

## Non-Brahmin Renderings of Feminism in Maharashtra

### Is It a More Emancipatory Force?

Chhaya Datar

THIS is in response to Sharmila Rege's paper, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position' (*EPW*, October 31, 1998).

I appreciate the author's efforts to chart in a comprehensive manner the recent history of dalit women's movement and its theorisation in Maharashtra. She has tried to locate this phenomenon and the theorisation in the context of the debate between post-modernist feminists from among black women and women from the third world and the standpoint theorists who believe that for a political action one needs to have a standpoint which is worked out in such a manner that it mediates the complex reality of hierarchies of colonial domination, race, class, caste and gender.

In critiquing the need for dalit women to talk differently Rege evolves a more forceful position and declares that the dalit theorisation and dalit movement should in fact lead the women's liberation movement which has remained constrained by brahminical framework in its attempt to unite all women regardless of their class and caste backgrounds. The present brahminical leadership of the women's movement universalises the experience of women by treating 'woman' as a category and promotes personal politics. Hence despite its claim of being more emancipatory than the working class movement led by the Marxist political parties it has ignored the experiences of dalit women and their special struggles around the oppression suffered under the different layers of hierarchies such as patriarchy within their own castes and the patriarchy of the dominant castes and caste domination which is represented often in class terms.

According to Rege, the major lacuna in the present feminist theorisation in India is that it has totally ignored a vital contribution by Babasaheb Ambedkar who highlighted the intrinsic relationship between gender, sexuality and caste "the absence of intermarriage or endogamy is the one characteristic that can be called the essence of caste". According to emerging dalit theorisation, all practices such as sati, treatment of widowhood, etc, were used for regulating any transgression

of caste boundaries. Babasaheb Ambedkar has located the specificities and varying intensities of women's subordination by caste and thereby draws our attention to the specificities of dalit women's subordination, both as 'dalit' and as 'women'.

Rege claims that by attributing dalit theory to Phule and Ambedkar it gives them more emancipatory force to intercept many layers of hierarchies at a time. Hence she argues that the dalit women's movement is not a narrow agenda of identity politics but on the contrary is interrogating current feminist standpoint which is brahminical and is also biased by middle class values and visions. Rege says for non-dalit feminists to adopt a dalit feminist standpoint position means sometimes losing, sometimes revisioning the 'voice' that we as feminists had gained in the 1980s. This process, she insists, can transform individual feminists into oppositional and collective subjects.

My first contention is that Rege has placed the current feminist debate within a narrow framework of feminist versus post-modernist streams. She did not present another vibrant stream, ecofeminism, which is attempting to revision the society where women are placed at the centre of natural and social regeneration. This stream consists of many overarching concerns such as ecological destruction, natural and social alike, apart from the usual concerns of colonial, class, caste and racial domination. Ecofeminists focus on caste- and gender-based oppression of dalit women, particularly the women who are losing their livelihoods in the rural areas because of displacement and environmental destruction. They are also questioning the unjust distribution of natural resources, which is one of main causes for mismanagement of natural resources.

Not only does Rege ignore ecofeminism, she criticises the autonomous women's groups and the left party-based feminists for ignoring the caste-based oppression of dalit women. She also takes issue with the post-modernists who talk of 'difference' but do not feel the need to convert multiple voices into social relations that can explain oppression. She tries to put forward her own dalit woman's standpoint in relation

to these two above positions. However, she ignores the fact that both these positions, one from the structuralist perspective and the other from the post-structuralist perspective are part of the same mainstream perspective which does not interrogate industrial, technological paradigm which encourages urbanisation and centralisation. These processes on the one hand create conditions for abolition of old hierarchies but on the other hand recast them into different categories in the changing context of globalisation and its response – fundamentalisation of politics. Although the dalit women's movement may not be part of narrow identity politics, insofar as it does not talk of the materiality of the majority of dalit, marginalised women who lose their livelihoods because of environmental degradation but focuses its struggle mainly against brahminical symbols, it cannot aspire to revisioning of society. It cannot become more emancipatory than the present women's movement.

Also, it is unfortunate that Rege targets what are really stray tendencies within feminism that are preoccupied with sexuality and sexual politics as though they define the second wave of the women's movement. She contends that issues of sexuality are intrinsically linked to caste and sexual politics without challenging brahminism results in 'lifestyle' feminism.

Rege alleges that feminists of left inclination have collapsed class and caste categories and rendered all women 'savarna',<sup>1</sup> and autonomous feminists who agree that dalit women need to take up leadership of the women's movement, do not feel the need to change their own subjectivity, i.e., to reinvent themselves as dalit feminists, leaving dalit women to fight their own cause. This is true by this assertion but the dalit feminist position does not become a superior standpoint. Those who regenerate both natural and societal resources can claim a standpoint and their knowledge becomes liberatory and forms a vantage point for this alternative standpoint. But dalit feminism as it stands cannot become a standpoint. It merely helps inform the liberatory knowledge of other movements, particularly the ecofeminist movement to expand its scope and richness.

The process of capital accumulation uses all kinds of cultural and material hierarchies to get cheap labour and recruit the marginalised population as a part of a reserve army of labour to push wages lower. Cultural revolt becomes useful for pushing the wages up. The demand for redistribution

of natural resources, and capacity building for managing these resources to produce livelihoods, questions the move to privatisation as the only option to the state control of natural resources. Community control and strengthening of local markets can create a sound base for negotiations with global markets if required. Rising fundamentalism at present is a response to the feeling of emasculation in the face of the global forces. A cultural revolt is necessary to counter these forces, but the revolt should get channelised in search of an alternative paradigm.

#### CURRENT WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA

I would like to present two arguments in the ongoing debate about women's movement being brahminical in the Indian context and particularly in the context of Maharashtra, where women's movement has been quite visible for some time. My first argument is that it is essential to understand the emergence of the second phase of the women's movement in its specific historical context to understand why the need was felt to assert anti-patriarchal struggle at that point of time. Besides, it is crucial to take note of different trends which emerged as the movement got developed, some of which have the capacity to be more holistic and can accommodate rich theoretical explanations offered by many other movements, such as dalit women's movement, nature-based cultural revival movements, and environmental movements.

In brief, the emergence of the second wave women's movement can be traced to 1975, when two events happened. The Committee for Status of Women submitted its report, 'Towards Equality' to the central government in 1974. It was part of the mandate by UN to all the member nations to prepare such a report for the first International Conference on Women's Issues to be organised in 1975 at Mexico. The revelation from this report was alarming – it highlighted through statistics collected through the government machinery that women's status was declining in every sphere. The International Women's Year celebrations also gave space to women in different form despite the declaration of emergency by the then Indira Congress government. Women in and around the left parties including those active in the Naxalite<sup>2</sup> movements and the unions were inspired to talk on women's issues. Academic women who had succeeded as individuals in their own fields, were startled by these facts pointing to the declining status of women.

A second significant event was the discussion of the Mathura rape case in 1980. This stimulated an analysis of patriarchy as structural violence embedded in the present relationship between men and women. There followed the issue of domestic violence in dowry deaths reported by the women in the media. Women's groups all over the country mounted strong protests. The movement gathered momentum during 1980s. It is important to understand these dates because some of the interrogatory questions raised in the paper by the author are factually incorrect. She has asked why the women's movement did not take up the issue of rape of dalit women in 1979 which occurred at the time of the renaming of Marathwada university in Maharashtra as Babasaheb Ambedkar university.

The author has blamed both the Dalit Panther Movement along with the women's movement for ignoring the specific oppression of dalit women. According to her both the movements started around the same period and followed a one-point agenda; Dalit Panthers pursuing the cause of dalit men and the mainstream women's movement fighting against patriarchy, assuming all women to be savarna. The Dalit Panther Movement started in the 1970s. 'One village, one water point'<sup>3</sup> movement was also going parallel under the leadership of Baba Adhav, a non-dalit social reformer. Both these movements converged in 1979, for the demand of renaming of Marathwada university after Babasaheb Ambedkar. The reported rape of dalit women mentioned by the author took place around the issue of renaming of the university, i.e., in 1979. It needs to be noted that many women activists, feminists also joined the renaming struggle at that time. The women's movement had not at that point begun any analysis of violence yet. During 1975 and 1980 the focus was mainly the issue of discrimination in the wage rates and the legal rights at the work place, as many women activists had a left party background.

It was only at the time of the Mathura rape case in 1980 that feminists perceived women as controlled by men in all their life activities such as labour, reproduction and sexuality and that rape was used as an instrument of control by men. The left party women dubbed these feminists as radical feminists who stand 'against' men and want to divide the working class along sexual lines. It also needs to be put down on paper that Mathura was an adivasi woman in Chandrapur in Maharashtra. Another famous case taken up by women's organisations was the case of Ramezabee,

a Muslim woman, in Hyderabad. Hence it is not true that the women's movement never took up cases of rape or marginalised women seriously. In Chandrapur later in 1990 when savarna women attacked dalit women, the 'sampark samiti' (co-ordinating body) of women's organisations sent an investigating committee and publicised the issue in a big way.

The point is that the Dalit Panthers had been already arguing that their women's oppression was not only class-based but it was also caste-based. They reiterated the position long noted by Babasaheb Ambedkar, that dalit women are being sexually used and abused by the savarna men. Dalit Panthers felt it necessary to highlight this aspect because the left parties used to refer only to the class aspect of their situation. It was the natural mandate of the women's movement to bring out the patriarchal aspect in rape incidents against dalit women (particularly mass rape) carried out to humiliate and provoke dalit men. One has to remember that caste-based oppression has been more publicised in Maharashtra because of the Satyashodhak<sup>4</sup> and Ambedkarite movements. It was imperative for the women's movement to inspire the high caste women, the brahmin women and force them to perceive their 'deprived' and hence 'dalit' status and to demystify their insulated, high ritual status.

It has to be remembered that in India, many women activists got radicalised on the campuses during 1970s but their feminism emerged after they started working with the labouring classes, either in unions or among adivasis, unlike in the west. Alongside their personal experiences of being dominated by their own colleagues and menfolk in the family, their inspiration for revolt against patriarchy also came from the powerful voices of the women of labouring classes. Rege has borrowed the analytic of the women's movement from Grant (1993). Grant's work is too narrowly designed to accommodate the concerns of the women's movement in India. Rege notes that feminism of the 1970s had developed in opposition to the left and borrowing from Grant cites three categories, viz, woman, experience and personal politics as central to feminist theorisation. Rege excludes many other trends in feminism in the north and in the world, which are more inclusive of many other issues and have departed from the conventional left analysis in a substantial manner. Feminism may be used narrowly by a few, to justify their personal lifestyle but the agenda of the women's movement is much wider and is based on collective identity.

It is one thing to say [Velaskar 1998] that for understanding dalit women's issues we need a more sensitive and fine grained understanding of patriarchal structures which takes into account the influence of variant social structures and notes the diversities rather than be content with the analysis of the secondary status of women as if it were a pancultural phenomenon; and it is another thing to claim that the dalit feminist standpoint which has emerged so far, from the work of dalit feminist intellectuals and the practices and struggles of dalit women, can be an alternative torch-bearing force for the women's movement. Here the argument is trying to collapse the levels of theoretical analysis, i.e., it copies the same act of collapsing the categories of class and caste, which the author accuses the left of doing.

Padma Velaskar has emphasised the difference between women of different caste groups in a strong manner. She writes, "In another very fundamental social sense also, the status of women of the lowest caste groups has nothing in common with and is in diametric opposition to women of the higher groups especially the twice born and higher groups. Thus to speak of common subordination of all women being 'dalit' is to mystify this crucial difference. In fact, women of higher castes are infinitely superior ritually and in social power to even men of lowly castes. Women are mute actors in the cultural construction and material operation of caste but are very dynamic actors giving substance and meaning to caste interaction." Thus in a status quoist situation her analysis stands valid, but not in the current dynamic situation where women's movement has already taken some steps to transform the subjectivity of individual self as well as to intervene in situations of violence and injustice against dalit women.

It appears that non-dalit women in need of cleansing their feeling of guilt of being born in the savarna castes are trying to put new 'goddesses' on the altar who can bless the women's movement in future. However, Rege warns us that non-dalit women should not leave dalit women alone to fight their own cause but 'should own their cause as our cause' and she assures us that the 'transformation of subjectivities is possible'. She asserts that only the dalit women can speak for themselves, a typical post-modernist stand which she herself has described as 'limiting'. However, at the same time she talks of the possibility of non-dalit women 'reinventing themselves as dalit feminists'. It is one thing to say that the dalit women should emerge as leaders and spokespersons to bring forth

forcefully the specific oppression of dalit women on the agenda of the women's movement. But it is another to say that to be able to claim to oneself the label of a real feminist, one has to forget the wider perspective of feminism which is a result of the confluence of many other movements such as environmental and Gandhian movements, and embrace solely the so-called dalit women's standpoint.

#### DALIT FEMINIST POLITICS

The second point one needs to discuss is what kind of politics is proposed by this standpoint. The claim of a separate standpoint made by the dalit women's movement fits into the present mainstream political scenario of bargaining within the given political framework. This new additional dimension to the traditional structure of caste-class relations has arisen because of the trend towards brahminisation/sanskritisation<sup>5</sup> among dalit and OBC castes on the one hand and the unstable political atmosphere which encourages the bargaining for seats in the democratic processes of elections and power-sharing on the other. It brings pressure for consolidation of groups on the basis of caste identity for opportunistic purposes. In practice it means that men of the dalit and OBC castes strive for space and compete with savarna men within the present political and economic system.

I am afraid that the dalit feminist standpoint does not take into account the contemporary dynamic situation which encourages assertion of intra-caste patriarchy by the dalit men. In the present atmosphere, women's issues and women too are used as pawns to further political interests of parties and men who are in control of these parties. Issues like uniform civil code and women's quota in the parliament are taken up and treated in a manner not empowering to women but encouraging their dependence on men. Women are divided, not only by their class status but more fundamentally by their caste status, where women of the high castes are used by their men to symbolise the purity and the higher ritual status of their castes. Once caste politics gets predominance these divisions among women get underscored and the process of empowerment which should get heightened as a part of women's participation in the decision-making processes in public life, yields distortions of all sorts, recasting the patriarchal tendencies in a new mode.

A demand by some dalit feminists for separate quota for dalit and OBC women within overall women's quota of 33 per cent seats in the parliament has to be

analysed against this backdrop. Dalit men have never encouraged dalit women to represent them in the few reserved constituencies which exist. The parties representing dalit votes such as the Republican Party of India have never offered seats to dalit women while bargaining for seats with the other political parties. Dalit Panthers never took up women's issues in their revolt against brahminical culture during the 1970s. On the issue of women's quota in the parliament, dalit women are posed in a competitive situation against savarna women, encouraged by dalit and OBC men who want to divert the prospective competition aimed at them by their own women to savarna women.

#### AMBEDKAR'S ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL CONTROL

It is interesting to note that the relatively egalitarian culture of adivasis is getting more patriarchal as adivasi life is coming under the influence of the market institutions. Babasaheb Ambedkar's contribution explains the institution of control over women's sexuality, particularly that of high caste women who had some right over property in the pre-Vedic period and fear of this property getting transferred to the lower castes through marriage ties was responsible for these women being denied this right. This phenomenon is being repeated at present in the regions where adivasi population predominates. Adivasi women are denied property rights by the men of their own community, due to the fear that outside men are marrying adivasi women and will claim the land of these women which is supposed to be inalienable under the fifth schedule.<sup>6</sup> Thus control over female sexuality as a means of retaining control over property is a typical patriarchal mechanism and is reported at present from areas undergoing transition from tribal communal life to the commercial economy. I regret that dalit women are not using this analysis to explain the phenomenon of growing internal patriarchy among dalit castes which are getting more and more stratified and those who have acquired mobility are emulating brahmin customs and practices. The growing incidence of dowry among dalit castes instead of traditional bride price illustrates this tendency.

At this point we need to take note of the point raised by Padma Velaskar: ...it is maintained that lower caste women were not secluded, since their labour was needed in the fields and survival. Many lower caste communities allowed divorce; and polygamy though permitted, could not be practised by those who could not afford

to support a large family. All these facts are left fragmented and disparate, and decontextualised from caste organisation and its operation; they do not provide an account of the actual structural position and status of dalit women and 'falsely convey a positive picture'."

I think this argument is in a way double-edged. The author argues and rightly so that all women have been lumped by the feminist analysis under the panculture of subordination by the patriarchal forces suppressing women in various sub-structures, but she also criticises the women's movement interpreting the differential norms governing dalit women as conferring autonomy on dalit women as compared to the brahmin women. I think what the women's movement is saying has to be understood as a subtext of the pancultural patriarchy, to exhort brahmin women to get awakened from their consciousness of superior position in a caste system. To demystify the strong myth of superiority, in the popular version of the movement, it is pardonable to assert that the women considered inferior in the traditional ideology have more strength and space than brahmin women. Ambedkar has shown the link between sexual control of women and property and material wealth in the case of brahmin women. A few dalit women like Baby Kamble are pointing out the danger of the elite dalit women initiating the brahminical mode and adopting brahminical customs and symbols (Speech by Baby Kamble at Mahad, on December 25, 1998, for the celebration of Bharatiya Stree Mukti Din).

#### DEAD END TO MAINSTREAMISATION

Another area where dalit men's movement is very strong and has not used its power to benefit its own women is in the unions of the public sector enterprises where dalit men have formed separate unions for the agenda of recruiting all the reserved posts. There too, not much effort of recruitment for women is noticed. These are all agendas mainly to mainstream the dalit population in the economy and polity.

However, one realises that there is a dead end to this road and now that dalit women have awakened and started demanding their right to the reserved posts, they are hardly likely to succeed. The recessionary processes at the global level, increasing competition among the nations for exporting goods produced by cheap labour, disinvestment in the public sector, promotion of economy based on markets and shrinking jobs in the organised sector and in the urban areas combine to produce

a discouraging scenario for the one point agenda of reserved posts. Ambedkar had exhorted the dalit people to migrate to cities and educate themselves. He wanted them to prepare for the modern society based on the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, leaving their menial jobs with the stigma of impurity and untouchability. However, that vision is no longer valid. And at least a few dalit groups have realised this. Migration in the present context means living in the slums of the big cities and allowing the children to get criminalised in the absence of good schools and due to growing unemployment.

To create livelihood opportunities for millions of marginalised people it is imperative to think of an alternative development paradigm and assert the dalit voice in that forum. The fear of decentralised society scattered in the village communities is understandable because of the centuries of experience of social and spiritual marginalisation. However, in the historical context of the struggles and new ethos of democracy, equity, justice and sustainability, it is not possible for anybody to go back to feudal practices. Violence still plays a significant role in rural life but it is due to the assertion of oppressed groups for increased wages or demand for water and other natural resources.

#### LIMITS OF DALIT FEMINISM

I would like to question the validity of this dalit feminist standpoint as the only standpoint representing dalit women's voices. It is interesting to analyse the socio-economic profile of the dalit women leaders who have formed dalit women's organisations, since 1990s. They are the educated dalit women working in universities and in white collared jobs. Many of them are neo-Buddhist and the author has mentioned 'pardeshi' cautioning against the middle class neo-Buddhist leadership which could have politically limited consequences for the movement. It has to be also pointed out that these are all urban women, and it is not known from their writings and concerns how much knowledge they have about the issues of rural development apart from the issues of cultural oppression of the marginalised women.

Another criticism levelled against the brahmin women who form part of the women's movement is that they act as spokespersons of dalit women. Brahmin women always utilise opportunities of presenting data on dalit women, or research findings related to their specific oppression, which they could do because of their superior access to education and language

skills. But the same women do not make efforts to teach dalit women how to do research, how to represent the situation of dalit women in such a manner that they can come forward and occupy the dais themselves. Kunda Pramila Neelkanth, in her recent article in *Maharashtra Times* (December 23, 1998) alleges that the leaders in the women's movement want dalit women to behave as the masses who will sit on the floor and listen to their own plight articulated by the brahmin women under the plea that the illiterate dalit women cannot be effective on the stage by narrating their stories in such robust words. She argues that dalit women are no more going to tolerate this and would like to become their own spokespersons and leaders. Unfortunately, when the dalit women's organisations also organise their public meetings one finds that the educated dalit women are on the stage and use their illiterate women as audience (meeting co-ordinated by Vikas Vanchit Dalit Mahila Rashtriya Parishad on December 25, 1998, at Mahad which I attended<sup>7</sup> and in fact act much less democratically than the women leaders in the movement who have become much more sensitive to participatory democracy and are alert against any imposition of ideas from any co-worker.

Another important aspect observed is that at present the phenomenon of dalit feminism is prevalent only among mahar women who have the background of the Ambedkarite movement and have migrated to the cities since the first world war when many dalit men got recruited in the British army. Also the peculiarity of mahar caste is that members of this caste had never developed any particular skill in the village 'balutedari' ('jajmani' system) and acted mainly as village messengers. A few went into entertainment business of 'tamasha', i.e., dancing and signing. Hence it was easier for them to escape from the village obligations. They could migrate easily to the cities. Education is more prevalent among mahar women than among women of lower dalit caste groups. One notices that the liberated dalit-mahar women too are not trying to educate the unliberated women from other dalit caste groups. The cultural ethos which include ritual prayers on the dais are all Buddhist<sup>8</sup> and may alienate other dalit women who do not believe in Buddhism. If the theory of difference is stretched further one can notice that there are different caste sub-groups and their oppression can be described in specific terms, but cannot be woven into separate analysis. The women belonging to nomadic or denoti-

fied tribes will fall into another sub-group which have nothing in common with dalit women.

#### ECONOMICS OF DALIT FEMINISM

The National Alliance of the People's Movement represents many movements of labouring people mainly working in the informal sector including fisherfolk working with traditional gears and crafts. They have shown concerns for the artisans and the people belonging to the occupation-based castes and recently had brainstorming consultations for what kind of livelihood arrangements they would have in the developing scenario of globalisation and dismantling of the organised sector and with unemployment.

One is not surprised at the total lack of reference to Gandhism and his vision which is being reinvented by several environmental groups and also ecofeminists. Although it is a well known fact that no dalit movements would like to explore Gandhian thought under any circumstances because of the well known differences between the strategies of the two leaders, it is imperative for anybody working in the area of rural development and building up of rural economy to understand what Gandhi had visualised 80 years ago and understand his concerns and postulates about following a path of development adopted by the industrialised countries. Dalit women need to erase their biases if they want to develop their theories of liberation.

The ecofeminist trend according to me can be called an alternative standpoint. It offers a fundamentally radical counter standpoint to any existing radical standpoint, including that of any variant of marxist standpoint. It positions reproduction at the centre of the human activity in all its three dimensions – daily reproductive activities to service human labour, physical reproduction which includes production, and social relations for which socialisation of children in moulding their cultural identities becomes an essential activity. The present capital accumulation processes are either commercialising the reproductive activities wherever they can afford, or externalising the same where cheap labour forms an important ingredient. These processes also encourage discounting of the future of mankind by unsustainable use of natural resources.

Any standpoint which predicts emancipation based on processes of industrialisation which requires non-renewable energy resources on a large scale, and fast-track development based on high-tech does

undermine the value of reproduction and regeneration. Unless reproduction becomes a central concern of society and a lifestyle is geared around that we cannot say that paradigmatic change has been envisioned. It means that the economy and polity both get decentralised. It also implies restructuring of office and factory hours, rescheduling of school timings and developing appropriate curriculum to appreciate historical struggles against caste- and class-based oppressions and exploitation. It also means that we need to identify technology which is more suitable for an ecologically balanced society based on equity, and sustainability in future.

It is desirable that dalit feminists are exposed to many other movements which would enrich them. They should not base their arguments with reference to feminism which encourages lifestyles or feminism which stresses only class exploitation of women and highlights wage discrimination. Cultural revolt is essential but it needs to be invoked in every aspect of daily life, as well as in the issues such as access to natural resources; water and land. Caste oppression started by denying access to these resources and hence there is a need to claim these resources instead of leaving them to the savarnas. This will help regenerate the ecosystem as well.

#### Notes

[An edited version of the paper presented at the Eighth International Conference on Maharashtra: Culture and Society, University of Sydney, January 6-10, 1999.]

- 1 Savarna is the term based on the vedic categorisation of the people in four 'varnas': brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra. The first three varnas are considered savarna, i.e., superior varnas. They do not observe pollution among each other as far as food is concerned. Shudras are the untouchables. The term 'dalit' was invented by modern untouchable writers to define their identity as oppressed and exploited. All the castes which are a part of the three varnas mentioned above are considered superior, though ideological leadership is given by the brahmins.
- 2 Naxalite movement had been spearheaded by young party workers and students frustrated with the established communist parties. They were influenced by Maoist ideology and wanted to bring about revolution by organising peasants in the countryside. The movement first started at Naxalbari in north Bengal and is called the naxalite movement.
- 3 'One village, one water point' was a slogan coined by Baba Adhav, a maratha who has been influenced by the ideology of Phule. One of the visible symbols of untouchability in rural Maharashtra was either a separate well for the dalit people or they had to wait to obtain water from women of the savarna castes who would

lift the water from the well and serve them in their pots. The dalit women were not supposed to touch the well. During the 1970s Baba Adhav took up this issue and waged a campaign to eliminate this concept of pollution of water. The slogan stood for the idea that for the villagers there had to be single water source for drinking.

- 4 Satyashodhak movement had its origin in the thoughts of Phule who was the founder of this movement. He raised his voice against the ideological and cultural domination of brahmins, which according to him got authority from the fact that they acted as mediators between god and the common men and women. They interpreted god's words for the common people. He asked the people, the peasants, the labouring castes to revolt against brahminical domination and also against the trading communities who exploited peasants by offering loans at exorbitant interest rates. He wanted the people to search for god, for truth on their own.
- 5 Sanskritisation concept has been developed by the sociologist M N Srinivasan. Social and economic mobility becomes possible for the lower castes and class people and they start emulating the cultural traditions of the higher castes. In the Indian ethos, this emulation is also towards brahminisation, i.e., accepting the brahminical norms including those of domination over women.
- 6 The fifth schedule of the Indian Constitution states that adivasi (aboriginal) land cannot be purchased by non-adivasi citizens. It aimed to provide security to the adivasis against any forceful alienation of land through moneylending and usurpation.
- 7 This was the second year when the December 25 was celebrated as the Bharatiya Stree Mukti Din (Women's Liberation Day), because of its connection with the event of burning of *Manusmriti* by Babasaheb Ambedkar at Mahad in 1930. Dalit feminists had given a call to the women's movement that March 8 remains the International Women's Day for which they had no objection but for Indian women burning of *Manusmriti* is a more meaningful event towards liberation and also it meant accepting Ambedkarite thought by the women's movement.
- 8 Buddhism was accepted by Babasaheb Ambedkar at a very late stage in his life. Conversion to Buddhism was a mass movement, and has provided a new identity to lakhs of dalit men and women since then. However, very few dalits other than those who belonged to the mahar caste embraced Buddhism as their identity. Thus at present it has remained restricted to the people in the Ambedkarite movement alone, who observe Buddhist rituals and prayers even in public meetings.

#### References

- Grant, J (1998): *Fundamental Feminism*, Routledge, New York.
- Rege, Sharmila (1998): 'Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique Of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 31, WS-39-46.
- Velaskar, Padma (1998): 'Caste-Patriarchy and Dalit Woman's Subordination: Towards a Theoretical Framework', *Sugava*, Prerana Visheshank, December.