their children to acquire the best social, economic, cultural and religious 'capital.' They strove to build a 'middle-class' image for their children to ward off derogatory attention and to counteract the



negative stereotypes of Dalits that are common throughout Hindu India. Since the community believed in the 'natural order,' women were expected to be more responsible for developing such 'respectable' behaviour in their children. I noted that highly educated Dalit women desired and earnestly worked on assembling a capital for their children and grand-children and developed a 'taste' in them for sports, arts, music, dance, culture, science and so on. I marked that in certain cases the inherent Dalit capital is different from the upper caste capital, in that some Dalits were trained in skills that help them earn a living whereas upper caste students have the luxury of earning without practical considerations.

#### **Towards a counter-hegemonic programme for Dalit women**

B.R. Ambedkar spoke about the 'sickness' of a Brahmanical Hinduism that regarded the lowest in the hierarchy as polluted and beyond the pale.<sup>759</sup> This particular 'sickness' has not only continued to infect the body politic of modern India, but it has in recent times, like a cancerous growth, recurred in new malignant forms. In 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru had written that the emerging Indian regime must strive to achieve social equality. This did not, he said, stop at the provisions of legal equality, but had to translate into 'a realization of the fact that the backwardness or degradation of any group is not due to inherent failings in it but principally to lack of opportunities and long suppression by other groups.'<sup>760</sup> The upper castes did not on the whole embrace this vision with any commitment. In fact, they continued for the most part to regard SC groups with deep disgust, seeing them as 'dirty,' 'polluted,' 'lazy,' and the like. Caste-based divisions continued to dominate in housing, marriage, employment and general social interaction—divisions that have been time

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<sup>759</sup> Ambedkar has called Hindus the 'sick-men' of India, whose sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians. BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 26.

<sup>760</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (New York, 1946), pp. 532-3.

and time again reinforced through economic boycotts and physical violence. Marc Galanter showed on the basis of legal evidence that 'from the late 1950s, the government's many programs for the amelioration of the untouchables' condition continued in force, but were not significantly augmented.<sup>761</sup>

Reflecting back in 1964 on the period since independence, Nehru once more held out his desire that 'all Indians should be able to live decently and work honourably and receive regard for doing it.' They should get such concrete things as milk and food, decent housing, education and health services, but also dignity. 'This is our government,' he said, 'and we have our own constitution which provides for our worker comrades and that those who are considered as 'low' should receive special care and protection.' 'It gives me great pain' he continued, 'to see that although we achieved independence 16 years ago, during which we did much, started big industries, gave attention to agriculture and improved it, yet the weaker sections did not receive proper attention and they did not make sufficient progress.'<sup>762</sup> Despite Nehru's plea, during the decade and a half after his death later in that same year, the abolition of untouchability and amelioration of the conditions of the untouchables remained a dead issue for most of Hindu India.

From the 1980s onwards, the issue came back with a vengeance over the issue of extending reservations, leading to the anti-reservation agitations. Those who fought this measure – who were largely high caste and upper caste – disguised their prejudices against the untouchables through the language of meritocracy. Supposedly 'unqualified' and 'incompetent' members of the SC were, it was said, getting preference in education and employment that they did not deserve or warrant, leading

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<sup>761</sup> Marc Galanter, *Law and society in modern India* (Delhi; New York, 1989), p. 292.

<sup>762</sup> Nehru, as quoted in Vijay Prashad, 'Revolting Labour: The making of the Balmiki Community, Vol. 2,' (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1994), p. 405.



to injustice to those who were better-qualified and more able (read the high castes), and a general lowering of standards. Nonetheless, because of the continuing importance of the Dalit vote, which could make or break a party in an election, politicians continued to pay lip service to policies of equality. Atrocities against Dalits that accompanied the anti-reservation agitations, such as the burning alive of Dalit villagers in Gujarat, led to public enquiries that were conducted lethargically and callously, with arguments being advanced that erasing this age-old institution would take more time, thus eliding and neutralizing any stringent measures to deal with such practices. Various cosmetic devices were used to paper over the fact that the state has had no genuine commitment to uprooting such prejudice, with its accompanying mental and physical violence.

Phule and Ambedkar continued to inspire the Dalit movement in the post-independence period. Dalits and their organizations have gained strength from their legacy, and no great leader of comparable stature has been able to replace these stalwarts. Both Phule and Ambedkar put a lot of emphasis in education for Dalits as a central means towards their emancipation. I described Phule's battle to actually allow Dalits to have any access at all to education as the first-stage struggle. In this thesis, I have examined the ways in which Dalits have fought and won this battle, and then gone on to the second stage, which is that of obtaining an education on equal terms to that of the upper castes and classes. One of the leading questions that I have asked is to what extent has this whole experience brought about the hoped-for liberation of the Dalits, and Dalit women in particular, in a situation of continuing and evolving discrimination?

It is clear that for many the liberation has been only partial. Low-quality education that is limited to only a few years of schooling has not helped many Dalits

to better themselves in lives or assert themselves effectively against the higher castes. Education has failed to eradicate internal divisions among Dalits, as seen in the continuing rivalry between Mahars and Matangs. For many Dalit women, their education has not brought any escape from a life of domestic drudgery under the domination of men. Nonetheless, significant numbers have managed to obtain a higher level of educational attainment and have benefited from the positive discrimination policies of the government. Often, this merely means joining the system and forgetting about the past and the discriminations of slum life. Even then, in joining the middle classes, and imitating high caste culture, Dalit women often feel more liberated than their less fortunate poorer 'sisters.' It is however a personal rather than community liberation.

In all of this, the attempt to build a counter-hegemonic ideology and practice that validates Dalithood appears often to become lost in the daily lives of those who are struggling to better themselves within a social system that continues to normalise upper caste and middle class mores and cultural values. Those in the mainstream of Indian life always talk in terms of 'we, Hindus, the nation, the state, the government is doing so much for you, but still the Dalits will not improve.' I am concerned with this social and cultural violence. Such engagements of equating the Hindu with India and 'othering' of minorities have been discussed in depth by scholars like Gyan Pandey, Tanika Sarkar, and others. However, I note that this debate has a history, in that Ambedkar wrote that, 'There is another form of discrimination which though subtle is nonetheless real. Under it a systematic attempt will be made to lower the dignity and status of a meritorious Untouchable. A Hindu leader would be described merely as a great Indian leader. If a leader who happens to be an Untouchable he is to be referred to he will be described as so and so, the leader of the Untouchable. A



Hindu doctor would be described as a great Indian doctor. If a doctor happens to be an Untouchable doctor, he would be referred to as and so, the Untouchable doctor [or the Tribal doctor. *This means that Hindu is equal to India, while an Untouchable is not.*] This Untouchable are an inferior people and however qualified, their great men are only great among the Untouchable. They can never be greater or even equal to the great men among the Hindus. This type of discrimination, though social in character, is no less galling than economic discrimination.<sup>763</sup> Thus, Mala rightly questioned, 'why is my mother [Urmilatai Pawar] called a 'Dalit writer,' and not just a writer?'<sup>764</sup> Upper caste writers are not called by their caste, unlike Dalit writers who are so marked.

Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that 'the poor and the oppressed, in pursuit of their rights, have to adopt every means at hand in order to fight the system that puts them down.'<sup>765</sup> For many male Dalit activists this has meant embracing the legacy of Ambedkar and describing themselves as 'Ambedkarites.' I found that few Dalit women had adopted such a persona. They rarely described themselves as 'liberated Dalits' or referred to Ambedkar's legacy. Significantly, while in my research I often encountered men who called themselves 'Ambedkarites,' I hardly ever found a Dalit woman who did so. Women have worked more through an idiom of 'community uplift.' In general, there is in India an ethos and idiom of helping in the uplift of ones own community. Communities believe in helping their own, and will take a lot of effort to achieve this. Several Dalit women whom I interviewed deployed such a language. Even women who were not formally educated might turn what little training they had back into the community, as was the case with Padma Nikam, the

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<sup>763</sup> Ambedkar, BAWS, Vol. 5, Chapter 13, p. 109.

<sup>764</sup> Mala Pawar, 6 September 2004.

<sup>765</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Politics Unlimited: The Global Adivasi and Debates about the Political,' in B. Karlsson and T. Subba (eds), *Indigeneity in India*, Kegan Paul, London 2006), 235-245.

leader of the Hawkers' Union in Mumbai. Although more Buddhist women appear to have such an agenda, I came across some Matang women who have used their skills acquired through education to help the less fortunate members of their community. The idiom tended to be however that of helping the immediate community – Mahar, Buddhist, Matang or Chambhar – rather than the Dalits or oppressed in general. I found moreover that such community work was not considered a particularly high priority among Dalit women; at least, it was not stated as such.

Otherwise, there is a small number, but increasingly significant, group of Dalit feminists who are generally educated to a high level, and use that education to mount an internal critique of Dalit patriarchy and an external critique of the women's movement in India in general. Kumud Pawde fought for the inclusion of the category of 'caste' in a gendered analysis of Indian society, and has argued for a distinct Dalit feminist standpoint in this respect. These Dalit feminists have faced opposition from both male activists and theoreticians of their own community, as well as middle class, upper caste feminists, who tend to dominate feminist debate, writing and publicity in India. In fact, unless Dalit women are able to voice their opinions in a language and in tones that accord with elite intellectual sensibilities, they are likely to be shunned. This was borne out in my interview with Kumud Pawde. When in a women's meeting she tried to argue for the need for a separate Dalit women's movement, she was subjected to a barrage of unsympathetic criticism by some middle class, upper caste feminists, who accused her of trying to divide the women's movement. Despite this, there are a few mainstream Indian feminists who have taken such Dalit feminist arguments seriously. What they realise is that the struggle for women's equality has to be fought at a number of levels and in various forums, with a range of targets, and



that the battle against caste oppression is for many low caste and Dalit women in India a prime struggle.

Previously, inequalities were played out in practices of touching and not touching, of access to particular spaces and resources, and modes of dress and demeanour. Today, the Dalit girl first encounters a person of caste in an intimate and most impressionable way in the schoolroom, when she meets her teacher and takes instruction from him or her. The discriminatory attitudes of the high castes that come out through ways of speaking and interacting with supposed 'inferiors' are experienced and felt with shame. Later, as she progresses through the education system, assuming that she has the parental and other support to do so, she finds that her peers band together in caste groups, rivalling each other in an unequal contest of caste assertion. She finds herself treated as 'public property,' both by other boys and high caste teachers, and suffers sexual harassment by males who know too well that they can get away with such behaviour without suffering any adverse consequences in their careers, only because their targets are lowly untouchable girls who, everyone agrees, 'lead them on.' The shame of being a Dalit and a woman is thus implanted in the schoolroom, and a consciousness is forged. A girl, as she becomes a woman, may then use this consciousness to fight back, as some have done, or she may – as most do – keep her head down and get on with her life.

This has been, in many important respects, also the story of my own life. During my childhood and while I was in college, every time I encountered caste-discrimination, both overt and covert, I felt:

I have faced such casteist remarks umpteen number of many times in my life and I am going to hear such derogatory comments about me and my community till my death. What am I to do about such statements made by upper castes? How should I react to such insults? Should I react? Why should I waste my energy over such upper-

caste idiosyncrasy which I cannot put an end to? Why should I stoop down to their level and enter a verbal war with them?<sup>766</sup>

I never reacted to such remarks as a result. This is the dilemma of a subaltern Dalithood that I have sought to address in this dissertation. Through this research, I have gradually learnt to stand up for my self-esteem and self-respect. It has helped me to re-invent my selfhood, and look critically at my personhood and my community. I can no longer in consequence remain silent today.

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<sup>766</sup> As in my diary, 23 August 1993, Yerawada-Pune, and in an interview for an under-graduate student's paper on 'Dalit women's education,' Emory University, Atlanta, 9 March 2006.



**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Maps

Figure 1: Map of India



Source: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/india-political-map.htm>



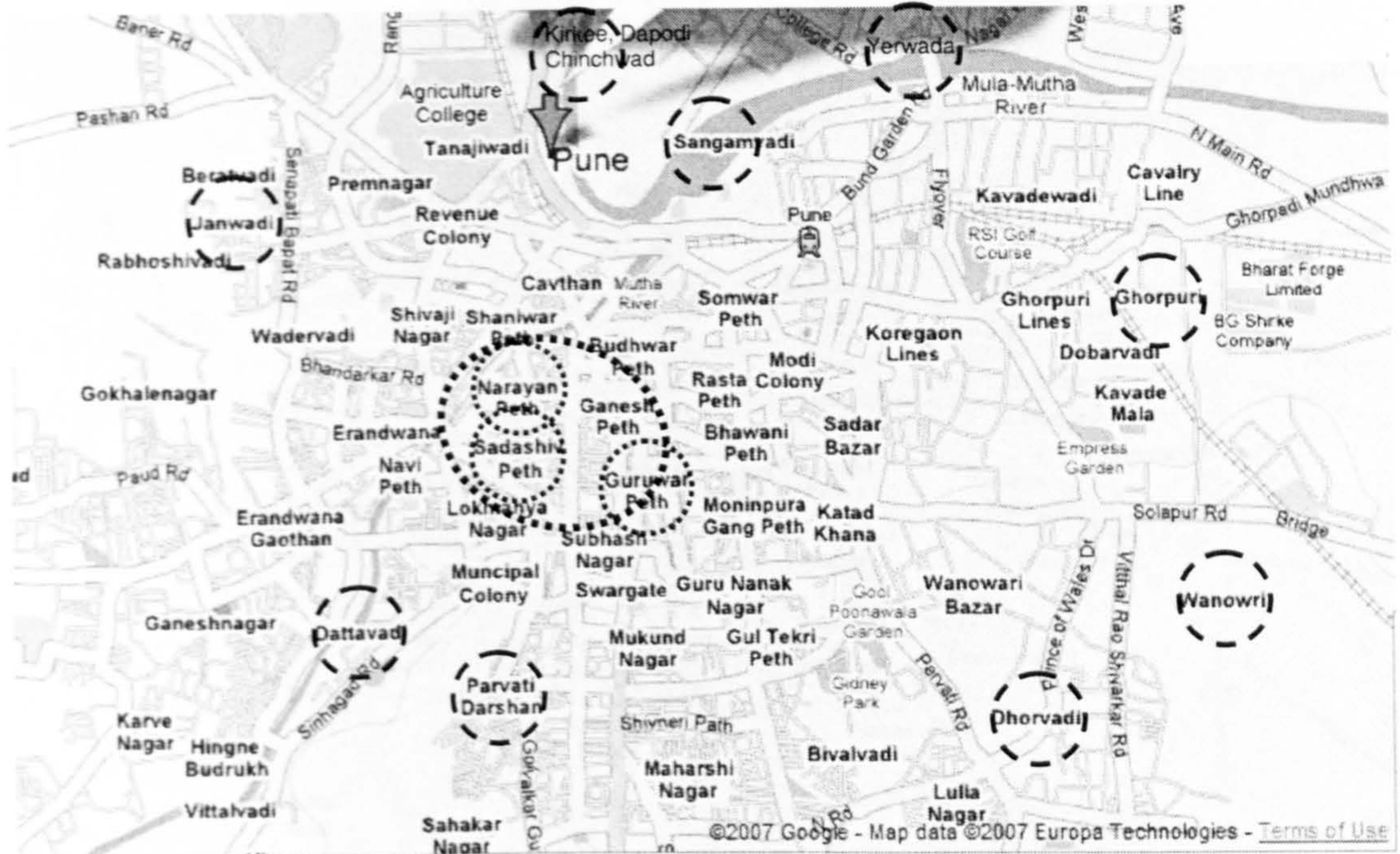








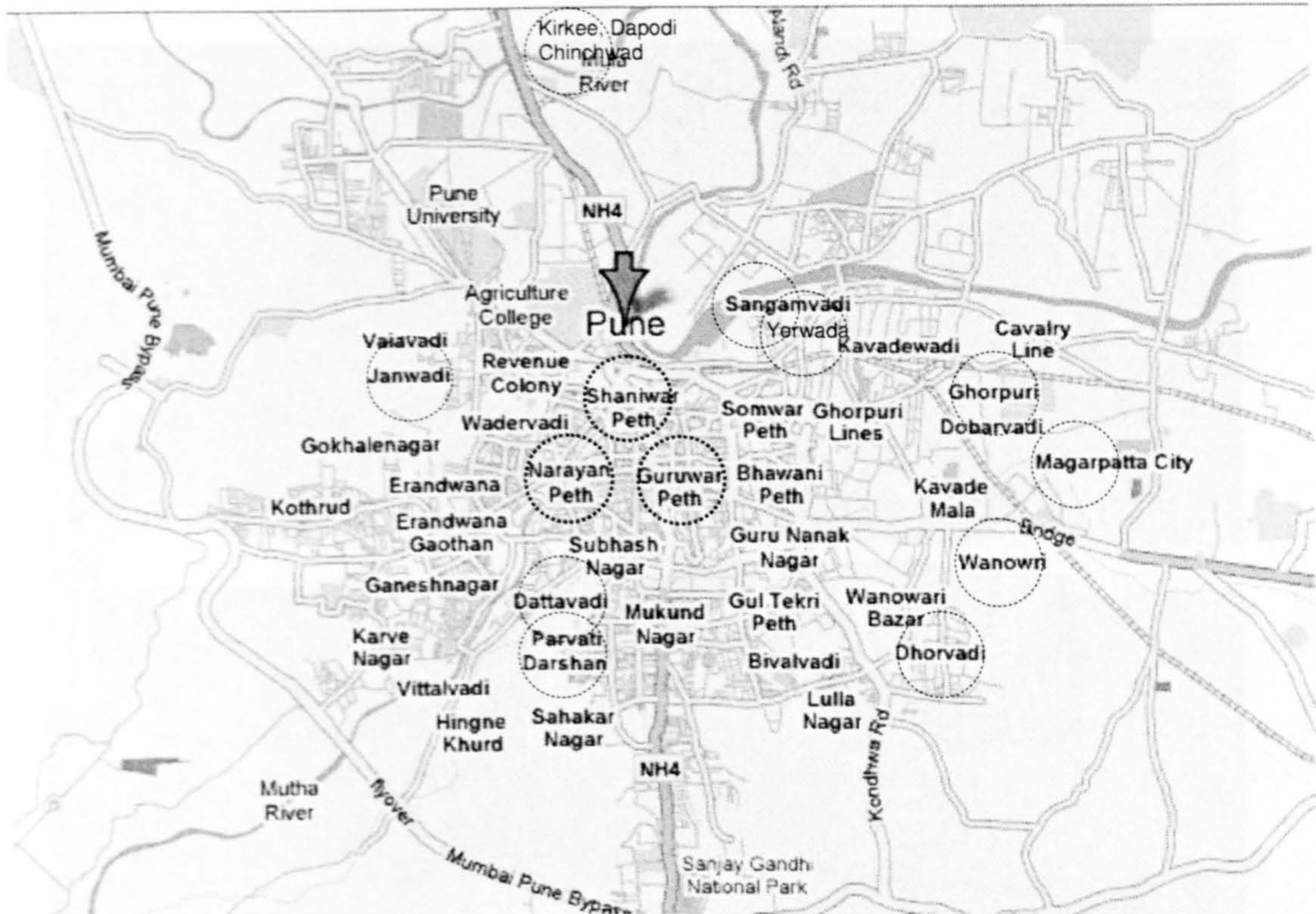
Figure 4: The City of Pune-1



Source: <http://maps.google.com/maps?um=1&tab=wl&hl=en&q=travel+guide>



Figure 5: The City of Pune-2



Source: <http://maps.google.com/maps?um=1&tab=wl&hl=en&q=travel+guide>



Appendix 2: A few memories



Dhammadiksha Suvarna Jayanti Bauddha Mahila Sammelan, Nagpur, 10 October 2005

Prof. Jyoti Lanjewar (second from left), Dr. Vimal Thorat (fifth from left), Prof. Kumud Pawde (eighth from left)





Buddhist women dressed in white, Nagpur, 10 October 2005



Interview with Prof. Kumud Pawde, Nagpur, 16 October 2005





**Mrs. Rajani Tribhuvan, Pune City Mayor, Pune, 13 November 2005**



**So close yet so far from Mayor's seat, Pune, 13 November 2005**



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### **Interviews**

Ms. Chhaya Bahule, Buddhist, Class 12, Mental Hospital clerical staff, Vishrantwadi-Pune, 1 June, 2001.

Mrs. Mangala Bansode, Matang, Illiterate, *Tamasgir*, 1 September, 2004 in Pune and 15 September, 2004 in Nagar. I watched their performance at the Balgandharva Theatre, Pune and in a village in Nagar, where I spent the day and night with them.

Mr. Nitin Bansode, Son of Mangala Bansode, Class 3/4, Nagar, 15 September 2004.

Mrs. Sudha Bhalerao, Buddhist, Bachelors in Commerce, Officer in a bank, Ramtekdi-Pune, 1 October 2004.

Manisha Bhalerao, Buddhist, (Daughter of Sudha Bhalerao), First Year Bachelors in Commerce, Ramtekdi-Pune, 1 October 2004.

Mrs. Champabai Bhalerao, Buddhist, Class 7, house-wife, Yerawada-Pune, 20 May 2000.

Mrs. Borade, Buddhist, Class 9, conducts sewing classes, Dapodi-Pune, 15 July 2002.

Ms. Vaishali Chandane, Buddhist, Bachelors in Law, Advocate, Parvati-Paytha-Pune, 10 August 2001.

Deepa Chavan, Matang, Class 9, Maid-servant, Ramtekdi-Pune, 22 May 2001.

Janhavi Chavan, Buddhist, Bachelors in Computer Science, Works with a firm, Yerawada-Pune, 21 May 2001.

Mrs. Indu Gade, Buddhist, Class 5, self-employed, Aundh Road-Pune, 15-16 March 2002.

Mrs. Gaikwad, Meera Jangam's mother, Matang, Class 3, Staff at a pre-school, Yashwant Nagar-Pune, 1 August 2004.

Ms. Jyoti Gaikwad, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Ramnagar-Pune, 20 May 2002.



Mrs. Kamal Jadhav, Matang, B.A., Police Sub-Inspector and now she is the Assistant Commissioner of Police. I interviewed her at her Kasba Peth Karyalaya, Pune. 16 September 2001 and also in June 2005.

Mrs. Meera Jangam, Matang, (Daughter of Mrs. Gaikwad), Class 10 failed, Yashwant Nagar slum-Yerawada-Pune, 1 and 5 August 2004.

Mrs. Bebi Jagtap, Matang, Class 12, Typist, Sinhagad Road-Pune, 5 February 2002.

Ms. Meenakshi Jogdand, Matang, Bachelors in Commerce, Bank-staff, Bhavani Peth-Pune, 13 March 2002.

Dr. Jyoti Kadam, Buddhist, M.B.B.S., Doctor, Trailokya Clinic, Dapodi-Pune, 11 June 2002.

Mrs. Sulochana Kadam, Buddhist, Bachelors in Science, Retired, Served in various positions as a senior administrative officer, Ambedkar Society, Yerawada-Pune, 3 and 8 August 2004. I have been seeing the Kadams since 2000 until the death of Mr. K.N. Kadam in 2006.

Mrs. Alaka Kale, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Karve Road-Pune, 1 July 2002.

Ms. Bharati Kale, Buddhist, M.A., Telephone-Operator, University of Pune staff quarters- Pune, 18 June 2002.

Ms. Alaka Kamble, Matang, B.A., Job-hunting and gives tuitions from home, Tadiwala Road-Pune, 30 October 2001.

Ms. Nanda Kamble, Buddhist, Nursing Diploma, Nurse, Parvati slum-Pune, 10 August 2001.

Rani Kamble, Matang, (Sister of Alaka Kamble), B.A., Clerical staff at PWD, Dapodi-Pune, 30 October 2001.

Mrs. Yashoda Kamble, Buddhist, Class 7, Hospital attendant, Ambedkar Society-Yerawada-Pune, 8 February 2002.

Mrs. Snehlata Kasbe, Matang, B.A., Senior officer, Central Building-Pune Station-Pune, 10 September 2003.

Mrs. Sadhana Kharat, Buddhist, Third year, B.A., housewife, Bibwewadi-Pune, 10 April 2002.

Ms. Smita Khedkar, Buddhist, B.A., Job-hunting, Ramnagar-Pune, 11 February 2002.

Mrs. Gangabai Kuchekar, Matang, Illiterate, Yashwant Nagar slum-Yerawada-Pune, 23 July 2004.

Mrs. Sheela Kuchekar, Matang, (Daughter of Mrs. Gangabai Kuchekar), Literate, Picks and sells rags, tin, glass and so on, Yerawada-Pune, 23 July 2004.

Mrs. Hirabai Kuchekar, Matang, Class 12, Clerk-Zilla Parishad, Sinhagad Road-Pune, 8 January, 2002.

Suvarna Kuchekar, Matang, (Daughter of Mrs. Hirabai Kuchekar), Commerce Graduate, job-searching, Sinhagad-road-Pune, 8 January, 2002.

Professor Jyoti Lanjewar, Buddhist, Professor of Marathi Literature, Ambazhari-Nagpur, 10 October 2005.

Mrs. Maya Mane, Buddhist, Class 12, Magician, flautist, Goregaon-Mumbai, 8 September 2005.

Mrs. Meena Mahajan, Buddhist, Class 12, House-wife, Mangalwar Peth-Pune, 29 April 2002.

Mrs. Sandhya Meshram, Buddhist, (Daughter of Draupadi Nagare), Masters in Social Work, Social worker-Trailokya, Laxminagar and Ramtekdi-Pune, 9 June 2001, and 11 September 2004.

Chetan Meshram, Buddhist, (Son of Sandhya Meshram), Second Year Bachelors in Science (Genetic Engineering), Laxminagar and Ramtekdi-Pune, 11 September, 2004.

Ms. Kanchan Mohite, Buddhist, Under-graduate, Sant Janabai Hostel-Pune, 30 July 2003.

Dr. Shalini More, Buddhist, M.B.B.S., Doctor, Owns two clinics, Sinhagad road-Pune, 1 June 2002.

Mrs. Draupadi Nagare, Buddhist, Class 7, Ramtekdi-Pune, 11 September 2004.

Mrs. Padma Nikam, Buddhist, Class 3, Owns two food-stalls, President-Hawker's Union, Borivili-Mumbai, 22 October 2005.

Mrs. Nanubai Pagare, Buddhist, Literate, housewife, Siddhartha Nagar-Yerawada-Pune, 20 May 2001.

Shilpa Pagare, Buddhist, (Daughter of Nanubai Pagare), Class 10, Yerawada-Pune, 20 May 2001.

Mrs. Sarita Paik, Buddhist, (Niece of Champabai Bhalerao), Class 7, House-wife, Yerawada-Pune, 20 May 2000.

Mrs. Ratnaprabha Pawar, Matang, Class 12, Diploma in education, Municipal school teacher, Bibwewadi-Pune, 10 April 2002.

Ms. Prakshoti Pawar, Buddhist, Bachelor in Engineering and Masters in Business Administration, Executive (Mahindra and Mahindra Group), Maharashtra Board Housing Society-Pune, 10 April 2002.



Mrs. Urmila Pawar, Buddhist, M.A., Borivili-Mumbai, 5-7 September 2004. I stayed at the Pawar's residence for 2-3 days.

Ms. Malavika Pawar, Buddhist, (Daughter of Urmila Pawar), Masters in Sociology and Bachelors in Education, Sangeet Visharad. She is looking for further opportunities. I spent a night at Malavika's place, 5 and 6 September 2004.

Ms. Manini Pawar, Buddhist, (Daughter of Urmila Pawar), Manini has Bachelors in Science and works at a laboratory. She is an accomplished Kathak dancer. She is searching for further opportunities. Borivili-Mumbai, 6 September 2004.

Prof. Kumud Pawde, Buddhist, M.A., Retired, Dhantoli-Nagpur, 16 October 2005.

Apurva Pawde, Buddhist, (Son of Kumud Pawde), M.B.B.S.-M.D. Dhantoli-Nagpur, 16 October 2005.

Ms. Amita Pillewar, Buddhist, Masters in Social Work, Researcher-National AIDS Research Institute, Interviewed at Karvenagar-Pune, 30 July 2005.

Mrs. Surekha Punekar, Buddhist, Literate, *Tamasgir*, Kasba Peth-Pune, 20 September 2004.

Mrs. Lalita Randhir, Buddhist, (Daughter of Nanubai Pagare), Masters in Commerce, State Bank Officer, Swami Vivekanand Nagar-Ramtekdi-Pune, 22 May 2001.

Mrs. Meena Ranpise, Buddhist, M.A., Lecturer, Sinhadgad Road-Pune, 12 May 2001

Mrs. Gitanjali Rithe, Buddhist, Masters in Commerce, Karuna Trust, Ambedkar Society-Pune, 12 June 2001.

Mrs. Jyotsna Rokade, Buddhist, (Daughter of Mrs. Sulochana Kadam), Masters in Commerce, Sales Tax Officer, Interviewed at Yerawada and Vishrantwadi-Pune, 8 and 15 August, 2004.

Mrs. Poonam Rokade, Buddhist, (Daughter-in-law of Jyotsna Rokade), Bachelors in Engineering, Engineer with Maharashtra State Electricity Board (Mumbai), Interviewed at Mundhawa-Pune, 15 August 2004.

Monica Sathe, Matang, Masters in Social Work, Karve nagar-Pune, 30 July 2005.

Ms. Lakshmi Shinde, Matang, Class 12, Self-employed, Parvati slum-Pune, 9 October 2000.

Mrs. Rajani Tribhuwan, Buddhist, S.S.C., Mayor's Office-Pune Corporation-Pune, 13 November, 2005.

Dr. Swati Waghmare, Buddhist-Matang, M.B.B.S., Doctor, Vishrantwadi-Pune, 12 November 2004. Her mother Mrs. Waghmare is a B.A. and is employed with the Maharashtra state government.

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## Abstract

'Daughters of the Lesser God: Dalit Women's Education in Postcolonial Pune' examines the nexus between caste, gender and state pedagogical practices in relationship to Dalit (ex-untouchable) women of Pune (India). Based on interviews with three generations of Dalit women, it examines the ways in which they have experienced and made use of their formal education in schools and colleges. It traces their lives as they have over the generations migrated from rural areas to the cities, and from city slums to, in some cases, middle-class neighbourhoods. The women belong to two Dalit communities – the Mahars and the Matangs – who are traditionally rivals and competitors. It is argued that the education system discriminates against Dalit women in ways that mirror their socio-economic and religious disabilities. Dalits valorise institutes of formal education for escaping their historical and contemporary degeneration. They look upon education as a primary means of gaining employment, and of advancing economically and socially. Nonetheless, the process of education frequently subjects Dalit girls to humiliating experiences that smother the hopes of many. These are described and analysed in detail, revealing how the caste system subjects Dalit in general, and Dalit women in particular, to the 'physical and mental violence' of constant indignities and humiliations. Although the recently burgeoning writing by Dalits has a lot to say on the experience of Dalit men, Dalit women are largely neglected in this literature – something that this thesis seeks to rectify. The thesis also interrogates the ways in which culture is deployed and represented, showing how the process of *subjectivation* works to produce not merely forms of domination but also complicity and dissent. In recent years, increasing numbers of Dalit women have found ways of resisting the prevalent hegemony, and the research pinpoints the ways in which some have managed to use the education system to their advantage. Wider questions are raised about the ways that the Dalits, and specifically Dalit women, create spaces and sites for their own self-assertion and betterment, and how they engage with modernity in other ways. The dissertation is concerned with contributing to and furthering the dialogue on gendering education and caste. Dalit lives are built on a long history of suffering, anxiety, desire, and struggle, and the creative visions of social justice put forward by Dalits can continue to inspire and shape the consciousness of local and transnational participants in their battles against oppressive and exploitative systems.

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