Ambedkar, Periyar, and Feminisms in India

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by

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Certificate

This is to certify that this thesis entitled *Ambedkar, Periyar, and Feminisms in India*, towards the partial fulfillment of the BS-MS dual degree programme at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune represents the study/work carried out by Srijay Sutar at IISER Pune, under the supervision of Dr Anandita Pan, Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IISER Bhopal, during the academic year 2022-2023.

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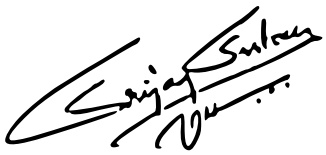
This thesis is dedicated to *my parents*

Declaration

I hereby declare that the matter embodied in the report entitled *Ambedkar, Periyar, and Feminisms in India* is the result of the work carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, under the supervision of Dr Anandita Pan, Assistant Professor at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Bhopal, and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree.



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Abstract

As all feminist trajectories branch from epistemological intersectionalities, feminist movements in India also find themselves battling a regressive patriarchal force with layered variables. Studying these movements in India poses several challenges, one of the foremost being the absence of a single vantage point and a single trajectory that captures the underlying pluralities. However, to conceptualize feminisms in India is to contextualize Brahmanical patriarchy to a considerable extent. India's pernicious history of regressive norms, customs, superstitions, and institutionalized oppression makes conceptualizing feminism in India difficult and outrightly implies the need to do away with the predominantly western phraseology of feminism. This work aims to bring to light how an emphatic movement was realized and acknowledged as not only a sociological outcome of multi-layered prolonged oppression but also as a legal battle under intellectual pioneers such as Ambedkar and Periyar. This thesis is a dynamic study of myths, struggles, battles, losses, and accounts of people who were victims of the kind of patriarchy unique to India. Elaboratively, the work also reviews the adoption of an intersectional framework for Indian feminisms ever since the inception of Ambedkarite and Periyar feminisms in the 20th century. Owing to their vast palette of ideas and knowledge, an attempt to augment Ambedkar and Periyar thought to queer theory is also made. The methodologies for this study include in-depth textual and comparative analysis, and archival studies examining the genealogical outcomes of such movements.

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I heartily appreciate and thank my parents for their continuous support throughout my upbringing. A debt of gratitude is owed to all my friends for bringing a satisfactory balance to my social and academic life.

Chapter 1

1. Introduction to Intersectionality

1.1. Background

An extensive part of this thesis uses the term feminism, and thus, it is pivotal to contextualize what it means both as an ideology and a movement. As the former, it critiques any patriarchal formulation that institutionalizes two strict gendered classifications of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ with an intrinsic imbalance of privilege and power deemed by the former, causing subjugation, disenfranchisement, and disempowerment of the latter. As a movement, feminism aims to restore and delete this imbalanced hierarchy governed by patriarchy. The coinage of the word feminism precedes women’s rights movements that began with a political thrust in the West with women’s suffrage in the 19th century. The word’s etymology will be dealt with in the last chapter. However, for now, it is adequate to know that the term feminism was maneuvered and politicized in the West under the banner of uniting several voices advocating for equal rights and opportunities for women. The immediate consequence of this sort of labeling raises the question of Who is a feminist?, and furthermore, Who is not a feminist? There are numerous women’s rights activists who accept and wear the feminist label, and there are also activists and scholars who advocate along the same lines yet choose not to tag themselves with such labels. The debates on such ideological inquiries are essential for prescribing and adopting an autonomous self-view. This section will touch upon some of these aspects below. Unless stated otherwise, this thesis will synonymously use terms like feminist politics and women’s politics till the point queer politics is studied, from which point on, it will be explicit why feminist politics needs to be a larger, all-encompassing superset of women’s politics, with a more extensive goal in understanding gender issues.

It is also important to remark that the term ‘gender’ is intrinsically fastened to feminist politics; furthermore, it has been widely trivialized in both anglophone and non-anglophone governments, corporates, medicine, education, and development agencies soon after it was first coined in the 1950s by John Money, a psychologist and sexologist who employed the idea in the sense of a gender role that constituted an essential facet of an individual’s subjective identity (Cortez et al., 2019, pp.2-3). The authors of this paper exclaim, “from the 1970s onward, some terms and/or expressions began to appear frequently in the feminist studies literature, used to refer to the reiterated differences associated with femininity and masculinity: ‘social sex relations’, ‘social sex’, ‘male/female’, ‘women/men’, ‘sex difference’ (Löwy; Rouch, 2003 cited in Cortez et al., 2019, pp.2). In present times, none of these terms has as significant a presence as ‘gender relations’, or simply ‘gender’. In fact, ‘gender’ came to be used in place of these other terms and became a cornerstone of the different feminisms” (Cortez et al., 2019, p.2).

One must, therefore, keep in the back of their mind that the extensive use of the word gender is a relatively recent development in history and that feminism and the feminist movement predate the conception of gender, gender roles, and gender relations. The conception of gender has ever since assisted feminist vocabulary in research, academia, activism, and its intersections with other domains. However, the extensive use of the phrase also holds a heavy risk of appropriation and trivialization in feminist politics as is evident today where certain sections of society attach a ‘man-hating’ attribute to feminist politics.

The terms’ feminism’ and ‘gender’ were born in the West, and ever since, we have witnessed its facilitated travel to other parts of the globe. One may find it unreasonable to adhere to the dominant ideologies of the West, especially when India idiosyncratically homes issues like caste, dowry, property, child marriage, divorce, communalism, and personal laws. The immediate and most significant contrast between western and non-western/third world/other divergent forms of feminism is that we cannot comprehend gender issues in the non-west without entangling ourselves with the tribulations of the colonial past, social reforms, development, and globalization. While

feminism continues to engender newer and newer renditions of itself, the primary wall of West versus non-West persists, creating large spaces for debates on gender relations in conventional feminism as a theoretical corpus. Feminism, therefore, also runs into the risk of overlooking both inter-group and intra-group discrepancies, especially when it evolves as a label in identity politics.

As is the case, several women have issued that they do not wish to be identified with any sort of 'isms.' Madhu Kishwar (2014), in her article, 'Why I do not call myself a feminist', says, "Anyone working for women's rights in India is automatically assumed to be a feminist, no matter what form their work takes. Yet people working for peace and disarmament in the West are not assumed to be Gandhians, even though Gandhi is the most outstanding leader of modern times to have provided a philosophy and politics of non-violence, and led the most noteworthy mass movement based on non-violent principles." Another essential critique Kishwar brings out (Kishwar, 2014) in this formula-based hypnosis politics of mirroring the West is how three epithets of the bourgeoisie, radical, and socialist schools of feminism were already creating splits and convolutions among Indian individuals with pro-women politics before they could even stand together as a unit and create an autonomous self-view. While 21st-century feminist thought in the West has now developed interests and, to some extent, even romanticized alien and indigenous cultures, and transnational motifs, it was not the case before when feminism was first theorized. Maitrayee Chaudhari (2012) says, "for western feminists whether or not to engage with non-western feminism is an option they may choose to exercise, no such clear choice is available to non-western feminists or anti-feminists.... our very entry to modernity has been mediated through colonialism, as was the entire package of ideas and institutions such as nationalism or democracy, free market or socialism, Marxism or feminism." Scholars like Chaudhari (2012) choose to identify with feminism while fully aware of its elaboration in India as a modern representative project under a major influence of colonialism. Different commentaries on using the term feminism echo in Rekha Pande's (2018) paper, "The History of Feminism and Doing Gender in India." She says, "Many groups were not comfortable with the use of the term feminist and did not identify their struggle for women's rights with this term. Many believed that Feminism betrayed its anti- capitalist roots in favor of identity

politics: it failed when the focus shifted “from society to the individual.” It was argued that what was once collective action and a shared vision for how women might work and live in the world gave way to a focus on individual history and achievement, and an unwillingness to share space with people with different opinions, worldviews, and histories (Jessa CRISPIN, 2017 cited in Pande, 2018).”

Constrastingly, many other scholars and academicians have noted the western feminist trajectory to, over the years, accommodate plural and diverse modes of consideration ever since the rise of multiculturalism and postcolonial studies. Mary E John (2015), in her article “Feminist Vocabularies in Time and Space”, underscores that we ought to re-think when we stress that mobile theories and ideologies lack contextual generalizability. She says (John, 2015, p.122), “I am interested rather in what happens when a given theory or conceptual vocabulary is put to use in a particular context, without valorizing origin over destination.”

The Indian feminist trajectories stream amidst several other influential movements, like colonialism, nationalism, fundamentalism, communalism, and globalization. Such simultaneity of movements pushes feminist epistemology into a challenging position in India, making it problematic to apply a single-axis framework of gender to historicize, analyze, and investigate this movement in detail—the layered variables of caste, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and religion demand a re-orientation of the existing (predominantly Western) connotations of feminism to address the socio-cultural specificities of the Indian context adequately. However, there have been several narrow domains inside the mainstream Indian feminist movement that have adopted a single-axis framework, i.e. neglecting one or more than one of the above variables in their respective politics as will be evident in the sections below. Such matters have criticized the mainstream women’s movement for falling short of adjusting, accommodating, and collaborating with subjects affected differently by similar structures of patriarchy, hitherto ‘failing’ to be ‘intersectional.’

When we read feminism in the Indian context today, we come across the very prevalent term of intersectionality. We assume its purview at least provides a framework (if not a

solution), that provokes and sensitizes us to observe the structures of social inequalities that exist at the crossroads of two or more variables, the variables in question being gender, race, caste, class, sexuality, disability, or religion. Intersectionality today, in the academic, NGO, social media, and legislative contexts has been very trivialized and is only seen as a tool to comprehend the hegemonic layers in society and its diverse connotations. Ever since the widespread use of the word intersectionality, be it in the NGO context or online tweets, several catchy phrases have been framed, 'its not feminism if its not intersectional' is one such example. Moreover, the term intersectionality has readily entered student activisms and as Jennifer Nash best describes it, it has been institutionalized (Nash, 2015, p.74).

The term intersectionality was first coined by the American legal scholar, and civil rights advocate Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 (Cash, 2008) to underline the 'multidimensionality of marginalized subjects' in Black feminism (Cash, 2008, p.89). Intersectionality, as a framework at the crossroads of race and gender, helped provide a lens to witness race in gender and gender in race and thus help comprehend certain forms of disempowerment better. Jennifer Cash (2015), in her article "re-thinking intersectionality", says, "Because intersectionality is attuned to subjects who 'exist...within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse and in the empty spaces between', it is a tool particularly adept at capturing and theorizing the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes" (Crenshaw 1992 cited in Cash 2015). Crenshaw uses the term intersectionality for the first time in her seminal essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-racist Politics", wherein in the framework of law, she analyzes the judicial treatment of Black women and their consequent marginalization, invisibility, and disempowerment in both feminist and anti-racist politics (Crenshaw, 1989). Judicial remarks from the court of law, for example, in a case that Crenshaw analyzed, explicitly declared that "this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both." (Crenshaw, 1989).

Kathy Davis (2008) comprehensively locates the triumph of intersectionality theory within feminist praxis and phenomenology. She locates the success of intersectionality in the resultant ambiguity and open-endedness it produces. She draws extensively from Davis's (1986) ""That's Classic!" The Phenomenology and Rhetoric of Successful Social Theories" to exemplify the splendor of 'intersectionality' buzzing in every feminist dialogue, politics, theory and praxis (Davis, 2008). A more extensive review of this Davis's seminal paper is reserved for the end of this section. For now, it will be useful to cite some examples of intersectionality that popularized it to the extent of it becoming, as Davis (2008) says, a 'buzzword' in every feminist conversation thereon. The 1991 Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas case scintillated dialogues of racism and sexism in the workplace for women lost at the intersections of race and gender for being a black woman. To elaborate, Anita Hill testified at Clarence Thomas' Supreme Court judge appointment hearing, accusing him of sexual harassment from a few years ago. While Clarence Thomas denied these allegations and, being a black man, was able to gather narratives that concatenated his circumstances to the racial and sexual oppression of black men in the US, implying that his report was more likely to be understood as relevant to the black community, Hill remained incompetent in illustrating herself because of the deficiency of intersectional politics (Morrison, 1992).

Intersectionality in the Indian context spans the variables of gender, caste, class, sexuality, religion, and disability. In contrast to the western framework of intersectionality, where the central focus is on the intersections of gender and race, the Indian scene, in the feminist context, witnesses the cases of caste in gender and gender in caste the most. Indian feminist scholars, however, do not seem very keen to directly borrow the framework from the West because (a) it was roused within judicial complexities under the issues of systemic racism and (b) the socio-material relations in the third-world feminisms span a more extensive palette of difficulties. Debates around intersectionality have initiated a dialogue among feminist academicians situated in India and also among Indian feminists in the diaspora.

The very well-known case of Shah Bano Begum v. Mohammad Ahmed Khan, for example, places Shah Bano in the lawsuit at the intersection of either being a woman or

a Muslim. The 62-year-old Muslim woman, Shah Bano, took her petition to court requiring maintenance from Mohammed Ahmad Khan, her divorced husband, and a prominent lawyer in Indore. Khan gave Shah Bano an irrevocable talaq in November later that year. Shah Bano drove to court and filed a lawsuit for maintenance under Section 123 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, which puts a 'legal obligation on a man to provide for his wife during the marriage and after divorce too if she isn't able to fend for herself' (Express Web Desk, 2017). However, Khan oppugned the assertion because the Muslim Personal Law in India required the husband only equip maintenance for the circumstantial period of iddat. The case is a prominent example underlining several issues–gender justice, minority rights, and a secular civil code, to name a few. "Shah Bano's case highlights the tensions that arise when the pursuit of gender equality comes into conflict with the religious claims of a minority group. These tensions, coupled with the communalization of politics and of religious minorities, have proven a constant obstacle to the equality in India, particularly in the field of family law", says Siobhan Mullally (2004) in her article, Feminism and Multicultural Dilemmas in India: Revisiting the Shah Bano Case. Kumkum Sangari's (1995) article "Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies" primarily deliberates on the intersectional nitty-gritty of gender, religion, state, and communalism. She locates the horizons of gender justice at the intersections of debates between legal uniformity and legal pluralism (Sangari, 1995), i.e. the infamous UCC debate with rising communalism in the 1990s. The UCC debate holds a fuzzy yet noteworthy position within Indian intersectional feminism under the pretext of gender justice. Additionally, other incidents of feminist attention like the Mathura rape case, the Pankhan horrors, the Khairlanji atrocity, or even a closer look at the rising fundamentalism in the 1990s are only very few examples of the grave and grotesque picture of how deeply the variables of gender, caste, and religion are integrated into Indian society.

1.2 The Caste-Gender Intersectionality in India

This section will examine several critical pieces on intersectionality in India, published by various scholars of sociology and feminist politics in India. Although these pieces are

written much later in the timeline of the Ambedkar and Periyar movements, exploring them first will help not only help us understand why leaders like Ambedkar and Periyar were way ahead of their times but also invite more space for discussing why we saw considerable neglect of 'caste in gender and gender in caste' in mainstream Indian feminism, voiced mainly by urban-educated, upper-caste, upper-class women.

In 1993, Uma Chakravarti (1993) published her article, Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State; she also coins the phrase Brahmanical patriarchy in this seminal piece, where she begins her exploration of the Brahmanical social order and its implications on upper-caste women's sexual regulation (Chakravati, 1993). Such forms of control and regulation in the name of preserving the purity of caste play a cardinal role in the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of upper-caste women in the Hindu social order. It is noteworthy to see and react to how such a form of patriarchy manifests two different forms of fora, one where upper-caste women are sexually regulated, controlled, and restrained, and the other, where lower-caste women have been constant victims of untouchability, fetishization, sexual violence, and inhumane treatment in society. However, it would be pretty tactless to comment on who is more oppressed or more marginalized because the modes of such oppression are very different. While it is factual that Dalit women see themselves battling both Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchy, it makes sense to distinguish only the subjectivity and uniqueness of issues distinguishing Dalit women from upper-caste women instead of grading another hierarchy of double or triple forms of oppression simply because the two cases are qualitatively and not quantitatively distinct. Feminist vocabulary must be used carefully, because most of its subjects carry historical and living baggage of trauma and abrasion. Comparing oppressions in terms of weighted scales of doubling and tripling can oftentimes come off as insensitive. Instead, using the intersectional lens to deeply examine the plurality in the category of the subject in question may invite a more rigorous discourse.

Chakravarti's (1993) article may be jarring for some readers to see the complete absence of observations by Dr Ambedkar and his formulation of caste as prescribed in Castes in India: Its Mechanism, Genesis, and Development (1917). This thesis will

elaborate more on this, mainly when it discusses Ambedkar and Ambedkarite Feminism. However, for now, it is very startling to see Chakravarti comment that “Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of the Brahmanical social order and despite their close interconnections neither scholars of the caste system nor feminist scholars have attempted to analyze the relationship between the two” (Chakravarti, 1993, p.579) given that Ambedkar, way back in 1916-17 wrote and published many seminal pieces on intersectionality. Infact, most of Ambedkar’s arguments have been epistemologically intersectional.

Chakravati’s article, nonetheless, provides an excellent and comprehensive analysis of the sexual regulation of upper-caste women for both readers and non-readers of Ambedkar. Much like Ambedkar, she talks about the anxiety upper-caste men harbor pertaining to their caste getting impure (Chakravarti, 1993, p.579). Much like Ambedkar, she describes how the epitome of such anxiety is reached when a progeny of an upper-caste woman and a lower-caste man is hypothesized. Thus, there comes an inherent need for upper-caste men to sexually regulate and restrict women of their castes for the sake of preserving caste purity, putting the onus of ‘sexual sanitation’ on the women. She cites several vital observations to strengthen her point; for example, she enunciates how puberty marks a dangerous circumstance and is the context for significant rituals that indicate the meaningful connection between ‘female purity and purity of caste’ (Chakravarti, 1993, p.579). In the paper’s first section, she infers an egalitarian economy and an absence of the discussed form of sexual regulation among hunter-gatherers from the cave paintings from the Paleolithic and Mesolithic Ages; the concept of female reproductive power is envisioned in the form of goddesses in cave paintings (Chakravarti, 1993, p.580). She (1993) adds, “The relative status of men and women can at most be characterized as ‘separate but equal’.” As evident, Chakravarti is searching for the point in time when women were stratified into two major groups, one sexually regulated and the other sexually violated, reflecting the contemporary scenario of differences in perpetrations on upper-caste and lower-caste women, respectively. She exemplifies one of the first instances of subjugation of women in the Rig-Vedic period, where the early Aryans, as conquerors, enslaved the women of the conquered (Chakravarti, 1993, p.580). “Thus the first large group to be enslaved in early Indian

history were women as there are more frequent references to ‘dasis’ than to ‘dasas’”, she adds (1993). Such examples contextualize both the caste-gender intersectionality and the caste-based stratification of women in early India. The author (Chakravarti, 1993, p.580) expresses, “the Rig-Veda evidence is extremely significant as it reflects an essential stratification within women, between women of conquering tribes and women of the subjugated people...the Rig Veda for example describes the Aryan women as ruling over bipeds and quadrupeds, i.e. slaves and cattle. While the *dasis*’ or the enslaved women’s labor and sexuality were to be used, this was under the overall control of the men of the conquering clans.” The Aryan expansion, according to the author, thus concretizes the confinement of caste women to domesticity while simultaneously regulating their sexuality through rituals like Niyoga; on the other hand, the period also exploits and enslaves the women of rival clans, situating the upper-caste women as household subjects in the gradually increasing agricultural economy, marking an important step in establishing patriarchal norms within and outside the family of the patriarch (Chakravarti, 1993).

The author points out very early references; exemplifying the Satapatha Brahmana, she says, “The Satapatha Brahmana expresses the fear that the wife may go to other men. Most significantly, there is a very embryonic notion of ultimate control over women’s sexual behavior being asserted by the king. The Satapatha Brahmana states that the divine ‘raja’ Varuna seizes the woman who has adulterous intercourse with men other than her husband” (Chakravarti, 1993, p.581). To summarize, the author helps us notice a historical shift from an egalitarian balance to the institutionalized bifurcation of women into reproductive and laboring categories. With the rise of Vedic rituals, myths, and sacrifices, Brahmanical patriarchy strengthens the captivity of the upper-caste woman.

The validity of the Aryan theory is beyond the scope of this discussion; the inference, however, remains similar, i.e. a shift from egalitarian to patriarchal society can be traced back, starting from the Mesolithic and Paleolithic Age. The rest of the paper contains examples from the Manusmriti, Asatamanta Jataka, Culapaduma Jalaka, Gahapati Jataka, Arthashastra, and the Epics illustrating barbaric and grotesque pictures of women sexually with the coercive power resting in the hands of husbands (Chakravarti,

1993, p.581-584). Chakravarti's work is an essential critique of *stridharma* (eternal duties and obligations of married women) in Brahmanical ideology. She says (Chakravarti, 1993, p.583), "That the *stridharma*, or the pativrata dharma was a rhetorical device to ensure the social control of women, especially chastity, is now well accepted. As outlined by Manu and elaborated and repeated by Tryambaka in the *stridharmapaddhati* the *stridharma* was clearly an ideological mechanism for socially controlling the biological aspect of women. Women, as biological creatures, are representatives of a wild or untamed nature. But through the *stridharma* the biological woman can be converted into woman as a social entity, in whom the biological has been tamed." Conclusively, the author underlines the certitude of patriarchy along with its ideology in the archaic state of early India and reminds the reader of the close-knit relationship between gender and caste relations manifested in society.

A more contemporary analysis of caste and gender is done extensively by S Anandhi (2013) in her work, The Mathammas: Gender, Caste and the Politics of Intersectionality in Rural Tamil Nadu. Her meticulous and rigorous ethnographic examination outlines the complexities of understanding caste patriarchy in the ritual of dedicating Arunthathiyras girls to the goddess Mathamma; Arunthathiyras are a group of Dalit sub-caste people in rural Tamil Nadu (Anandhi, 2013). This paper will briefly summarize Anandhi's work in rural South India. The author familiarizes three caste groups: the Arunthathiyras, the Paraiyars, and the Naidus; the first group being the focus of her study, is a Dalit sub-caste, serving the Naidus as agricultural labourers and considered 'untouchables among the untouchables' (Anandhi, 2013). Anandhi (2013) documents the legend of Mathamma, saying, "The legend of Mathamma as narrated by the Arunthathiyars is similar to that of Mariamman, a popular mother goddess worshiped mainly by the outcastes across the region." The legend of Mariamman had been developed from the brahmanic and Sanskritic versions of the story of Parasurama, who beheaded his mother on the order of his father. The severed brahmin head was refixed with an "untouchable" body, and thus emerged the goddess Mariamman." The legend and the manifestation of this goddess substantially impact the Valluvapuram village to such an extent that even the Naidus worship the goddess Mathamma and a very intricate inter-caste relationship is witnessed between the Naidus and Arunthathiyars.

The Naidus and other dominant castes believe that the deity Mathamma, a dedicated Arunthathiyar woman or girl from the village, would terminate all pollution, ward away destructive spirits, and heal illnesses like chickenpox. These dedicated Arunthathiyar women/girls are named Mathammas. They go house to house in this ritualistic process and dance in the streets, taking honors, gifts, payments, from dominant caste men. Notably, the Arunthathiyar male elders fully back these rituals, and the entire Mathamma festival of five days brings together the Naidus and the Arunthathiyar where the latter is, in a way, negotiating their caste subordination through this dynamic, ritualistic ceremony (Anandhi, 2013). Anandhi's paper raises several other serious concerns: one of the most important ones being how young Arunthathiyars are constantly pushing forward their efforts to overcome marginalization in their village, especially when they see the other sub-caste, the Paraiyars as relatively liberated in many ways. Their primary mode of mobilizing such effort is their control of Mathamma women, as reactionary consequences to the portrayal of their 'backwardness' by the state and society, primarily inferred by them as forms of sexual shaming of Mathamma women. The author elaborates, "...the Mathammas are reconstructed as "religious women" who are under the control of the community, and not "sacred prostitutes" as they have been portrayed." (Anandhi, 2013, p.68). A thorough reading of Anandhi's (2013) paper highlights several other happenings in the village. The issues range from the exclusion of Paraiyras from the Mathammas festival, the sociological impacts of state interventions on the Mathammas and the consequential reactions of Arunthathiyars to the matters involving sex work, AIDS, and sexual exploitation of the Mathammas in the village of Vallavupuram (Anandhi, 2013). A crucial point to note and understand is how caste patriarchy perpetuates from both internal and external arenas and, thus, there is a need to dissolve the lacuna in applying a single-axis framework of either caste or gender to understand one of several such cases in India concerning both upper-caste women, as seen in Chakravarti's article and lower-caste women, as seen in Anandhi's article.

Manisha Gupte's piece, "The Concept of Honour: Caste Ideology and Patriarchy in Rural Maharashtra", dissects the less talked about issues of honor, honor killing, and

crimes of honor (Gupte, 2013). She problematizes the appropriation and bifurcation of male and female forms of honor and its dangerous implications for families (Gupte, 2013). Gupte particularly chooses to perform her fieldwork in rural Maharashtra, in the Purandar taluka of Pune, where crimes are not documented and filed as frequently as in other places; she converses with the rural women and some men of this taluka in focused group discussions (Gupte, 2013). She culminates her research by formulating a gender-caste matrix where honor decides the index of power and freedom in matrimony. She analyzes the regional nomenclature and describes, “My fieldwork indicates that only men from dominant caste and class groups possess “intrinsic” honor. While men possess honor, women are patriarchy’s embodied honor...Since men lose honor through the behavior of women from their families or kinships, the control over women’s behavior becomes imperative, as does punishing transgressors. Customarily, women have to choose between honor and power; they lose one because of the other” (Gupte, 2013). The above case studies by S Anandhi and Manisha Gupte deeply exemplify and epitomize the need for intersectional modes of reflection to not only see the larger picture of gender justice in India but also to devise a vantage point for Indian feminism.

1.3 Contemporary Debates on Intersectionality

The notion of intersectionality, however, invited a succession of debates among scholars of feminism in India in 2015, starting with Nivedita Menon’s (2015) article, “Is Feminism about ‘Women’? A Critical View on Intersectionality from India.” Menon problematizes the juxtaposition of feminism with ‘the politics of caste, religious community identity, and sexuality’, thus ‘destabilizing’ the primary subject of feminism, the woman (Menon, 2015). One of the critical issues for Menon (2015) is when legislation insists on multiple differences in the form of multiple identities, which she calls ‘quotas within quotas’, creating more instabilities in the category of women, as seen in the 2010 Women’s Reservation Bill. Menon also exemplifies another vital debate that arose in response to the Maharashtra government’s ban on bar dancing in 2005. The Home Minister clarified that the rationale behind the ban was that bar dancing ‘perverts the morals of our young men’ (Arya, 2020). Menon (2015) points out

that the two groups on either side, both with Dalit representation, nurtured internal conflict of ideas despite being Dalit. She says (2015), “there are sharply political and equally feminist positions ranged on both sides, and the opposition between them is not easily amenable to an elite/subaltern division since often both identities, as in this case (Dalit/bar dancer), are equally subaltern, and there are Dalit women on both sides of the debate.” More examples like those of a Muslim woman’s position pivoting the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) debate and the framing of queer identity along with caste lines, for instance, Dalit queer, according to Menon, ‘prevents the full constitution of Woman as the stable subject of feminist politics’ (Menon, 2015). An excerpt from the paper in the words of the author (Menon, 2015), “Each identity emerges or rather, is called into being, in particular contexts in such a way that at that moment it is not simply an intersection of two or more identities but an unstable configuration that is more than the sum of its parts” becomes the primary subject of debate between Marxist liberal feminists and Intersectional feminists in India.

A rudimentary exemplification of what the author is trying to convey would be that it is counterproductive to combine and add two or more scales of oppression to quantify another, i.e. a Dalit woman’s experience of oppression is not a sum of the individual oppressions of being Dalit and the individual oppressions of being a woman; instead, it is a qualitatively different aggregate, with added complexities that arise because of this new identity of being a Dalit woman. The author also remarks how intersections of identity vectors can also become a null space implying invisibility. She says, for example, “Not all of the potential identities available in a society to a person or a group may be relevant at all times for them. Rather than a black woman being both black and a woman, she may at times be only black, and at others, only woman. The intersection itself is an empty space” (Menon, 2015). In the section ‘Governmentalizing Gender’, Menon (2015) reiterates her stance on invoking the imperialism of categories and its contemporary obsession in policy-making and the authority of global funding in promoting such categories and harboring the risk of depoliticization of gender and intersectionality. Furthermore, Menon (2015) asserts throughout her work that the framework of intersectionality is redundant in India, with her examples ascertaining that a single-axis framework was never even employed in Indian feminist politics.

1.4 Does India need an Intersectionality framework?

Nivedita Menon's paper invited critical academic dialogue among several other feminist scholars in India. In response to Menon, Mary E John (2015) offered her premises on intersectionality in her paper "Intersectionality: Rejection or Critical Dialogue?"

John begins by filling in the lacunae in Menon's arguments, arguing that her examples could have also illustrated the absence of a single-axis framework when examined more in-depth. For example, she breaks down the nuances in the Reservation Bill, reasoning that neither OBC men nor upper-caste women held aspirational outlooks for OBC women, implying the adoption of a single-axis framework by each group, i.e. OBC men wanting sub-quotas to preserve their caste numbers and upper-caste women disfavouring sub-quotas in reservation for women, both thinking along caste and gender lines respectively, thus inducing the invisibility of OBC women (John, 2015). Moreover, John also problematizes 'problematizing western notions' and outrightly asserts that universality needs to be questioned contextually (John, 2015). The need for an intersectional lens as a critical dialogue is thus amplified in John's paper. Reiterating Menon's earlier point in (the context of Black feminism), John supportively exclaims, "More often than not, Black women disappear at the intersections of racism and sexism because their experiences prove to be more than, or other than, the sum of the various 'parts' that are thought to constitute it." She adds, "This is why I see intersectionality as providing an insight into the problem itself, by pointing to a place where identities fail to appear or be recognized as we might have expected them to" (John, 2015, p.73).

Intersectionality, therefore, as devised originally in the West, adds qualitative understanding to layered forms of oppression; for example, much of our theoretical knowledge of Brahmanical patriarchy has been devised by adopting an intersectional lens. In the context of the presumed universality of western notions, John brings out the often-ignored connotations of the intersections of gender, funding, and development. While Menon's (2015) trouble with international funding and governmentalizing of gender in the critique of intersectionality was that it feeds off of deceiving allegories of

gender justice and representation in the ulterior corporate scheme of development and globalization, John's (2015) recuperation reads intersectionality in the context of bringing out issues like sex-work and disability which themselves form integral elements of discourse in funded organizations like the UN. Lastly, John (2015) also elaborates on the solidarity potential of an intersectional framework that surpasses national and racial boundaries; for example, Dalit feminism can discover their inspiration from Black feminism and vice versa.

More drastic critiques of Menon's (2015) "Is Feminism about 'Women'? A Critical View on Intersectionality from India" come from feminist scholars like Sunaina Arya. Arya (2020) writes on a range of issues like sex work, caste crimes, atrocities against Dalits, the relation between caste and gender, and the way privilege differentiates women of different castes in their experiences and their ideologies. Although titled "Theorising Gender in South Asia: Dalit Feminist Perspective", Arya (2020) writes mainly about the caste-gender issue in India and draws a critique of upper-caste Indian feminists for their ineptitude and unwillingness to adopt a Dalit feminist standpoint. For example, Menon's liberal standpoint support on the need to consider sex work as work is met with sharp critiques from Arya's Dalit feminist perspective; she says (Arya, 2020, p.17), "the woman in so-called 'sex work' opt for this profession because they have very limited choices, that is, either to be exploited in domestic and other kinds of works which don't help them run their house or to be exploited in prostitution which helps them financially to run their house. Notably, all the options open to them are void of dignity. These women technically may be called an agent but the restriction of opportunities available to them leaves the sole option of prostitution for their financial needs." Arya locates counterproductivity in Menon's theory of caste, religion, and sexuality politics destabilizing the category of women implying that such a theory is unseeing of the cause of gendered minorities and the caste marginalized (p.19).

Although the institutional embodiment of intersectionality is first seen in the West, Jennifer Nash's (2008) article, "re-thinking intersectionality", raises some fundamental questions about the universal and general practicality of intersectionality. In summary, Nash (2008) sets to re-think intersectionality because of its fuzzy methodology,

empirical validity, definition, and improper appropriation. An addressal and redressal of the above-outlined issues are comprehensively conferred in Davis's work (2008). Davis locates the usefulness and expediency of intersectionality by borrowing certain aspects from Murray Davis's work in the sociology of science. In summary, she first notes three of the most useful features of intersectionality, i.e. a) it examines the legacies of exclusions and inclusions and jeopardizes a single-axis framework within any feminist movement, b) it re-establishes feminism as a shared initiative, and c) it presented the best-selling link between critical feminist theory and postmodern feminist theory, "bringing them together in ways that could not have been envisioned before" (Davis, 2008, p.73). In her paper, Davis reiterates the points that Nash (2008) poses regarding the ambiguity in developing, defining, and postulating an intersectional framework. However, for Davis, the thriving sensations of intersectionality lie within these imperfections, for it makes visible the blind spots within feminism and works in a multitasking manner (using its ambiguity) as a great analytical tool, an axis of difference, and as a diligent and dynamic process (Davis, 2008).

Moreover, as Davis aptly notes, intersectionality "does not provide written-in-stone guidelines for doing feminist inquiry, a kind of feminist methodology to fit all kinds of feminist research. Rather, it stimulates our creativity in looking for new and often unorthodox ways of doing feminist analysis. Intersec- tionality does not produce a normative straitjacket for monitoring feminist inquiry in search of the 'correct line'. Instead it encourages each feminist scholar to engage critically with her own assumptions in the interests of reflexive, critical, and accountable feminist inquiry." (Davis, 2008, p.79)

1.5 Brief Introduction to Dalit Feminism in India

Although one could trace back anti-caste feminist thought back to Jyotirao Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj in 1874, or as some historians argue, even back to the Bhakti movement of the 7th century, this thesis will only examine the well-documented rise of Dalit feminism in the 19th century in this section and reserve the 20th century matters to

be seen in the light of Ambedkar and Periyar in the later chapters. However, some significant events in the post-Ambedkarite post-Periyar Dalit feminism will be outlined here towards the end.

Feminists studying and tracing Dalit feminism unanimously accentuate the ignorance and erasure of Dalit women and the intersectional relation of gender and caste in the reform movements, the nationalist movement, the male dominated anti-caste movement, and the mainstream feminist movements. Reform efforts were only seen in addressing regressive Brahmanical practices like sati, child marriage, and enforced widowhood (Sujatha, 2014). Except for some notable examples (Rege, 2006; Anandhi and Kapadia, 2017 cited in Paik, 2021), even in postcolonial times, many savarna elite feminists, activists and scholars alike, have deployed a singular model of analysis and failed to mobilize or even deconstruct difference as a tool to initiate change. They have insisted on rhetorical homogenization of all women and a monolithic Indian feminism, thus making “gender oppression” the basis of a “natural” bond between different women”, says Paik (2021), revitalizing the need to include the Dalit women picture in the Indian feminist position. The ignorance of the plight of the Dalit woman is mainly seen in the absence of dialogue with Dalit women and the obsession of upper-caste subjects with liberal reform instead of a complete rejection and annihilation of Brahmanical practices.

In the 19th century, we saw women writers and poets like Savitribai Phule, Tarabai Shinde, Pandita Ramabai, and Muktabai Salve. Savitribai Phule, in 1854, published Kavya Phule in Marathi. One of her poems titled “So Says Manu”, translated into English by Ujjwala Mhatre (Phule, 2012, p.74), reads:

“Those who work in the fields and wield the plough
They are obtuse, says Manu
For the Brahmins it has been ordained indeed!
Says the ‘Manusmriti’,” “Don’t toil in the field”
Sinners from their last birth are born as outcasts
In this birth do they pay for the sins of their past”

Reading Savitribai Phule's poems essentializes the need to see gender along caste lines and vice versa. Similarly, Muktabai Salve, a young and pioneering Dalit radical writer from the Maang community, who had no reach to education until 1852, when Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule began their third school for girls at Vetal Peth in Pune (Javalgekar, 2017), writes in *Maharanchya Dukhavisatha (About the Grief of Maangs and Mahars)*: "our women give birth to babies, and they do not even have a roof over their heads. How they suffer the rain and cold! Try to think about it from your own experiences" (Salve 1855: 747–48 cited in Paik, 2021). Emphasis on the word 'our' in the above quotation gathers Muktabai's caste consciousness based on differences among women, something very crucial for the building the subjectivity of Dalit women; this is a crucial example of inter-categorical intersectionality in the 19th century. Muktabai also vehemently underlines the lack of disposition and resources for the people of her caste, inducing a feeling of loneliness, isolation, and inferiority in the Dalits that Salve dares to talk about in this very early piece of work. Muktabai Salve published her works in a journal called Dnyanodaya in 1855 at a very young age. Paik (2021, p.129) says, "Muktabai contrasted two traditional and distinct dichotomies of the caste mechanism: the always and already human Brahmins, and the non-human Dalits. In pointing to the polarity between the two communities, she focused on the abjection of Dalits and the Brahmins' relegation of Dalits to the status of non-human."

The Satyashodhak traditions united and espoused the assignment of education, enriched human rights, and democratic access to resources for the underprivileged and the deprived groups in the caste hierarchy; their focus, although primarily on the Dalit women of Maharashtra, also backed the support of upper-caste women and dispossessed widows. One of the prominent Satyashodhak members, Tarabai Shinde (1882), writes in her influential work Stree Purush Tulana (A Comparison between Women and Men):

"Just look now, how the custom of not remarrying widows has spread--in so many places, to so many castes, like a great sickness. It's hard to imagine; the bitter despair all these hundreds and thousands of widows must suffer. And how many disasters

come out of it. Because stridharma hasn't ever been saved just by making people sit at home and control their thoughts." What they do with their minds and eyes can make them just as guilty." (Shinde, 1994, (translated into English by Rosalind O'Hanlon) p.79)

Another prominent writer and social reformer of the 18th and 19th centuries was Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Born in a Brahmin family, she witnessed patriarchal practices and their long-term impacts on upper-caste women. Her book "High-Caste Hindu Woman", published in 1888, talks at length about the caste system and its impacts on low and upper-caste women, the code of Manu, religious orthodoxy, and women's education. Ramabai (1907) wrote, in her autobiography, "only two things on which all those books, the Dharma Shastras, the sacred epics, the Puranas and modern poets, the popular preachers of the present day and orthodox high-caste men, were agreed, that women of high and low caste, as a class were bad, very bad, worse than demons, as unholy as untruth; and that they could not get Moksha as men."

Such intersectional works by authors like Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai, both from non-Dalit backgrounds, who reject male-dominated political and personal governance, become influential in igniting a wrangle against the caste system; Shinde influences Dalit women in the Satyashodhak and Ramabai's Mukti mission holds significant importance in Indian feminist history, an exemplary effort that is still alive in Pune. Tarabai Shinde and Panita Ramabai played robust roles in building solidarity across different categories of women.

The 20th century saw even more momentum in the anti-caste feminist agitations. Rege points out eminent personalities like Shivram Janoba Kamble, who led agitations against caste-based prostitution in the very early decades before Ambedkar (Rege, 1998, p.41). With the advent of Ambedkar in Maharashtra and Periyar in Tamil Nadu, a radical anti-caste consciousness became central to representative politics. In 1917, Ambedkar published his dissertation, *"Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development"*, one of his most important contributions to comprehending the caste-gender relationship that problematized the Brahmanical regime of endogamous matrimony, the consequences of which nurture the caste system in India to date.

Ambedkar calls caste a parceling legion of an already homogenous unit; the superimposition of endogamy on exogamy systematically guides and facilitates this parceling (Ambedkar, 1917). With the beginning of Periyar's postulations of self-respect and rationality in the mid-20th century, women mobilized themselves and came forward in paradigmatic ways to tackle the issue of growing Brahminism in colonial India. Ambedkar and Periyar's contributions to the cause of feminism in India in the 20th century deserve an earmarked analysis which will be done in the forthcoming chapters. These movements were so evocative that post-Ambedkarite movements, we see a rise in the number of Dalit women writing their autobiographies, bringing the contemporary Dalit perspective into mainstream feminism. Feminism under Ambedkar and Periyar formed the heart of Dalit feminism in the 20th century. Decades after the demise of these leaders, most mainstream feminisms were gaining some consciousness of the notion of conceptualizing 'difference', and with the rising fundamentalism and communalism in the 1980s and 1990s, Dalit and Intersectional feminist politics solidified the need for a critical dialogue along the parameters of difference and heterogeneity in the category of 'woman'. Today, there is a dire need to reflect and deliberate on the ghastlinesses Dalits deal with, such as widespread sexual and custodial violence, low conviction rates, degrading treatment, obscene parading, fetishization, and regular bullying and microaggressions. Moreover, today, there is also an alarming need to accommodate Dalit-queer identities into 'mainstream' Dalit feminism for their battles, too, need solidifying support from understanding communities that speak with them. The following table overviews some of the landmark events in Dalit feminism post Ambedkar and Periyar movements:

Year	Event
1972	● Mathura Rape Case
1975	● Stree Mukti Sanghatana
1978	● First Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was set up

1980	• Forum Against Oppression of Women
1981	• Behmai Massacre (Phoolan Devi Case)
1983	• Amendment to India rape laws regarding the meaning of consent
1987	• First National Meeting of Dalit women in Bengaluru
1989	• Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
1991	• All India Progressive Women's Association
1992	• Dr Ambedkar Foundation: National Relief to the SC/ST Victims of Atrocities Scheme • Bhanvari Devi rape case • Formal recognition of OBCs following the Mandal Commission Report
1993	• UNESCO World Conference Against Racism invited Dalit women delegates • Uma Chakravarti (1993) publishes *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State* • Nation Human Rights Commission
1995	• Beijing Conference (UN) • Gopal Guru publishes a very important article, "*Dalit Women Talk Differently*"
1997	• Ramabai Colony killings • Laxmanpur Bathe Massacre
1998	• National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights • All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM)

	• Sharmile Rege (1998) authors *Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position*
1999	• Pankhan Atrocities
2001	• Durban World Conference on Racism
2002	• *Khabar Lahariya,* a multilingual, multidialectal magazine started for and by Dalit women
2006	• Khairlanji Massacre • National Conference on Violence Against Dalit Women, New Delhi • Hague Convention (International Conference on the Human Rights of Dalit Women)
2008	• Gurjar Agitations • Reports showed repeated trends of sexual violence against Dalit women
2009	• Conviction rate of rape cases involving Dalit women was shown to be less than 2% • National Coalition for Strengthening SC & ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.
2010-19	• Several Amendments in the SC/ST PoA Act • Nationwide Caste Protests • Hathras Rape Case • Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act • Una March

1.6 Contemporary Debates on the Dalit Feminist Movement

In his seminal article “Dalit Women Talk Differently”, Gopal Guru (1995) underlines the necessity not to sideline Dalit patriarchy from conventional notions of patriarchy. Dalit women stand in the foreground of conceptualizing ‘difference’ in India (Guru, 1995, p. 2548) and thus become essential forerunners for the women’s liberation front. Guru reminds us of the Beijing Conference of 1995, which observed a significant turning issue for the global agenda for gender equality. 189 countries unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action; the Declaration strategically devised objectives and actions for advancing women and attaining gender equality in 12 pressing zones of concern (UN Women Website). The National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW), an NGO, earmarked and founded in 1995 to promote the rights of Dalit women, participated in the Beijing conference in the same year. NFDW’s work began in 1985 when Dr Ruth Manorama, a founding member, conducted a proximate and comparative study of the material and social conditions of Dalit women in India and women of colour in the West. She reported some crucial contrasts despite the intrinsic resemblances in women’s socioeconomic and political conditions in both the West and India (Samy, 2020). “In India, Dalit women faced the heinous practice of ‘untouchability’ and faced other discriminatory practices such as the ‘devadasi system’ and ‘manual scavenging”, says Samy (2020) in her Wire article; the term “triple-alienated” or “thrice discriminated” based on class, caste, and gender were thus mentioned by Dr Manorama (Samy, 2020). 1987 saw Dalit women and scholars in Bangalore’s International Women’s Day conference at a national level.

In 1993, before the Beijing conference, progressive contributors in India jointly nailed the idea that women should be mustered extensively to participate in the Beijing conference. A ‘Coordination Unit’ and an ‘Advisory Group’ voicing feminist scholars and activists were levied to foster this approach; NFDW was described in the latter. (Samy, 2020). The community organizers, domestic hirelings, manual scavengers, ex-devadasis, academics and scholars came jointly on a single platform, and their collective voice screamed, “transforming pain into power.” They underlined that a “Dalit

woman is feminist, non-Brahmanical, non-patriarchal, and positively oriented towards ecology." (Samy, 2020)

Gopal Guru (1995, p. 2548) thus lays out the premise of this paper, saying that the rationale for Dalit women' talking differently' finds its basis in "external factors (non-Dalit women homogenizing the issue of Dalit women) and internal factors (the patriarchal domination within the Dalits)." (Guru, 1995, p. 2548) Thus, he highlights the importance of social location, which "determines the perception of reality", thus canceling and nullifying the savarna representation of Dalit issues (Guru, 1995, p. 2548). Guru has also underlined the weight of landholding and distribution of forest resources in the purview of Dalit issues (Guru, 1995, p.2549). Guru, however, stresses that Dalit women rejected the unauthentic telecasting and voicing of their reality through the process of 'savarna-washing.' Dalit solidarity, hence, already has a strong premise. In most scenarios, Dalit women are intrinsically politically more woke, owing to their underprivileged existence and the upper castes' marginalization of their voices. Dalit solidarity eventually gave us agitative, collective, decentralized, and inclusive processes of resistance. An unprecedented mobilization of grassroots women activists was seen beginning in 1993. By 1994, several panels, talks and workshops were held nationwide on many problems affecting women's lives. Women, especially from marginalized communities, communicated their inputs around the "12 critical areas of concern" of the UN Decade (Samy, 2020). "As an outcome of the grassroots mobilization and consultative processes organized since 1993, a delegation of over 250 women, out of which 80 were Dalit women, went from India to China to participate in the Fourth UN World Conference on Women held from September 4–15, 1995 at Beijing", remarks Samy (2020). As we should never forget, and as articulately as Guru reminds us, patriarchy within the Dalits makes Dalit women even more subordinated; their expressions suppressed, voices taken, and independence mocked (Guru, 1995, p. 2549). Guru's supply of ample examples with most of his arguments makes his paper very evocative and reiterative of the need to speak differently.

Extending Guru's notion of Dalit women standing in the foreground of conceptualizing 'difference' in India (Guru, 1995, p. 2548), Sharmila Rege, in her 1998 paper, Dalit

Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position, extends Guru's argument, asserting that the mere naming this difference, as seen in all feminist theorizations, is not adequate. The rise of post-modernism and post-structuralism in the purview of feminist theorizations has also opened up newer debates, and the notion of difference has been thoroughly extended. This difference, she argues, needs to be studied as social relations that 'convert difference into oppression' (Rege, 1998, p. 40). She says, "This requires the working out of the cultural and material dimensions of the interactions and inter-phases between the different hierarchies of class, gender, race and so on. In other words, this means transforming 'difference' into a standpoint." (Rege, 1998, p. 41). This standpoint-making had already been tried in black feminism and can also be traced back to Marx, Engels, and Lukacs' theory of the proletariat standpoint, which tells us that the negligence of the oppressive and dominant groups questioning their advantaged positions renders them socially, scientifically, and epistemologically deprived for the generation of knowledge; this process is quickened when the proletariat gains public voice (Rege 1995, p. 41, 45).

To define such a standpoint for Dalit women, she draws insights from the history of their struggles, especially in the Satyasodhak and Ambedkarite movements, where they sought peak participation. She reviews Dalit history to conclude that the Dalit women's differences or different voices are not begetting identitarian politics; it is a record of their long life struggles (Rege, 1998, p. 42). She thus raises the question of why the ignorance of feminist movements post-1970s has sustained such differences. She epitomizes this using the cases of exclusion of Dalit women from the Dalit Panthers and the Women's Movement of the 1970s; the former composited class with class and the latter vitalized sisterhood (Rege, 1998, p.42). Such exclusions created an upper-caste female experience and a Dalit male experience, clearly obliterating the experiences of Dalit women. She discusses it in the section "*Masculinization of Dalithood and Savarnization of Womanhood*" (Rege, 1998, p.42). Her discussions range from exemplifying several case studies, for instance, the Naamantar agitation, Bhanwari Devi's intervention, and the formation of Agnishikha Maanch, to sexual politics in Brahmanical ideals, domestic violence and dowry politics. She calls for translating individual narratives to collective and coordinated contestations of hierarchies (Rege,

1998, p.43–44). She draws upon several existing theories regarding Brahmanical manifestations of controlling a woman's sexuality, leading to caste and caste-based labour divisions (Rege, 1998). Despite the emphatic Brahmanical forces, DBA women have been able to stand for dissent and unionize in groups like NFDW, Maharashtra Dalit Mahila Sanghatana, Bahujan Mahila Parishad, Vikas Vanchit Dalit Mahila Parishad, and many others (Rege, 1998, p.44).

Citing Guru (1995) again, Rege recalls that the mere naming of differences may lead the autonomous Dalit movement into inflexible identity politics, bounding their full emancipatory potential (Rege, 1998, p.44). She notes that the non-Brahmanical renderings of feminist politics have been responded to in three following positions by the autonomous women's groups: a non-dialectical position of those who accept that Dalit women lead the movement and that the revisioning of non-Brahmanical feminist politics is not needed, a position where Dalit women lead but also revise feminist politics, and the left position that still question the pertinence of caste (Rege, 1998, p.45). The second position is of particular importance. The author says, "this position argues that it is more emancipatory than other existing positions, and counters pluralism and relativism by which all knowledge-based and political claims are thought to be valid in their own way." (Rege, 1998, p.45). She ushers this discussion by conveying the vision of non-Dalit feminists' reinventing' themselves as Dalit feminists, although not stealing the mic; she believes that this could take care of the narrow identity politics issue while being more emancipatory (Rege, 1998, p.45). In an exhilarating tone, she exclaims, "Thus adopting a Dalit feminist standpoint means sometimes losing, sometimes revisioning the 'voice' that we as feminists had gained in the 1980s." (Rege, 1998, p.45).

Rege's paper raised crucial concerns among the scholarly community. In the very next year, Chhaya Datar, an Indian feminist activist and writer, rigorously attacked Rege's proactive arguments in her new paper, "Non-Brahmin Renderings of Feminism in Maharashtra: Is It a More Emancipatory Force?". Datar is critical of Rege's ignorance of the ecofeminist movement, loosely based on Gandhian thought, which focused on caste and gender-based oppression to a large extent. She asserts that Brahmanical ideals are

not the only source of oppression; environmental degradation has also caused marginalization to a significant extent. Datar strictly rejects the possibility of a Dalit feminist standpoint for Indian feminist politics. She says that Dalit feminism, from a standpoint, “merely helps inform the liberatory knowledge of other movements, particularly the ecofeminist movement, to expand its scope and richness.” (Datar, 1999, p.2964). Datar (1999, p.2965) also points out Rege’s incorrect historical information, mainly the dates. She also counters Rege’s assumptions of the ill functions and ignorance of the Dalit Panthers and the Women’s Movement, whom she claims, had recognized the caste-gender intersectionalities in the acts of violence directed at Dalit women (Datar, 1999). Datar also says, “Rege excludes many other trends in feminism in the north and the world, which are more inclusive of many other issues and have departed from the conventional left analysis substantially. Feminism may be used narrowly by a few, to justify their personal lifestyle, but the agenda of women’s movement is much wider and is based on collective identity.” (Datar, 1999, p.2965)

She extends her arguments of why it is unmannered to reinvent all feminists as Dalit feminists and that Dalit feminism itself does not have the purest political foundations. Hence, the outcomes will not have full emancipatory potential. She rejects Rege’s anti-postmodernist proposals of the Dalit feminist standpoint on the grounds of the following situations: (a) the existence of intra-caste Dalit patriarchy, i.e. non-existent Dalit solidarity, that the Dalit feminist standpoint does not talk about, (b) the dangers of elite Dalit feminist women adopting Brahmanical traditions and symbols, (c) decentralized societies, (d) educated, urban, middle-class Dalits stealing the mic creating a non-participatory democracy, and (d) dominance of certain sub-castes (like the Mahars) within the Dalit communities (Datar, 1999, p.2966-2967). Datar thus concludes by suggesting a substitute, i.e. an ecofeminist standpoint complemented by a cultural revolt. Ecofeminism essentially focuses on reproduction, resources, and resource distribution, which is critical in societies that facilitate caste divisions (Datar, 1999, p.2968). In response to Datar’s paper, Rege published her article ‘Real Feminism’ and Dalit Women: Scripts of Denial and Accusation in 2000. She asserts that she did not overlook ecofeminism and that her review emphasized differences and its postmodernist appropriations (Rege, 2000, p.492). Rege adds, “Ecofeminism was not

overlooked, but collapsed as a particular variant of cultural feminism, one, which valorizes sexual differences especially in relation to nature." (Rege, 2000). She argues that most feminist standpoints already account for the ecofeminist concerns (Rege, 2000, p.495-496). Still, Rege argues that the issue is the non-addressing of problems among all the existing social movements, leading to seeking the 'best' alternative (Rege, 2000). In her defense and Datar's neglect, she adds that the Dalit feminist standpoint rejects the dichotomization of resources and the Brahmanical practices which equate the resources to environmental degradation (Rege, 2000). The materiality in Brahmanistic practices has always permitted a casteist and differentiated division of resources, labor, and sexuality. In response to Datar's allegations of Rege misinforming the readers of the absent concerns of the Dalit Panthers or the Women's Movement, she says that even though these movements have actually addressed the caste issue, they have not willingly aimed to revise feminist politics from the lessons they learnt from caste-gender issues; Rege thus calls for an internal critique within these movements (Rege, 2000). Rege is also very critical of Datar's assumptions and accusation of Dalit patriarchy being the worst adversary for the Dalit feminist movement; she calls out her failure to see radical Dalit feminists working at the grassroots level. Reiterating her defense, she says, "DFS like any other standpoint, therefore, is not to be seen in terms of aggregates of individuals, it is a collective subject position that requires an always contingent transformation of complex subject positions." (Rege 2000, p.495).

Debates, discussions, and intellectual exchanges are vital discourses within the grander scheme of modeling a safe space to accommodate all identities possible. It is also pivotal to look back into the history of caste-based feminisms under pioneers like Ambedkar and Periyar, whose visions exacted a society equal for all. With the current socio-political atmosphere of intersectional thinking in India, there is a dire need to re-memorialize and re-situate the perspicuity of these monumental figures who concocted a rich palette of theory and praxis for modern India. It is also crucial to note the inaccuracy in claiming that no one properly stood up against Brahmanism before Ambedkar or Periyar. The contributions of several social reformers and activists like Jyotirao Pule, Savitribai Phule, Iyothee Thass, and A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar, among many others, make them prominent torchbearers of the anti-caste tendencies in colonial

India. Challenging historical uniqueness always remains an indicator of intellectual development and helps advance the modes of knowledge production; what remains well-documented, however, is the sheer grandeur, participation, and mass following in the Ambedkarite and Periyar movements that brought reinvigorated hope and channeled a burning passion for amelioration among their followers.

Chapter 2

Ambedkar and Ambedkarite Feminism

2.1. Background

The 19th century downtrodden India homed the then-called *Untouchables, Panchamas, Atishudras, Avarnas, Namashudras, Antyajas, or Pariahs* (Keer, 1971). Born on 14th April 1891 to Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai Sakpal, Bhim belonged to the most prominent and the largest untouchable castes in India, the Mahars. Growing up, Bhim faced many hardships; he soon lost his mother, and he eventually realized that his family's caste location made them subject to nation-wide discrimination. Ramji was a courageous and spirited man; he protested against the 1892 ban on Mahars' recruitment in the Indian Army as issued by the government; and very soon, these attributes of dissent were adopted by Bhim. Like any untouchable child in 19th century India would, Bhim too experienced the tyrannies of untouchability practices wherever he went. Keer (1971, p.13) narrates several such incidents in his biography of Ambedkar, one of which reads, "...another shock awaited the growing mind and understanding of Bhim. It was indeed a touching scene when Bhim came to know that his hair defiled the purity of the razor of the barber who regarded even the buffalo-shaving as a better and holier affair that tonsuring a human being who was his co-religionist and his countryman."

Bhim grew up resolute, stubborn, and pugnacious. Most of Bhim's teachers were Brahmins, some brutal and heartless and some hearty and humane. One of the latter kinds, Krishnaji Keshav Ambedkar, helped Bhim draw his surname as Ambavadekar (from Bhim's native village Ambavade in Maharashtra) and even documented 'Ambedkar', i.e., matched his surname to Bhim's in the school records (Keer, 1971, p.14). In no time, Bhim rose as Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, as we know him today. Ambedkar was schooled mainly in Satara and Bombay, and he soon developed an

affection for reading, even though acquiring resources as an untouchable was extraordinarily formidable and risky.

In an unkind and unjust world, Ambedkar skillfully acquired a Master of Arts and a Doctorate in Economics from Columbia University, a Master of Science and a Doctor of Science in Economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science along with being awarded barrister-at-law, at the Grey's Inn in London (Omvedt 2004, p.11.) An untouchable Mahar, born in a remote rural town under colonial and oppressive regimes, quite fittingly underwrites the picture of Ambedkar. "This superior education helped propel Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar to the leadership of a growing movement of India'sIndia's downtrodden", says Omvedt (2004, p.11).

By 1923, Ambedkar was fully equipped to commit himself to the cause of the Untouchables, and he was solemnly aware of the caste politics of the 1920s. He made an active effort to learn from other influencers like S.K Bole, D.D. Gholap, and Anandrao Surve, who were already fighting for the representation of the Untouchables (Keer, 1971). 1924 saw the release of Gandhi and Savarkar from jail, and their efforts for the cause of the Depressed Classes/Untouchables were utterly different. In the same year, Ambedkar's desire for the emancipation of the Untouchables was manifested by establishing the 'Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha', registered under Act XXI of 1860 (Keer, 1971). As Keer (1971) notes, the aims and objects of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha were:

1. *To promote the spread of education among the Depressed Classes by opening Hostels or employing other means that may seem necessary or desirable.*
2. *To facilitate the spread of culture among the Depressed Classes by opening libraries, social centres, and classes/study circles.*
3. *To advance and improve the economic condition of the Depressed Classes by starting Industrial and Agricultural Schools.*
4. *To represent the grievances of the Depressed Classes.* (Keer, 1971, p.55)

Ambedkar closed down the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha in 1928 to form the Depressed Classes Education Society in the same year followed by the All India Depressed Classes Association in 1930. In each such establishment, he ensured that women's issues were adequately addressed parallely in a dedicated body of the parent conference. The term "Scheduled Caste" was coined in 1935 by the Simon Commission, and subsequently Babasaheb adopted its usage when he found the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942, as usual with a women's wing which is now popularly referred to as the Dalit Mahila Federation of 1942.

The difference in Ambedkar's efforts for reform lay in his ideas of the annihilation of caste and the complete reconstruction of Hindu society instead of the focus on the Hindu family unit. Keer (1971, p.57) says, "The galaxy of earlier patriots, princes, reformers, humanitarians, Mahatmas, and rationalists diagnosed the disease in their own way and prescribed for it, but in vain. The disease was in the stomach and often the medicine was applied by the reformers to the head."

Ambedkar's nationalism was articulated through the dedicated efforts of problematizing the Hindu caste order, his pro-active participation for the upliftment of the Shudras and the women, and his sheer vigor in uniting and mobilizing masses under a single banner. The following temple briefly summarizes some of the most important events in the history of the Ambedkarite Movement (Keer, 1971).

Year	**Event**
1916	● Ambedkar published *Castes in India*
1919	● Govt. of india Act 1919
1920	● Ambedkar starts the *Mook Nayak,* to voice the issues of the Untouchables

1923	• Bole Resolution
1924	• Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha established by Ambedkar
1925	• First Provincial Depressed Classes Conference
1927	• Bombay Depressed Class Teachers met with Ambedkar; • Mahad Satyagraha; • Manusmriti Dahan; • Bahishkrit Bharat Weekly; • Mahad Municipality revoked Bose Resolution, Ambedkar presides over a Conference in Poona dedicated to galvanize the younger generation
1928	• Ambedkar's Bill to amend the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act, 1874 which bound the Mahars to day and night slavery • Babasaheb makes it a habit to tag along Women's Conferences with every General Conference • Simon Commission arrived in India • Bombay Provincial non-Brahmin Party asked for a separate electorate for the Untouchables, along with reservation • First ever textile workers' strike in Bombay • The Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha closed • Ambedkar established the Depressed Classes Education Society
1929	• Second mill worker's strike; Ambedkar put forth his views on the already worsened condition of Untouchable workers • Depressed Classes held a conference in Jalgaon, presided by Dr Ambedkar

	● Ambedkar writes on the need to abolish priesthood ● Maternity Benefits Act 1929 for women mine-workers was passed, with the batoning efforts of Babasaheb. ● Mahadev Temple Satyagraha at Parvati Hills, Poona, was led by women inspired by Ambedkar's pedagogy
1930	● Kalaram Temple Satyagraha ● Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur ● Simon Commission does not meet Ambedkar's reccomendations ● Ambedkar starts the fortnightly, *Janata* ● Ambedkar put forths his idea of *Swaraj* being met only if minority rights were safeguarded constitutionally ● Ambedkar leaves for London in October where he represents the Depressed Classes at the First Round Table Conference; he pleads for representation of women in a separate electoral structure ● The All-India Depressed Classes Association was established by Ambedkar
1931	● Ambedkar arrives back in India ● Ambedkar and Gandhi meet for the first time ● Second Round Table Conference commences ● Ambedkar makes his speech in the Federal Structure Committee, the ideas of 'free India' was discussed, he proposed a separate electorate for the Untouchables for the first ten years
1932	● Poona Pact ● Gandhi founds the Anti-Untouchability League (Harijan Sevak Sangh) ● Ambedkar expresses his dissent on the activities of the Harijan Sevak Sangh for their incompetence in

	addressed the socio-economic upliftment of the Untouchables instead of just Temple entry movements and inter-dining; Ambedkar suggested detailed alternatives to the Sangh ● Third Round Table Conference
1933	● Ambedkar gives an insightful speeches in Mazgaon and Sopare ● Ambedkar leaves for London again, this time for a Joint Committee Meeting
1934	● Ambedkar starts his part-time professorship at Government Law College, Bombay ● The outcomes of the Joint Committee Meeting introduced the India Bill in the British Parliament
1935	● Ramabai Ambedkar breathes her last, Ambedkar mourns for weeks ● Ambedkar becomes the principal of the Government Law College, Bombay ● Yeola Conference, Ambedkar declares change of religion ● Govt of India recognized the Depressed Classes as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes ● Babasaheb authors *Untouchables or The Children of India's Ghetto*
1936	● Ambedkar publishes his undelivered speech, *Annihilation of Caste* in a booklet form ● Ambedkar creates his political party called the Independent Labour Party, his goals were to ameliorate the status of workers and agriculturalists, elections were launched immediately

	● Babasaheb gives several speeches throughout Bombay presidency
1937	● Ambedkar becomes the leader for labourers, women labourers listened to him piously ● Ambedkar reminds of the three problems for the Untouchables: the Hindu caste order, share in national wealth, and their rights to self-respect and dignity
1938	● Ambedkar gave several evocative speeches throughout Maharashtra ● Ambedkar arranged several labour rallies
1940-43	● Ambedkar authors *Thoughts on Pakistan* ● He addresses several Mahila Parishads ● The All India Scheduled Caste Federation was founded by Dr Ambedkar, and as usual a women's wing called the All the India Scheduled Caste Women's Federation was also established, following which three important conferences happened in Nagpur ● The 7th session of All-India Labour Conference, under the baton of Ambedkar, reduced working hours for labouring Dalit men and women
1944	● Ambedkar introduced a Bill proposing paid holidays for the industrial workers, his concerns for labouring women was very evident in his perennial efforts ● Ambedkar addresses the Depressed Class Christians Association in Tamil Nadu ● Ambedkar meets Periyar in Madras; in Ellore, he listened to the addresses by District Scheduled Castes Federation, Christian Federation, the West Godavari

	District Board, and the Ellore Municipal Council
1945-46	● Manmad Conference of the Scheduled Castes Federation, Ambedkar addresses the failures of Congress. He took these sentiments to other parts of India where he gave numerous speeches ● Scheduled Caste federation performed poorly in 1946 elections for the Constitutional Assembly of India ● Ambedkar writes *Who Were the Shudras?* ● The slogan "*Jai Bhim"* was popularized
1947-50	● Ambedkar becomes term as Law Minister of India and the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution ● Ambedkar marries Sharada Kabir, who later adopted the name Savita Ambedkar ● Ambedkar begins his active devotion to Buddhism ● Ambedkar submits his draft of the Hindu Code Bill to the Constituent Assembly, he resigned upon its continuous defeat in the Assembly
1950 onwards	● Ambedkar writes *Riddles in Hinduism* ● He authors *Buddha and His Dhamma* ● Ambedkar publicly converted to Buddhism

This brief background of Ambedkar gives a rough yet expansive idea of his visions for the nation. Ambedkar's ingenuity and morality, juxtaposed with his inspirations from the West, provided the impetus to the rapid spread of what we now call Dalit subjectivity. Of particular interest to this thesis are his contributions to understanding the gender-caste framework in India, which today becomes the face of the Dalit feminist movement.

2.2. Feminism in the Ambedkarite Movement

This sub-chapter aims to amplify, historicize, and re-memorialize Ambedkar's contributions to building a rich feminist thought and outlook, which he essentialized for good nation-building. These aims are reached by comprehensively examining Ambedkar's publications, his speeches, the activities of the anti-caste movements, and the legal developments in the 20th century concerning both caste and untouchable women. The goal is not necessarily to track a stringent timeline of events because regardless of the year and decade, Ambedkar's writings, speeches, and rallies have always directed to the practice of egalitarian politics with the understanding of recognizing differences. Furthermore, the works of several contemporary feminist writers, poets, and scholars will examine and outline their arguments on the importance of an Ambedkarite vision for Dalit feminism to construct itself as a common trope in mainstream feminism. Autobiographical works by Babytai Kamble, Urmil Pawar, and Kumud Pawade and personal accounts of several notable Dalit women who made history, like Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon (2008) narrate it in their book, "We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement", will also help deliver a first-person narrative to understanding Dalit subjectivity.

2.2.1. Feminist Literature

Since most of Ambedkar's critique of the foundations of the Hindu society materializes around caste, it is crucial to understand how Ambedkar formulated the genesis of caste in his (1916) dissertation, Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development. Ambedkar, in his thesis, problematizes the Brahmanical regime of endogamous matrimony, the consequences of which nurture the caste system in India. Ambedkar calls caste a parceling legion of an already homogenous unit; the superimposition of endogamy on exogamy systematically guides this parceling. Written almost in the style of a thought experiment, Ambedkar hypothesizes a surplus man and a surplus woman under the condition that endogamy is always preserved to underline

the mechanism of caste propagation in India. He pens down historical pieces of evidence of this transformation from conventional exogamy to sacrilegious endogamy. He finds such evidence in the practice of abominable customs like sati and girl marriage and hypothesizes that the Brahmin class almost certainly perpetuated the transformation of classes into castes. The work is a sturdy proof for explaining the Brahmanical practices like sati and enforced widowhood for 'surplus' women as a tool to 'fix' the issue of sex ratio imbalance followed by the loss of a hypothetical husband; the purpose of maintaining the ratio of marriageable units was to perpetuate, stabilize, and fixate Brahminical homogeneity. Ambedkar's piece is highly concise and complete, underlining the extraordinarily complex and fissiparous character of castes in India; he locates such characters, developments, formation, and perpetuations with the help of Tarde's Laws of Imitation, situating a 'self-proclaimed elite' in the hierarchy to emulate. The text provides an advantageous starting point to introduce this unnatural institution peculiar to India. The text also exemplifies Ambedkar's unique, soundproof, and logically-precise language and terminology that uniquely make his readings so precise and evocative.

In 1936, one of Ambedkar's most important self-published works, the Annihilation of Caste, became an essential crest for India's revolutionary reviews. His text envisions social endosmosis for India, energized by intersectional thinking. Ambedkar's incisive critical thought spans the entire text; he has meticulously and extensively drafted this speech under social reform, economic reform, the round table conferences, the Vedas, education, labor, marriage, and gender equality. His astute use of vocabulary and rhetorics adds more emancipatory and evocative potential for the Untouchables and expands its scope to radical Hindu introspection. Ambedkar's standpoint, throughout the text, intensively reproaches his contemporaries and the Hindu consciousness. The paragons of liberty, equality, and fraternity assemble the backbone of the text. Reading this speech, we acknowledge his feminist visions, where he measures the country's progress on the scale of gender equity. His vision of a just society with social endosmosis calls for a change in the rigid caste structure. It claims that a just society is achieved only after the complete annihilation of caste. Ambedkar, very famously writes, "An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change

taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society, there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words, there should be social endosmosis." (Ambedkar, 1936). Ambedkarite thought finds the only remedy to the caste-gender problem in inter-caste marriage and the destruction of the belief in the sanctity of Shastras; he also repudiates the social objective of the Chaturvarnya system. He pens down the necessity for state regulation of priesthood, if not its total abolition. To reflect, Annihilation of Caste concocts an anti-caste utopia, denouncing altogether, with logical and lucid assertions, Hinduism and its turbulent practices throughout India, making a fundamental text for Caste and Gender studies in India.

Ambedkar's penmanship constantly critiqued and exposed societal flaws. In "Philosophy of Hinduism", he reveals how women were treated as commodities and how the onus of caste sanctity and purity always lay on women. For example, in regard to intermarriage, as Ambedkar points out, Manu says, "For the first marriage of the twice born classes, a woman of the same class is recommended but for such as are impelled by inclination to marry again, women in the direct order of the classes are to be preferred" (Ambedkar, 1982-90, Vol 3, p.26). On the issue of intermarriage, locking it in designated unidirectional order, Manu also elaborates how "a Shudra woman only must be the wife of a Shudra; she and a Vaishya, of a Vaishya; they two and a Kshatriya of a Kshatriya; those three and a Brahmani of a Brahmin" (AWAS, 1982-90, p.108). Thus, as noted earlier, the matrimony of a Brahmin woman and a Shudra man would be the most outrageous. The offspring of such unions would be named 'Chandalas', a pejorative outcaste falling in the untouchables' lowest rungs, more so because it accentuates the pinnacle of a Brahmin woman's audacity to fall for a Shudra man, a crime of the highest order and an adulteration of the biggest abhorrence. The following, taken from Manu's code concerning Chandalas, entices a grieving picture of how bizarrely his thoughts convert into words:

1. "*A Chandala and a boar, a cock and also a dog, and a woman in her courses and an eunuch, may not see the Brahmins eating.*

2. *On having (carnal) intercourse with Chandala women (or low born woman), on eating their food or receiving (presents) from them, a Brahmin (if he has done so) unwittingly, falls; but (if he has done so) wittingly, he comes to an equality (with them).*
3. *The slayer of a Brahmin enters the womb of dogs, boars, asses, camels, cows, goats, sheep, (forest) animals, birds, Chandalas and Pukkasas."*
   (from AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 7. pp 199-200)

The Chandala caste today is highly stigmatized, oppressed, and humiliated under Hindu orthodoxy; and they are often associated with handling butchery, fishing, and the dumping of corpses.

Uma Chakravarti has also honed out the gruesome picture of women drawn in Manu's code; she says how, for Manu, "women were innately promiscuous, fickle minded, lacking in love, and unfaithful to their husbands even when closely guarded" (Chakravarti, 1993, p.581) which Ambedkar talks about in great detail while examining Brahmicide. Ambedkar also brings to the fore the ideas of philosophers like Nietzsche and their erroneous and immoral fetish with Manu's prescriptions. The sexual mistreatment, commodification, objectification, and prostitution among Aryans were apparent, as Ambedkar writes in "The Ancient Regime: The State of the Aryan Society", "there was prevalent among the Aryans the practice of renting out their women to others for a time...Besides the practice of letting out women to others temporarily at a rent there was prevalent among the Aryans another practice namely allowing procreation by the best amongst them. Raising a family was treated by them as though it was a breeding or stock raising. Among the Aryas there was a class of persons called Devas who were Aryans but of a superior status and prowess. The Aryans allowed their women to have sexual intercourse with any one of the class of Devas in the interest of good breeding" (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 3, p.156).

In "*Reformers and their Fate*", Ambedkar incisively compares Buddhist and Aryan societies, weighing the positions of Shudras and women, denying them Sanyas and bearing the same status quo in Aryan societies; furthermore, he underlines Buddha's

repudiation of the Aryan doctrine of denying education to women and Shudras (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 3, p.221). Emotively, Ambedkar compiles and summarizes why Brahmanism triumphed in India; he says, "*the laws of Manu also explain, the determined way in which the Brahmins proceeded to use their political power to degrade the Shudras and the women to their old status. The triumphant Brahmanism began its onslaught on both the Shudras and the women in pursuit of the old ideal, namely servility and Brahmanism did succeed in making the Shudras and women the servile classes, Shudras the serfs to the three higher classes and women the serfs to their husbands*" (AWAS, Vol 3, 1982-90, p.316). Ambedkar widely adopted comparative analysis methods in his research to further his process of learning and un-learning.

For example, he compares the situation and position of women from the days before Manu; he eloquently writes, "That a woman was entitled to Upanayan is clear from the Atharva Veda where a girl is spoken of as being eligible for marriage having finished her Brahmacharya. From the Shrauta Sutras, it is clear that women could repeat the Mantras of the Vedas and that women were taught to read the Vedas. Panini's Ashtaadhyai bears testimony to the fact that women attended Gurukul and studied the various Shakhas of the Veda and became expert in Mimansa. Patanjali's Maha Bhashya shows that women were teachers and taught Vedas to girl students. The stories of women entering into public discussions with men on most abstruse subjects of religion, philosophy and metaphysics are by no means few" (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 3, p.432). Several other facets of freedom, liberty, and equality in womanhood, like the absence of child marriage, the right to divorce, economic autonomy and widow remarriage, are exemplified by Ambedkar from pre-Manu days. His analysis led him to ask, "In short, in pre-Manu days, a woman was free and equal partner of man. Why did Manu degrade her?" (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 3, p.437). Ambedkar's continuous, detailed, and dedicated research and effort in publishing the horrors of such social orders make his vast collection of writings and speeches a weight of historical importance. Although one can go on and on about Ambedkar's writings seen from a feminist lens, it is also essential to glance into how he inspired, encouraged, indulged, and mobilized thousands of women for the cause of their upliftment.

Another work of cardinal importance by Ambedkar is his collection of “Riddles in Hinduism.” In Riddle No.13, “The Riddle of Ahimsa”, he talks about ways of prostitution of women among the Aryans. It is best to read it in his own words:

“There was communism in women. It was a simple communism where many men shared a woman and no one had a private property in or exclusive right over a woman. In such a communism the woman was called Ganika, belonging to many. There was also a regulated form of communism in women among the Aryans. In this the woman was shared among a group of men but the day of each was fixed and the woman was called Warangana one whose days are fixed. Prostitution flourished and has taken the worst form. Nowhere else have prostitutes consented to submit to sexual intercourse in public.” (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 4, p.109).

In Riddles No.20 and 24, “Kali Varjya or the Brahmanic Art of Suspending the Operation of Sin without Calling it Sin, and “The Riddle of Kali Yuga”, he points out the outrageous custom of prayashchit, that a raped (the Devala Smriti uses the word ‘polluted’) woman had to do before mixing with her caste unless the timeline is Kali Yuga (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 5, p.235, 321). In his piece, “The Indian Ghetto- The Centre of Untouchability”, Ambedkar talks in great detail about the Indian village as a social congregate of Untouchables and Touchables where the former lived under a code of touchables that they were obliged to follow; in a reprimanding gust, Ambedkar writes how on festivals, the Untouchables had to ‘submit’ their women to the associates of the village community, ‘to be made the subject of indecent fun’ (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol. 5. p.22).

Ambedkar documents another well-known case of domination of the upper caste on the Balai community, who demanded that Balai women not wear fancy gowns or jackets and obey and attend the cases of confinement of Hindu women in the village (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 5, p.49). The control of female sexuality, with the added perpetuation of Brahmanizing the Untouchables while also subordinating them, is well exemplified in Ambedkar’s “THEIR WISHES ARE LAWS UNTO US.” The Kallad community in Ramnad, for example, laid down some of the following restrictions for Untouchable men and women:

1. *Women shall not be allowed to cover the upper portion of their bodies by clothes or ravukais or thavanies;*
2. *Women shall not be allowed to use flowers or saffron paste.*
3. *Women should carry water only in mud pots and not in copper or brass vessels. They should use straw only to carry the water pots, and no clothes should be used for that purpose.*
4. *They must work as coolies from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. under the Mirasdars, and their wages shall be for men Rs. 0-4-0 per day and for women Rs. 0-2-0 per day.*
   (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol.5, pp.279-280)

Ambedkar also disparaged Hindu casteist women who did not hesitate to take an active interest in perpetuating caste atrocities against the Untouchables. For example, he reports the following incident featured in Pratap, a weekly magazine started in 1932 by Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi to address the issues of downtrodden India.

The report reads: “On 19th February 1932, a very tragic incident took place in the village of Pul Bajwan. This happened when Mahashaya Ramlal went to fetch some water from a well, the same well at which on 13th January 1932 some Rajputs had belabored Mahashaya Ramlal and his companion, Pandit Bansilal. At that time, a crowd of Rajput women came up armed with all sorts of bats and sticks and gave such a sound beating to the Mahashaya that it is difficult to describe. All his body was covered with blood by the time the Rajput women had done with him. At this time, he is admitted in the hospital of Phuklian.” (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 5, p.37)

In another report, Ambedkar amplifies the plight of Bhangi women, who are denied basic necessities like drinking water. One could write pages and pages on the atrocities that Untouchables had to face daily. The perpetrators of some of these barbaric incidents were Hindu women who did not even spare older men and women from the Untouchable communities; from beating up families to pouring kerosine ne in the wells used by Untouchables, the monstrosities were terrorizing. Ambedkar repeatedly

condemned such atrocities, and his comments are reminiscent of his addresses in the Mahad Satyagraha of 1927, recalling that their sit-downs were not for water but for the most basic human rights.

Ambedkar evolved as the face and voice of the Untouchable women who, time and again, voiced the issues of both sexism and casteism faced by Untouchable women in particular. In a letter to the General Secretary of the Sangh Parivar, he says, “Depressed Class women working in the winding or reeling departments have come to me in hundreds complaining that the Naikins, instead of distributing the raw material to all women employees equally or in fair proportion, give all of it to the caste Hindu women and leave them in the cold.” As evident already, a politics of ‘difference and intersectionality’ was a centerpiece in Ambedkarite politics.

2.2.2. The Fight for Political Rights

Ambedkar’s cognition of the kind of patriarchy in India led him to firmly take robust measures to involve women in Satyagrahas, Conferences, Rallies and Sabhas. In the grander scheme of the Ambedkarite liberatory movements, from 1920 onwards, we gradually see Babasaheb’s seminal role in asserting the political independence of women, especially with the rise of a tagged and dedicated Women’s Conference with every meeting and also the happenings of Mahila Mandals devoted to the confabulations circling women’s position in the 20th century. Ambedkar’s first wife, Ramabai Ambedkar, commonly known as Ramai, was instrumental in establishing these Mahila Mandals (Pawar, Moon, 2008, p.136). Rege (1998, pp.41-42) exclaims, “The 1930s saw the organization of independent meetings and conferences by Dalit women in the Ambedkarite movement. This was an obvious consequence of Ambedkar’s practice of organizing a women’s conference along with every general meeting and sabha that he called. In these ‘parishads’ of the 1930s Dalit women passed resolutions against child marriage, enforced widowhood, and dowry, critiquing these practices as Brahmanical.” By 1948, after Ramabai’s death, resolutions to launching nationwide Mahila Mandals were already taken under consideration; children’s education became a robust agenda taken up by women. Pawar and Moon (2008, p.154) point out how

subscriptions of a monthly format were already underway for the cause of children's education. The 1920-1940s also saw mushrooming of several women-led campaigns that became the backbone of the Ambedkarite movement. Untouchable women met in Nagpur, Vidharba, Pune, Bombay, Kamathi, and Thane and carefully discussed their resolutions passionately. The internal differences among the women were also calcifying, as evident from the following meeting documented in (Pawar, Moon, 2008): "A meeting of untouchable women was held in Dharampeth, Nagpur on Ist January 1938. Earlier, in the session of the All India Women's conference held in December, Hindu women like Jaibal Choudhuri had insulted the dalit women by arranging separate seating for them at meals. Anjanibal Deshbhratar and Sakhubai Meshram condemned the "shameful and despicable behavior" of the Hindu women and advised the women to be self-respecting and self-reliant."

The 1906 Depressed Class Mission, started by Vitthal Ramji Shinde, saw a complete ideological shift under Ambedkar, who situated the objectives as a complete transformation of the Hindu social order by abolishing and annihilating caste. In 1942, three Conferences held in Nagpur by the All-India Depressed Classes Mission saw a dedicated discussion of women's issues in the "The Depressed Classes Women's Conference, presided over by Mrs. Dongre of Amraoti" (Ambedkar, 1982-90, Vol 17, p.243). The All-India Depressed Classes Conference was unprecedented because at least 75,000 people were present at the session, with no less than 20,000 women. In addition, this was a Conference fully representative of the Depressed Classes of almost all the Provinces of India. Moreover, the conference passed a Resolution to establish an All-India Organization called the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 17, p.243-244). It must be understood that seeing the count of women in three and four-digit numbers was no less than revolutionary. Most of Maharashtra's precincts, like Mazgaon, Manmad, Thane, Nagpur, and Bombay, among many others, carry a historical pride in having seen tremendous numbers of women following Ambedkar. In the 1942 Women's Conference of the All India Depressed Classes, Sulochanabai Dongre presided over and presented eight resolutions to the conference. These were in the order: support to the All-India Depressed Classes Conference, Divorce Law, Polygamy, Economic condition of women, education, law for appointing

lady supervisors in mills and factories, female representation in legislatures from the depressed classes, and the establishment of the All India Scheduled Castes Women's Federation (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 17, pp.277-282). The Conference saw an enthusiastic participation of 25,000 women from all over the country (Pawar, Moon, 2008, p.142).

In the same conference, Ambedkar famously articulates, "Ever since I began to work among the Depressed Classes, I made it a point to carry women along with men. That is why you will see that our Conferences are always mixed Conferences. I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved, and when I see this assembly, I feel both convinced and happy that we have progressed" (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 17, p.282). Furthermore, Ambedkar's never-ending drudgeries were seen in many other areas; for example, he demanded a Statutory Commission for the Aboriginal Tribes of India, he schemed a one-party, one-programme approach under the scheduled castes federation, and he also made endeavors to revitalize Buddhism in India (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 17).

Ambedkar raised the concern for the adequate representation of women in electorates in the First Round Table Conference of 1930; he proposed representation of women in a separate electorate for the first ten years and, after that, in joint electorates. This particular decade also saw a few more important events for the nationalist calendar: The Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931), The Second Round Table Conference (1931), The Poona Pact (1932), and the Government of India Act (1935). The Poona Pact (1932) settled the Gandhi-Ambedkar dispute in a joint electorate of 147 seats in the general electorate for the Depressed Classes, earmarking an integral journey for the voice and representation of Untouchables. However, in a diluted form, it also gave caste Hindus the power to elect or not elect Untouchables. Reactionary outputs of Ambedkar's pedagogy invited a satyagraha in Pune, and women and children constituted a significant part; most of these adult satyagrahis were also arrested. Pawar and Moon (2008, pp.150-151) document how even the reporters were shocked that uneducated women who did not fear arrest were so knowledgeable of their political rights due to Babasaheb and his teachings.

In May 1937, about twelve hundred women listened to Ambedkar at the Independent Labour Party Meeting. His continuous reiteration of the need to work within the finest interests of the Untouchables, one of the biggest of which he considered was the issue of women's rights, was highlighted. Over a thousand women attended the Pandharpur Conference in December 1937, where Ambedkar addressed the issues of equality, equity in the share of national wealth, and the rights to self-respect and dignity, the latter being a common feature in all of the meetings he addressed. By 1938, Dr Ambedkar ensured that women were involved in trade union activities. He demanded equal pay for equal work regardless of sex; in this consideration, he says (Ambedkar, 1982-90, Vol 10), "We have also taken care to see, and this is an important point, that women shall be paid the same wages as men. It is for the first time that I think in any industry the principle has been established of equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex." His representative and egalitarian political methods were echoed deeply throughout the Ambedkarite Movement. Babasaheb's efforts were significant in passing the Bombay legislature's first-ever Maternity Benefits Act 1929 for the women mine workers. Like a true reformer and a pioneer for women's rights, Ambedkar labored to ensure women were safeguarded under labor laws.

Instrumental in lowering the number of working hours and enhancing working conditions for women, his legal battles stand testimony to the outcomes. In the seventh session of the 1942 Indian Labour Conference, Ambedkar's efforts culminated in reducing working hours from fourteen to eight. He considered that if the employer benefited from women's labor, they should also, in part, aid women on maternity breaks. The other half of the wages, he thought, should be remunerated by the government as it was in the interest of the welfare of the nation (Desai, 2019). Attri (2015) notes in his article, "Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar framed many laws for women workers in India such as 'Mines Maternity Benefit Act', 'Women Labour Welfare Fund', 'Women and Child Labour Protection Act', 'Maternity Benefit for Women Labour', and 'Restoration of Ban on Employment of Women on Underground Work in Coal Mines'."

2.2.3. The Power in Ambedkarite Vocabulary

Ambedkar projected his ideas and visions so well that they left the same impact on the front and last rows of women energetically listening to him. Consider the well-known Satyagraha at Mahad in 1927, which saw generous participation of women. Ambedkar's speech to Dalit women following the burning of Manusmriti the previous day was so moving and powerful that these women found their safe spaces in these meetings. Ambedkar's phrases were the keys to the liberation of their bodies and minds. His monumental role in elucidating to these women the rationales behind why they should liberate themselves from the markers of untouchability that were hitherto enforced, especially on women of the Untouchable communities and his propositions of emulating the upper caste, needs to be seen as a positive trope in Dalit history. His speech to women that is worth noting reads:

"To tell the truth, no untouchable person carries the mark of being untouchable stamped on his forehead. But untouchable persons can be easily recognized as such because of their customs and way of life. I am of the opinion that these ways were once imposed on us. But such compulsion cannot continue under the rule of the British. Therefore you must now give up all those things that enable people to recognize you as being untouchable. The way you wear your saris is a sign of your being untouchable, you must wipe out that sign. You must begin the practice of wearing your saris in the same fashion that upper-caste women do, it will not cost you anything. In the same way, your habit of wearing heavy necklaces round your necks and bracelets and bangles of kathil on your arms up to the elbow, mark you out as being untouchable. There is no need for more than one necklace. It is not as if your husband's lives will be lengthened or that you will look beautiful because of a neckful of ornaments. Clothes rather than ornaments make you look good" (Pawar, Moon, 2008, p.122).

Babasaheb's speech left an extraordinary and unforgettable impact on the women of the Maang and Chamhar communities, who switched from wearing their saris to their knees (a marker of their caste) to fraying nine-yard sarees like the Brahmin women. As Pawar and Moon (2008, p.124) note, Brahmin Ambedkarite women assisted the Dalit

women in dressing like them. One of the most significant outcomes of Babsaheb's efforts in rallying and mobilizing masses of men and women under the banners of emancipation was that he imbibed in them a consciousness and a realization of the organizational and managerial resilience, solidarity, and strength the community posses. Tanubai Kamble became one such leader of satyagrahis in the Mahadev temple entry movement of 1929, which witnessed a rise in the number of women satyagrahis compared to Mahad. It is important to see that it was not the case that temple entries and satyagrahas were not seen before Ambedkar; the only difference in Ambedkar's time was that his education, proficiency, and perseverance helped him radically politicize the issue and extend its reach to both men and women, hence the larger turnouts.

In a meeting with the women of the Ambedkarite movement (before his departure to London for the Second Round Table Conference) on the 14th of August 1931, in a very provocative speech, Ambedkar said (Ambedkar, 1982-90, Vol 17, p.65), "If you stand by your resolve to extirpate your slavery root and branch and undergo all trials and tribulations for it, the credit and success of my being able to discharge the onerous task will be yours." Ambedkar's concern for the women inevitably hauled into prostitution was also addressed in Sabhas and is often debated as his disapproval of women's right to sex work by mainstream feminists today. This stance is often misunderstood because, in light of the socio-economic plight of Mahar women in the 1930s, we realize that his concerns dawn from a desperate desire to ameliorate and emancipate women with the dignity they deserve. Ambedkar valued living with dignity more than living in poverty. Addressing the Mahar women of Kamathipura, he says (Ambedkar, 1982-90, Vol 17, p.150), "You will ask me how you are to make your living. I am not going to tell you that. There are hundreds of ways of doing it. But I insist that you must give up this degraded life. You must marry and settle down to normal domestic life as women of other classes do and not continue to live under conditions which inevitably drag you into prostitution."

By 1948, resolutions to launching nationwide Mahila Mandals were already taken under consideration; children's education became a robust agenda taken up by women. Pawar and Moon (2008, p.154) point out how subscriptions of a monthly format were

already underway for the cause of children's education. Often forgotten in academic circles is Babasaheb's endeavors in setting up a co-education college in Aurangabad along with a bus service so that girls from other regions could attend in significant numbers. On matrimony, he strictly abhorred the early marriage of girls and boys because he stressed the need for children to get access to education first and foremost. In the 1942 Mahila Parishad, Babasaheb is famously known for saying, "*Do not arrange early marriages of boys and girls, let them first be economically independent. Bring to their notice the ill effects of having too many children. Marriage is an obstacle in the development of a girl; do not impose marriage on her. After marriage, the wife must be her husband's friend and a housewife having equal rights. She must not become the slave of her husband.*" Babasaheb also emphasized the need for family planning; he correlated poverty and large families and amplified this issue in his speeches. He understood the painstaking task of childbearing and thus enlightened the public in his speeches to channelize priorities productively and sensitively (Moon, Pawar, 2008, p.160).

It is also crucial to imbibe Ambedkar's general concern for human lives regardless of the identity variables. For example, Ambedkar deeply condemned the violent attacks on Hindu men and women in the Moplah Rebellion of 1921. Ambedkar studied the Hindu-Muslim Riots of 1938 and 1939 and voiced his anxieties about safeguarding human lives. Furthermore, he emphasized the terrible consequences of communal violence on women, rape, molestation, and abduction statistics showed a clear case corelation. For instance, he enlightens, *"In this civil war men were, of course, the principal victims. But women did not altogether escape molestation. It is perhaps not sufficiently known how much women have suffered in communal hostilities...the attitude towards women-folk is a good index of the friendly or unfriendly attitude between the two communities."* (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 8, pp.184-185).

Ambedkar exposed every religion of maneuvering their women under harsh systems of patriarchy that deeply nourished the sanctity and uprightness of the prevailing fundamentals. As much as he hated the customs of child marriage, and the forfeiture of rights to property and divorce for women among Hindu practitioners, he also despised

the practices of caste and polygamy in Islam and its consequent concubinage for Muslim women. Furthermore, he held detesting sentiments for the purdah system for Muslim women. He sympathizes with the Muslim woman, *"Purdah deprives Muslim women of mental and moral nourishment. Being deprived of healthy social life, the process of moral degeneration must and does set in. Being completely secluded from the outer world, they engage their minds in petty family quarrels with the result that they become narrow and restricted in their outlook"*, he articulates (AWAS, 1982-90, Vol 8, p.230).

Ambedkar not only wanted a physical mobilization of the Untouchables in the spirit of demanding basic human rights, but he also engaged and necessitated the roles of academics and media as an emancipatory and evocative mouthpiece for the movement. His exemplary efforts are evident in three of the Marathi Magazines started by him, Mook Nayak ('The leader of the dumb'), started in 1920; Janata (The People), started in 1930; and Bahishkrit Bharat ('Excluded India'), started in 1927. An article of Ambedkar's own writing in Bahishkrit Bharat (1927) speaks to the readers concerning the eyesore-ing monstrosities of untouchability:

"In Kathiawad (Gujarat) there is a village named Lathi. In that village lives a school teacher by the name of Jethala Manasur Parmar. He is an untouchable by caste. Unfortunately, that poor person faced a miserable calamity which has been reported in the newspaper recently. On the last 5th of April his wife delivered a child. And immediately after two days she fell seriously ill. At a place called Dhangdhra there was a doctor named Pranajivan. The teacher approached him but the doctor refused to visit the house of an untouchable and get himself polluted by examining the untouchable patient. Thereafter this teacher used the good offices of one gentleman called Nagarsheth on whose insistence the doctor agreed to come provided the patient is brought out of the house. The doctor came at 8 pm, he did not touch the patient, gave the thermometer to a Mohammedan who got the fever measured with the help of the teacher, and the doctor then after seeing the thermometer told the teacher that it is the case of pneumonia and went away without even touching the patient yet taking Rs. 200 as his fees. The patient died within six hours of this incident. Who will not be angry after

reading this? To what extent a caste Hindu can be merciless towards the untouchables is indicated by this behaviour of the doctor. The Hindus who tell the people not to kill cows did not show any mercy towards an untouchable woman who was on her deathbed." (Written by Dr Ambedkar in 1927, translated by Dr B.R. Kamble in 2010)

2.2.4. First Person Narratives

Rising Ambedkarite Feminism of the 20th century laid out an emancipatory terrain for the Dalit men and women's journeys as activists, writers, and poets, who bore years of historical and generational trauma and baggage of their societal subjugation. Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon write movingly in their work, "We Also Made History: Women in The Ambedkarite Movement", bringing out the voices of the Untouchable women following Ambedkar while also recapitulating Ambedkar's principal efforts in the fight for gender and social justice. By the 1940s, Bahasaheb's grand scheme of emancipation plans turned into a routine of meetings and conferences; women were so grateful to Dr Ambedkar for equipping them to fight for their personal and political rights. The Dalit Mahila Federation/Women's Scheduled Caste Federation of 1942 was chaired by Mrs Keertibai Dongre, who expressed in her speech, "Even if we are still far from the path chalked out for us by our leader Dr Ambedkar, those of our sisters who can lead the way should now be ready to do this work" (Pawar, Moon, 2008, p.142).

Pawar and Moon's (2008) work comprehensively narrates the resonating lives of the Ambedkarite women. One such story in their book is of Bhikshuni Laxmibai Naik, who was deeply devoted to Ambedkar. The authors account how she adopted and preached Buddhism following Ambedkar, besides social work and school teaching. She was so deeply moved that she pilgrimaged to Bodh Gaya after Ambedkar's 1956 conversion. Another Ambedkarite, Shantabai Bhalerao, narrates in first person the involvement of her family in the Mahad Satyagraha; her involvement in Quit India Movement is also recited in the chapter. She reveals how the instructions of non-violence were already a learned trope in Ambedkar's teachings. It is fascinating to note how a common trope in the life stories of these women is that they either pursued education or self-taught themselves, fulfilling Babasaheb's stringent wishes for affirmative education for all.

Muktabai Kamble, a regular attendee of the 1930's Mahila Mandals, narrates in one of these interviews, "Until about 1935 or 1936 I went to Babasaheb's meetings wherever I could. I took part in his birthday celebrations. There would be meetings of men and women. Then the English people living in Kamathipura would make inquiries with those among our people who worked for them as butlers, drivers etc., but our meetings were not concerned with the government. In the women's meetings we discussed subjects like child care, education of girls, collecting subscriptions and contributing to any programme of Babasaheb, starting new Mahila Mandals and collecting funds for setting up schools etc." (Pawar, Moon, 2018). The accounts of several such women involved in the Ambedkarite feminist movement bring life to each conference, rally, and meeting we know of. The authors pen down the histories of forty-four Ambedkarite women in their piece, elucidating the reader with such an innovative and alternate style of history writing.

Baby Kamble, more generally known as Babytai Kamble (1929-2012), writes in her 1986 autobiography Jina Amucha (The Prisons We Broke), translation by Maya Pandit:

"Gradually, the wind of Ambedkar's thoughts turned into a whirlwind. Everybody began to understand, argue and consider. The dead cells in their blood were charged with a new life. Blood began to flow through their veins with new vigor. People got charged with the spirit of revolution. There was one name on every tongue— Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. This included the young and the old with no exception. Each hut reverberated with his name." (Kamble, Pandit, 2003)

Ambedkar's legacy and the sheer density of his outstanding pedagogy made him an exemplar of vigor and rigor. His influence was so projective that today, his legacy is kept alive in political, social, and literary movements. The latter, on such a grand scale, is seen, for example, in the Dalit Sahitya Movement, bringing out the literature of the oppressed in the form of poems, autobiographies, stories, and articles. Eleanor Zelliot and Mulk Raj Anand's (1992) "An Anthology of Dalit Literature (Poems)" places the

ballads of several Dalit Ambedkarite poets at the center of the Sahitya Movement. An excerpt from Hira Bansode's "Slave" goes as follows:

"Where the doors are decorated with mango leaves
Where the houses are ornamented with little flaming oil lamps
In that country a woman is still a slave" (Zelliot, Anand, 1992, p.30)

2.3. The Hindu Code Bill

It would be discourteous to Babasaheb's legacy to examine his contributions and not discuss one of his grandest antidotes to the fall of Hindu women, the Hindu Code Bill, a topic of interest for this section. The Hindu Code Bill's history dates back to 1941, with the appointment of the B.N. Rau Committee to identify faults in the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937 and to codify, with the help of orthodox, traditionalistic, and reformist Hindus, a set of common laws for the Hindus pertaining to succession, maintenance, marriage and divorce, minority and guardianship, and adoption. The Draft was successively revised owing to suggestive modifications by the Hindus. In 1947, the proposals of this Bill, named "The Hindu Code Bill", abolished joint-family property, the impediments of inter-caste marriage, and recognized civil marriages without functions and rituals with the added introduction of divorce. The Bill, delayed due to India's Independence, was reintroduced, this time with Ambedkar's Draft; Babasaheb made unprecedented efforts to bring conclusive and total equality. Some of the most crucial provisions of the revised Hindu Code Bill are detailed below.

1. Nullified Mitakshara law, which permitted a joint-family system of property and adopted a revised Dayabhaga law (absolute right to individual property) after making it compatible along the lines of gender equality, allowing women to inherit regardless of their marital status
2. The abolition of birthright to property and polygamy
3. The daughter's share, as equal to the son, was stipulated in her father's and her husband's property

4. An absolute equality between son and daughter, declaring that “son also would get a share as equal to girl’s share in mother’s property, (even in Stridhana)
5. Partial estate (the ‘not for sale’ limited estate which the woman could only enjoy in her lifetime) was revised into an absolute estate that a woman could do with as she pleased
6. Abolition of caste considerations in marriages and adoption
7. Marriages were given conjugal rights and recognized as either civil or non-civil, permitting divorce
8. The position of widows was bolstered, disallowing an adopted son or step-son to dispossess the mother from her property

Another vital section of Ambedkar’s Draft negatively defined who would be called Hindu, i.e., it stipulated that the Bill, once it became law, would be applicable to anyone who was not a Muslim, Christian, Jew or Parsi.

As always, Ambedkar’s provisions invited nationwide orthodox uproars. Conservatives claimed that the Bill was a severe impediment to their religious freedom. Contrastingly, Rege (2013) points out Ambedkar’s ingenious, unquestionable route in framing the clauses, citing the shastras and smritis for various cases like divorce and entitlement and blaming Brahmanic customs for destroying the efficacy of such texts. Due to such a drastic departure from Hindu orthodoxy, the Bill was withdrawn multiple times owing to the rough antagonistic sentiments of Hindu Orthodoxy, quite notably by the Hindu Mahasabha and Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

The bills were propelled to be amended and diluted, and after continuous yields in the Parliament, Ambedkar’s relinquishment made him resign from the Cabinet in September 1951. In Babasaheb’s words, the Hindu Code Bill died an ‘Unwept and Unsung Death’. It is repeatedly said that some orthodox opponents openly expressed that as long as Dr Ambedkar was ushering the Bill, they would not authorize it to pass. Post Babasaheb’s resignation, the deferred Bill was legislated; however, in a watered-down version with four detached acts, viz. the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, The Hindu Succession Act of

1956, The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956, and The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956.

A cardinal personality in Indian feminism, Dr B R Ambedkar, passed away in 1956. His efforts, contributions, and reforms epitomize the strengths of intersectional solidarity. Today, Article 15(3) of the Constitution phrases, “Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children”; the journey to have advanced to this juncture in Indian feminist history is a faithful nod to the robust efforts of the revolutionary pioneer and advocate of women’s rights, the honorable Dr B R Ambedkar. Today, Ambedkar is remembered by countless phrases, but what better way to re-memorialize him than through Savita Ambedkar’s words:

“The prime sculptor of the Constitution of free India, the first law minister of the Republic of India, the Booker T. Washington of India, the Bodhisattva who initiated the dhammachakra of Buddhism, the great espouser of human freedom, the warrior who fought for the dignity of man, a modern Manu, one among the five greatest intellectuals of the world, eminent savant of law, the liberator of India’s destitute, the monarch of the downtrodden, the great humanitarian of the world, the defender of democracy, the skilled parliamentarian and great constitutionalist, a gem in Nehru’s council of ministers, a revolutionary messiah, a social reformer, a Bharat Ratna, the pride of the world—the moment any of these glorifying terms comes to mind, there’s just one image that flashes in the mind’s eye: that of Dr Babasaheb alias Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.”

(excerpt from Savita Ambedkar’s autobiography, Babasaheb: My Life with Dr Ambedkar, translated into English by Nadeem Khan, 2022)

Chapter 3

Periyar and Periyar Feminist Thought

3.1 Background

Erode Venkata Naicker Ramasamy was born into a strongly religious family on the 17th of September, 1879, in Erode, Tamil Nadu. His family arranged his marriage with the 13-year-old Nagammal in 1898. He spent much of his youth learning from social reformers and scholars like Ayothidaas, Pulavar Marudhaiya Pillai, and the sage Kaivalyam. Facing reprimanding circumstances within his family, he often left home as a means of coping, the consequences of which aided him in building an independent, dissenting, and rationalist outlook towards life and society. His well-known pilgrimage to Kaasi transformed and radicalized much of his views on the ways Brahmanism mercilessly subjugated anyone but Brahmin men.

As an avid progressive thinker, he soon renounced his caste surname and began oppugning all religious ramifications. Ramasamy engaged in relentless social service, the freedom movement, and the fight against untouchability. In 1918, he presided as the chairman of the Erode Municipality and the Honorary Magistrate of the British Government. (Veeramani, 2005). Ramasamy was profoundly interested in the nationalist movement; initially inspired by Gandhi, he presided over the Tamil Nadu Congress in 1923 and began politicizing the problem of untouchability. He also openly declared that he would not think twice before burning the Manusmriti or Ramayana, for it eternalized hatred and disgust for the Dravidians (Veeramani, 2005, p.15). As an important figure in colonial politics, he advocated for women's rights, education rights, employment, temple entry rights, and societal reformations. Ramasamy ushered the Vaikom Satyagraha into a mass movement in 1924; Vaikom, in present-day Kerala, had stringent decrees of untouchability in and around temples; the Untouchables were not even permitted into the close lanes around the temple, let alone inside it. The Vaikom

Satyagraha also evolved to be a tremendous motivational boost for the Mahad Satyagraha led by Dr Ambedkar.

Ramasamy's efforts to publish his Tamil weekly Kudi Arasu, his decisiveness in demanding resolution, and his resignation from the Brahmin-dominated Congress all happened in 1925, following which he founded one of the most important movements in Dalit history, the Self-Respect Movement. Ramasamy was named 'Periyar' or 'the Great one' for the significant happenings of the Self-Respect Movement. The following table briefly summarizes some important events (Veeramani, 2005):

Year	**Events**
1916	● Justice Party was formed, it held numerous non-Brahmin Conferences in the Madras Presidency
1918	● Ramasamy became the chairman of Erode municipality
1919	● He joined Congress, and actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement
1922	● He presides over the Tamil Nadu Congress ● He extends his support to the Justice Party for their social justice efforts
1922-1924	● Vaikom Satyagraha is led by Ramasamy ● Ramasamy realizes the extent of Brahmin domination within Congress
1925	● Ramasamy resigned from Congress ● He immediately held a Non-Brahmin Conference where he elaborated on the racial contrasts between Aryans and Dravidians and the need for Dravidians to evoke feelings of Self-Respect. ● The Self-Respect Movement begins under the baton of S

	Ramanathan, who soon invited Ramasamy to lead the movement ● Ramasamy starts the Tamil Weekly, *Kudi Arasu (A Republic)*
1926-32	● Ramasamy met with Gadhi and underlined the detriments of a Brahmanized Congress, the Hindu caste order, and the Brahmin dominance as even more critical for India's freedom than the independence from the British ● He published and English magazine named *Revolt* ● First Provincial Self-Respect Conference ● The concept of Self-Respect Marriage was defined, announced, and politicized ● Ramasamy visited Malay, Singapore, and Europe ● He published a book on Birth Control and Family Planning ● Periyar addressed Women's Conferences at the Second Provincial Self-Respect Conference ● Support for the abolition of the Devadasi system ● Ramasamy addressed a massive crowd in Britain at the labourer's public meeting where he articulated his views on Rationalism and Socialism. ● The Erode Plan of Socialism was underway after his return to Erode
1933-47	● Nagammal passed away in 1933 ● *Kudi Arasu* was banned by the British ● Ramasamy started another another Tamil weekly on rationalism called *Paguthariv*u ● Anti-Hindi agitation began to gain momentum ● A Tamil Daily, *Viduthalai,* was published by Ramsamy ● Ramsamy proposed the separation of Tamil Nadu as a separate sovereign state (Tamil Nadu for Tamils)

	● Ramasamy published *The World to Come* ● Ramasamy presided over the Justice Party ● He was assigned the title '*Periyar*' in the Tamil Nadu Women's Conference of 1938 ● Periyar met with Dr Babsaheb Ambedkar ● He published an anthology named *Why were women enslaved?* ● The Justice Party was renamed/transformed to Dravidar Kazhagam, members were called 'Blackshirts' ● Periyar warned that the Independence of India was mournful for Tamil Nadu given how Independence from Brahmanism was still a dream
1948–60	● Anti-Hindi agitations were directed by Periyar, women led agitations in huge numbers ● Periyar married Maniammai in 1949 ● Periyar opposed Brahaminized education schemes ● Periyar Summoned a conference on Buddhism in Erode ● He toured Malaysia with his wife to attend the World Buddhist Conference ● Veeramani notes (2005, p.31), "Periyar did not prefer conversion so that he could sustain the right to condemn the evils of Hindu religion" ● Periyar was arrested for publicly setting pictures of Rama aflame in 1955 ● Periyar met Vinoba Bhave in 1957 ● 10,000 people in Tamil Nadu burned casteist excerpts from the articles of the Constitution ● Periyar met Ram Manohar Lohia in 1958 ● Periyar burnt the map of India excluding Tamil Nadu
1967-78	● Epics were burned in Tamil Nadu in a dissenting move to

	protest against the inhumane depiction of Dravidians ● Periyar started *Unmai,* a Tamil bi-monthly ● UNESCO glorified Periyar in 1970, he was revered as "Periyar the prophet of New Age, Socrates of South Asia, Father of Social Reform Movement, and Arch enemy of ignorance, superstitions, meaningless customs, and baseless manners" (Veeramani, 2005, p.36) ● Periyar inaugurated the Rationalist Forum ● Periyar demanded a legislation that allowed and enables people of all castes to be priests ● He started the *Modern Rationalist,* an English monthly ● In 1973, Periyar delivered his last speech

It is important to note that before the Self-Respect Movement, the Justice Party's Non-Brahmin manifesto of the early 20th century invited severe reactions by Brahmins and even self-respecting Non-Brahmins, who accounted it for bringing national disintegration, disharmony, and friction, and hence unworthy of political consideration, especially with the Home-Rule movement gaining stimuli. The Brahmin of the early 20th century, seen by most as progressive and evocative, was not ready to imagine a non-brahmin congregation functioning as a single homogenous body. The Hindu and the TOI endorsed such political thought (Geetha, Rajadurai, 1998). Geetha and Rajadurai (1998) situate this hostile reception in the outrage that once took the commonweal hegemony for granted in the 19th century; this outrage evolved into the people's voice in the 20th century, and subscribing to Brahmanic ideas, they were now ready to reclaim India as manifested in the Home-Rule. The psychological tribulations in developing an anti-Brahmin sentiment, for leaders like Annie Besant, among many others, made it transparent that Brahmin participation in public life was necessary and noted the cultural worth of Brahmanism, among which was also developing the non-Brahmin dissent. This detachment articulated the non-Aryan version of history. In the purview of social reform, the authors spotlight the Woman's question and the situation of the Adi-Dravida in the light of extreme patriarchal Brahmanic orthodoxy. The Justice Party, over the course of the time, began including a separatist campaign

soliciting a sovereign state for the Tamil people. In this context, the regional distinction also becomes crucial. As a hegemonic location, the Hindi-Hindu-North also drove the demand for a non-Brahmanic Dravida Nadu. The Brahmins, who were conscious of the hegemony of the caste system, could not endure renouncing what they believed to be the essential codes of their faith. The dilemma of one-ness for Indians as a practical nation balancing casteism on the one hand and home rule on the other in the 20th century took centerpiece (Geetha, Rajadurai, 1998).

Geetha and Rajadurai (1998) have comprehensively recorded the non-brahmin awakening starting with the foundation of the Justice Party. The primary goal of this awakening was to resist Brahmin appropriation. They say that the time had come for non-brahmins to claim whatever was due to them by right, for the right to social righteousness, which they so eagerly desired and to which they were entitled because of their stake and numerical strength. They consciously document the utterances of non-Brahmin reformers of the Justice Party at the Bikkavole Conference. They underline the necessity to eschew caste rigidities in the Hindu chaos while timelining the Party's actions and legislative proposals and the areas out of their reach and influence due to various Brahminical attractions. Also, the fraternity's symbolic significance in the Justice Party was more significant than its political viability. Later sections of the chapter focus on the Party's concerns with bland primary education, anglicized literature, the need for technical education, and the existing non-comprehensive education model that demanded transformations. The resolutions passed focused on the plight of the backward classes, adi dravidas, the producing classes, women's suffrage, vernacular education, reservations, and the overall materiality of the nation; the Justice Party played an essential role in removing the restrictions that took away women's voting rights in colonial India. However, Geetha and Rajadurai (1998) also inform the reader of the limitations of the Justice Party, for instance, in finance. Geetha and Rajadurai locate the Party's new politics in their resolutions for numerical equity, reservations, their case of non-desire for Home-Rule, and their call for an extension of British rule. Parallely, in 1922, when Periyar was elected the President of the Madras Presidency Congress Committee, he strongly endorsed reservation in government employment and education. He also supported the Justice Party's cause for anti-untouchability and

reservation policies. His endeavors in Congress were subsequently defeated in the Congress party due to the small-mindedness and indifference of Brahmins within the Party, leading him to leave the Party in 1925, following which he led the Self-Respect Movement, founded first by S Ramanathan.

With the radical weeklies Kudi Arasu in Tamil and Revolt in English, Periyar amplified his ideas of self-respect. In the words of Miss Gnanam, "The Self-Respect movement stands for the social regeneration of the masses and the classes. It stands for the creation of an ideal society built upon the bedrock of equality and fraternity in all the spheres of life. It aims at complete equality between man and man as well as man and woman. Religion as a power to meddle with and shape society is completely ignored. The Self-respect movement is nothing if it does not stand for complete secularization of life. "Religion is the opium of life". This is the guiding principle that shall shape the destinies of the Self-Respect movement" (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018, p.109). Women's rights became an essential facet of Self-Respect, as will be highlighted in the coming sections.

With the Brahmin/non-Brahmin divide weakening the Justice Party and losing mass support, Periyar took over the Party's oversight. Periyar set out to call out the internal flaws within the Justice Party. He vehemently criticized the Justice Party for inadequately addressing the woman’s question, for example, its failure over the years to not implement the Child Marriage Restraint Act. Consequently, he led a paradigmatic transformation of the Justice Party under his presidency. With the Justice Party, Periyar expanded its scope to more rigorous anti-Hindi agitations, mobilizing student masses, and a clearer articulation of the woman’s question. Moreover, Periyar inculcated his ideas of self-respect, as seen in Revolt, into the functioning of the Party. The Justice Party was the immediate bureaucratic alternative to the Indian National Congress in Madras. However, it never recovered after losing to Congress in the 1937 elections, following which the Party, in 1938, came under the oversight of Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement. By 1944, Periyar re-casted the Justice Party into a social league called the Dravidar Kazhagam and thereupon exited it from electoral politics. Those who conflicted began a splinter party, asserting to be the unblemished Justice

Party. The primary purpose of the Dravida Kazhagam was to book the complete independence of a Dravidian Republic. This Party, at its genesis, maintained equivalent values to the Justice Party along with the added objectives of Self-Respect. Of paramount importance to this thesis are the contributions of the Self-Respect Movement and the Dravida Kazhagam in addressing the Women's Question in the 20th century. The following sections will address the same in detail, starting with the feminist literature developed under Periyar, followed by examining, in detail, the principles of Periyar's Self-Respect Movement using a feminist lens.

3.2 Periyar Feminist Thought

3.2.1. Periyar Feminist Literature

Periyar's 1942 Why Were Women Enslaved? is undoubtedly one of the most comprehensively documented feminist works that can be viewed as his anti-caste feminist manifesto. Periyar traces several crucial topics explaining why women are at the brim of patriarchal slavery. He divides his work into chapters on chastity, love, the right to divorce, remarriage, prostitution, widowhood, property rights, birth control, and masculinity (Ramasamy, 2007). What makes his observations pertinent is the ways in which he links women's subordination as arising from brahmanism. These pieces are taken from the Tamil weekly, Kudi Arasu and compiled as an anthology. This section will touch upon these chapters briefly.

On chastity, Periyar formulates how the etymology of the word chastity has no gendered connotations, but in the Sanskrit language, it has been heavily portrayed as pativrata. Gendering chastity directly implies the slavery of the group it is associated with, and because pativrata literally means 'vows for the husband', this slavery is religiously institutionalized. Periyar also talks against the purdah system that annuls women's freedom to a large extent. Very relevant to those times, Periyar says (Ramasamy, 2007, p.4), *"Just as people who are termed lower caste due to centuries-old tradition accept*

that they are low and rush to bend, hide or make way, likewise, even women think that they are the property of men, meant to be under the control of men and that they should not become the object of men's anger. Therefore, they are not concerned about their own freedom. If women really want freedom, the concept of chastity that deals a different justice to each sex must be destroyed and an equal, self-governing concept of chastity for both the sexes must come into place." He stresses how differing justice systems that arise when histories and narratives are written from a male perspective manifest the most abominable societal conditions.

As one of the greatest free thinkers of the 20th century, Periyar also debunks how love can enslave women. The chapter 'love' in Why Were Women Enslaved has been authored by Periyar to reveal the false conceptions concerning conditional love. He is strictly against narratives that say that love originates because of a divine strength; that it is endless and perpetual; and that if love ensues once, it never alters based on any rationale whatsoever. He says that love is a desire that appears and disappears based on the fulfillment, interest, and solidity of those who expect it (Ramasamy, 2007). Because the notion and the materialization of love in society remains so tainted, women are bound to be enslaved in the 'love' they aspire to be in. Furthermore, the notion of love becomes and continues to be an alien concept in the endogamous structure of marriage. Extending these arguments, Periyar underlines how a supposed marriage based on love and affection enslaves women, revealing the ghastly transactional nature of its conception. He adds, "Any impartial, unprejudiced person will accept that not only the women in our country, but all over the world are made to suffer unnatural cruelty and compulsions in the matter of marriage." Periyar strictly calls for the right to divorce and annulment of marriages in Indian society. He is also in utter shock, observing how rare rationality is among men who do not support issues like divorce. He exemplifies the effects of such restriction through rampant murders of women in that period on the grounds of suspicion and adultery.

Periyar sees the institution of marriage as modern-day slavery and as a site of oppression for women. Ramasamy also debunks the ritual purity and sanctity often associated with marriages in Indian culture. His pedagogy on this topic remains

immortal. Conclusively, he says (Ramasamy, 2005, p.25), “one shouldn’t think, “somehow we have got married, whatever happens, we should bear it” and continue to experience sadness and dissatisfaction and force others to undergo the same. Because, doing so is nothing but a way of life devoid of human nature and self-respect and never an act of intelligence.” Periyar also criticizes the practice of anathematizing a person’s second marriage on the foundation that matrimony takes place only for the amenity and pleasure of both partners, i.e. he firmly believes that remarriages are not evil or immoral.

In the chapter ‘Prostitution’, he underscores how the offense of prostitution is foisted only on women and that worldwide, it holds no pertinence to men because of which they coddle in it freely. He exclaims, “only women have been made outcaste; chased out of their homes; beaten, scolded and tortured; and sometimes even murdered on the charge of prostitution--we have never seen or heard of men being treated in this manner. Apart from this, we also see a few instances where prostitution adds self-importance and fame to men. We hear a few men talking proudly about it” (Ramasamy, 2005, p.25). Interestingly he also points out how men find it belittling to be called the son of a prostitute; while comparing the male anger, if a man were called the son of a male prostitute (Kandamany, 2005, p.25), the offense taken is practically none. Periyar also points out the inherent flaws in using prostitution in the general sense of having multiple sex partners because definitions change contextually in Indian social orders. For example, he elaborates how in some communities, it is not considered prostitution if the woman has sex with the husband’s brothers or the father (Kandamany, 2005, p.37). Therefore, he concludes that prostitution and its underlying tenets cannot be tolerated because it enslaves women, lacks general applicability, and is inapplicable to men. He clamors, “If prostitution is going to be an obstacle to the efforts undertaken for women’s freedom and women’s liberation, it is the duty of the truly persevering persons to daringly cast it away and move forward” (Ramasamy, 2005, p.40).

Another critical issue he addresses is the plight of the widows. Periyar breaks down the hypocrisy in patriarchal societies and addresses the regressive assertions of enforcing widowhood for women and, as in the case of prostitution, adopting a general ignorance

of applicability to men. He calls this a form of 'social suicide' (Ramasamy, 2007, p.42). He compares the system of sati to enforced widowhood and says, "the custom that prohibits widows from remarriage is crueler than the sati system. Becoming a sati is one day's sorrow; whereas living as a widow is a lifetime's unbearable sorrow similar to torture" (Ramasamy, 2007, p.42). All of Periyar's arguments stem from a fundamental rationalistic point of view; they carry a touch of innocence, almost like a child questioning the morality of subjects. Interestingly, he also narrates an incident from his life involving his niece. Periyar's niece was only ten when she lost her thirteen-year husband to diarrhea.

On hearing the information, the niece came rushing to Periyar and blurted loudly about her life falling apart. A massive gathering of people gathered for the funeral, saw the child and Periyar and started wailing. Periyar said, "But when I lifted that girl up, I resolved that I would get her married again" (Ramasamy, 2007, p.44). A year after that niece attained puberty, Periyar and his brother-in-law started trying to arrange her marriage. When the information reached his family, they considered it a significant danger to their community, became very worried and almost frightened a few bridegrooms Periyar that his brother-in-law selected. Finally, Periyar's brother-in-law persuaded his second wife's brother to marry her. Periyar ensured that the couple was carried to Chidambaram without anybody's notice (the bridegroom abode the Chennai route, and the girl through the Tiruchi route), and their betrothal was executed in the temple (Ramasamy, 2007, p.44). Periyar notes that the 1921 census saw a total of 11,892 widows under the age of five (p.48). In a heartfelt excerpt (Ramasamy, 2007, p.46), he writes:

"When men just think of giving freedom to women, they consider themselves to be doing a major sinful act that should never be done. Does this not mean that one half of humanity lacks freedom right from birth? Women (who are equal in number to men) are enslaved and made to suffer without freedom for the simple reason that men are physically a little stronger than women. This doctrine applies everywhere; that is why the strong enslave the weak. If the doctrine of slavery has to be abolished in human society, it is essential to destroy male arrogance and cruelty that is responsible for

treating women as slaves. Only then the tender sprouts of equality and freedom will bud forth. The first step towards this should be the creation of the right of remarriage for widows."

Next, Periyar notes that one of the most critical factors causing the enslavement of women is their lack of rights to own property. Rhetorically, he scours out why women were considered incapable of owning property. He also asserts that property rights entail an essential facet of independence for a person, and the lack of credentials for such rights is nothing but enforced slavery. The chapter "Birth Control" displays Periyar's thought that pregnancy and child-bearing become binding sites of oppression for women. He also asserts that women will never profit due to men's efforts for women's welfare, and thus, women should entirely forsake the idea that God concocted them for their pativrata; instead, they should regard themselves as equal to men, not nether to men in any form, and they should begin waging their own independent struggle. Periyar also points out how pregnancy is the hindrance that dissuades women from completing the female varieties of *brahmacharini* and *sankarachari*, like the types that exist for men. Consequently, women cannot apprehend such honored places where they can live with sovereignty, possess loads of money, and be glorified and worshiped by several men and women. Periyar also urges that "the campaign for birth control is more important than the campaign against liquor and the campaign against communicable diseases." Therefore, he adds, "An institution for birth control has to be established in our country. Through that institution, not only should pamphlets, magazines and books be published, but rare books in English and other languages related to birth control should be translated into Tamil and published. Moreover, propaganda should be done through drama, cinema, etc. on the benefits and independence for our nation and for women arising out of birth control" (Ramasamy, 2007, p.60). Periyar, time and again, radically reasserts that most men do not possess the experience, the history, and the understanding of women's issues and, therefore, it would be counterproductive for them to lead a women's liberation movement. Furthermore, he says that men are so obsessed with preserving anything masculine that their neglect of women's concerns is inherent. Periyar formulates how the term

masculinity is used demeaningly against women. He locates the true liberation of women in the destruction of masculinity. He says,

"Women should remember that as long as 'masculinity exists in the world, 'femininity' wouldn't be respected. As long as 'masculinity exists in the world, the enslavement of women will keep increasing. Unless women destroy the concept of 'masculinity', it is certain that they will not attain liberation. Women have been made into slaves because of 'masculinity. All over the world, the words freedom and bravery have been made the property of 'masculinity" (Ramasamy, 2007, p.62).

Periyar's profound and unremitting interest and commitment to annihilating caste, advocacy for women's rights, and antagonism to obscurantist faith outline his footings for starting an English weekly called Revolt. Periyar remarked that he hoped the ideals of the Self-respect movement would be known to people beyond Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, he also desired an English platform to gainsay Brahmanical views (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018). Geetha and Rajadurai (2018) remark, *"This tradition of criticizing religion in public and suggesting a recognizably atheistic and rationalist worldview was returned to history in the 1920s, with the founding of the Self-Respect movement...Such a lens was also taken to the women's question, and this led to the making of an extraordinarily rich feminist point of view, which baffles us even today, by its fearlessness and commitment to equality in both sexual and social relationships."* Revolt was 'agitational and pedagogic' and allocated to constructing a 'new commonsense.' It bore articles on contemporary politics and social reform and operated regular columns on science, Brahmanism, religion, and atheism (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018). Periyar edited the initial issues of Revolt with the assistance of S. Ramanathan. Considerable contributors to the newspaper used aliases. Aliases like Kirk (mad person) published some vibrant and influential articles. On some occasions, even Dr Ambedkar supplemented the weekly columns with his writings. This section will briefly contextualize the women's question in Revolt.

The 1929 (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018) article, "Malaviya's Last Trump Card" by the alias Kirk, criticizes the deep-rooted Brahmanism in Madan Mohan Malaviya's politics

concerning his negligence of uprooting the caste system instead only preaching for anti-untouchability laws. Kirk writes how the Self-Respect Movement deeply abhorred Malaviyaji's religio-nationalism in his advocacy for Hindi as the common language. Kirk also documents how Mr Gandhi opines that a bulk of the Hindu Folk must have their theology deciphered through Hindi. He adds, "The Ramayana of Tulsidas is the only book in Hindi that can interpret Hinduism to the masses." In vehement critique, he exclaims how in some '*choupayies*', Tulsidas hollers, "Drums, beasts, shudras, women, all these are entitled to be treated with the rod" (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018, pp.94-95). In Duties of a Revolutionary, Periyar stresses that the social reforms should focus on the relationship between men and women and the kind of slavery that institutionalizes modern-day slavery for women. Periyar also writes, "the abolition of untouchability and emancipation of women will be impossible until we rid people's minds of the notion that there are special virtues attached to birth" (p.124). He re-addresses the feminist issues discussed in "Why Were Women Enslaved?", but in the pages of Revolt, he draws a more extensive critique of religion occupying the centerpiece of oppressive regimes. This issue also echoes in Srimati G. Sumati Bai's article Revolt and Progress, where she writes how religion accords women as 'preordained unfortunates' who are subjugated in their personal and political positions. In The Tyranny of Custom, alias Ritus underlines how Hindu women do not eat with their husbands, how they think it is debauchery to cite their husbands' names and regard it offensive to converse with them in the presence of others. "The idea of husband worship is centuries old. Every ceremonial occasion at home, in the temple or elsewhere needs the presence of the thread-wearing priest who is relentless in the collection of his tax", they add (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018, p.289). Mr Bhagat Ram, in "Kindness to Animals in India", questions the foundations of a society that houses the sins of sati, female infanticide, dowry, child marriage, untouchability, and religious prostitution, in the same breath, preaches kindness for animals. The commodification of women is underlined in Agasthya's The Follies of Faith and Belief, they write:

"Whereas Hindus celebrate the sanctity of the gods by providing them with wives, mistresses, alcoholic drinks and animal sacrifices,

Whereas abductions of women and adultery on the part of the gods are not only condoned but held up as praiseworthy conduct and advertised during festivals" (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018, p.302)

P. Chidambaram Pillai interestingly points out, in "*The Right to Temple Entry*", how over the course of history, altars, temples, and idol worship became a reality at the injunction of non-Brahmins, because these modes of prayer originally schemed for the multitudes, including denizens, locals, and aborigines. Furthermore, he argues that the old monarchs fostered temple worship, for it was a worthwhile source of income; with time, temple worship was made more appealing with the introduction of dance and music. Pillai notes, "With the establishment of images and temples, dedications of land for their maintenance became necessary. Not only were lands dedicated but slave women were also attached to many ancient temples showing the spirit which led to images worship in India. Every temple even now is supposed to have its dancing hall or Nata Mandir" (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018, pp.391-392). In older days, as Pillai notes, the age-old temples were established by the monarchs to gladden the public and as a ground for revenue collection; these establishments were subsequently pivoted into disbursing amusement locations by having young girls dancing to music. However, they were also made exemplary and respectable by maintaining a few Brahmins as worshippers. Pillai cites Abbe Dubois's observations, who says, "It appears that at first they (the courtesans and dancing girls, called devadasis) were reserved exclusively for the enjoyment of the Brahmins" (p.334). He also remarks how every respectable temple held in its benefits a crew of eight to twelve, and sometimes even more devadasis whose authorized duties comprised of dancing and singing day and night at ceremonial and non-ceremonial occasions. Furthermore, the future of most of the devadasis was prostitution, as he notes.

A large section of Revolt focuses on Indian women and their deplorable state. Authors like T. S. Kunjitham compare the state of Indian women to the West, thus drawing a lamenting picture of the Indian woman restricted to indoor activities, striving hard to be as dutiful as possible. She also notes Gandhi's message to women to defy all evil customs with all their strength (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2007, p.414). Kunjitham enunciates,

“A cooly woman who carries a basket on her head earns from six to eight annas a day; a Hindu lady who carries souls for nine months each time for the service of the State gets only what the husband’s caprice allows and when he dies, the widow’s humiliation is her pension”, thus articulating the several issues the Indian woman under the code of Brahmanism goes through, while the cooly woman is treated second-class, the upper-caste woman is treated as a first-class enslaved person bound to serve her family (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2007, p.415). K. M. Balan extends Kunjitham’s essay in her piece, Woes of Indian Womanhood, with a broader lens observing the different propensities of Indian womanhood and finding resolutions in divorce, remarriage, and annihilation of ancient laws.

Revolt also documented Self-Respect Marriages from the movement in more upbeat writings. For example, it recorded that the inter-caste matrimony between Mr S. Guruswami and T. S. Kunjitham was conducted entirely under self-respect strategies, in the presence of a Murlidar, with neither the usual rituals nor the intermediaries. The magazine also addresses more philosophical issues within the frame of marriage, like sexual incompatibility, unhappiness, economic dependence, and trial marriages that the Hindu crowd shies away from answering in the name of preserving the sanctity of their culture, making it highly radical for its time. For the two years Revolt was active, it also documented the happenings and speeches at various Conferences examining the resolutions for women’s rights. Periyar writes on the resolution moved by Mr Pandit Krishna Prasad in the U. P. Social Conference for the Dissolution of Hindu Marriage, who instanced claims of rare contractual marriage from the Vedas. Furthermore, Manu’s quotations, which contemplated five grounds under which a wife can remarry during the husband’s lifetime, were also submitted by Mr Prasad, as Periyar notes (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018, p.435). On the plight of widows, Miss Indrani’s heartfelt essay in Revolt calls for absolute equality between the widow and the widower. She says,

“A tali will have to be tied round the neck of the man as well and removed when he loses his spouse. If the widow is to have her hair shorn off, so must the widower. A white cloth, for both. Meeting a widower brings as much ill-luck as meeting a widow. If it is “Moonadai” (derogatory term for widow – editors); it is “Moondan” (a neologism for

widower – editors). If it is no amusements, no ornaments for the widows, similarly for the widower. If Sati is to be performed by the widow, the widower also must be getting ready.The very presence of the widower is an ill- omen. All by legislative enactment – the preamble to which will be: "What is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose" " (Geetha, Rajadurai, 2018, p.449).

Kirk's envisioned dialogue on marriage in The Marriage Tragedy, where the wife refuses wedlock and the security it proposes exclusively because she views the relationship as intrinsically limiting, is an extension of Periyar's views on marriage and its ill effects. Nonetheless, as much as Revolt condemns ritualistic sacramental marriages, it also documents, as stated earlier, marriages of a specific kind, including widow remarriages. Miss Gnanam reasons her issue for inter-caste and inter-religious marriage as subjects of a woman's independent choice; divorce as not merely a legal possibility but also a social choice becomes a recurring and resonant theme in Gnanam's The Marriage Problem – A Dialogue. Geetha and Rajadurai (2018, p.408) say, "Of the writings on widowhood, the most interesting is a sentimental short story on a widow's right to desire, and here we have a coming together of a Brahmin widow and a non-brahmin reformist young man." Mr Kritivas wrote the piece in question, naming it Widow's Paradise Regained (p.453). In contrast to Periyar's, Why Were Women Enslaved, writers of birth control in Revolt see the issue of birth control in light of increasing poverty and subverting healthcare systems and not necessarily from the lens of feminist politics. The rest of Revolt addresses the issues and debates centering the age of consent, child marriage restraint bills, prostitution, the need for marriage legislation, orthodoxy, the devadasi abolition bill, dowry, and educating, organizing, and mobilizing women against patriarchal models. It is interesting to note how most male writers in Revolt were so supportive of women's issues, and yet, they chose not to speak for the women but with them.

3.2.2. Feminism in the *Suyamariathai Iyakkam*

S Anandhi (1991) notes how Periyar's views took a more overgrown form with the foundation of the *Suyamariathai Iyakkam (Self-Respect Movement)*. She notes how

Periyar gradually lost devotion to the idea of social reform and instead invoked a complete 'radical reconstructive work which would destroy the traditional structures' (Anandhi, 1991, p.25). Much evident from 1924 onwards, Periyar stridently started enunciating his refreshed ideas on religion, caste hierarchy, and patriarchy. With the Self-Respect Movement, he wanted to create an ambience that clobbered the fundamental pillars of patriarchy instead of taking up time-honored themes of women's emancipation like widow remarriage, education, and divorce. Anandhi notes (1991, p.27), "Periyar's trenchant criticism of Hinduism was influenced by its role in legitimizing patriarchy. While addressing a women audience, he reminded them that the *varnashrama* dharma and Hindu religion had treated them only as *dasis* (prostitutes)." He examined the quality of education inculcated in women, claiming that the current system only enforced a more nuanced form of patriarchal code where the so-called educated woman only learned how to be a good wife, mother, daughter, and sister. With Self-Respect, Periyar posed the Woman's question on a more existential level. This Movement emphasized Self-Respect at the religious, cultural, social, economic, and political levels, disseminating a reasonable understanding of political education, doing away with unnecessary customs, eradicating untouchability, senseless ceremonies and superstitious faiths in society, and giving equal rights to women (Vijaya, 1993).

Three key feminist themes resonate within the Self-Respect Movement: Marriage, Family, and Property (Anandhi, 1991, p.25). The Self-Respect Movement resisted all ritualistic traditions associated with marriages: tying tali around the bride's neck (an indication of women's subjugation to men). Furthermore, Periyar also opposed arranged marriages and advocated that all men and women should prefer partners of their own free will.

The Self-Respect Movement was significant in challenging the customary Hindu marriages and oriented radical changes in them with the introduction of Self-Respect marriages. Self-Respect marriages were executed from 1928 among a myriad of non-Brahmin castes. Spreading up to remote villages, the events were regularly reported in the mouthpiece of the Movement, Kudi Arasu. The marriages included marriages of consent, widow-remarriages, widower-widow remarriages, and inter-caste

marriages. The prominent purpose of self-respecting marriages was to liberate the institution of marriage from Hindu rituals, which emphasized monogamous familial criteria, abstinence, and chastity for women. Anandhi (1991, p.28) writes, *"Accordingly, these marriages were conducted without Brahmin priests and recitation of religious texts. More significantly they did away with the tying of the tali. In keeping with the rationalistic content of the Self Respect Movement, often they were arranged in times which were treated inauspicious by the Hindu calendar (Rahu Kalam). Some of the marriages took place at midnight, which is generally considered to be inauspicious time these challenged and subverted the religious aura that entrapped the institution of marriage."*

Periyar's ideas turned into reality in these kinds of politicized marriages that also discoursed the woman's question to a distinguished extent. Anandhi (1991, p.28) notes how the self-respecting couples exchanged rings and took oaths that emphasized their comradeship, friendship and equality. They even called each other comrades and companions instead of 'husband' and 'wife'.

Interestingly, the audience in these wedding ceremonies were permitted, prompted, and encouraged to ask queries relating to wedlock, the nature of marriage, and the issue of women's emancipation. Anandhi notes (1991, p.29) how one of the participants requested Periyar to answer why the Movement allowed a second marriage; Periyar answered that marriages should not be considered eternal. Furthermore, he added that everyone should have an equal right to marry anyone of their own preference, even after the first marriage; divorce, however, should invariably be permitted. Women activists attended these marriages in large numbers and spoke along the themes of liberation and amelioration. Between 1929 and 1932, as Anandhi (1991, p.30) reports, about 8000 self-respect marriages across Tamil Nadu. While some marriages regarded women's liberation as their aim, others were more against Brahmin domination with 'Brahmin priests and Sanskritic scriptures.' It is important to note that Periyar's ultimate aim was to do away with the institution of marriage. Self-respecting marriages were the nearest utopia he could manifest. Anandhi (1991, p.30) exclaims how Periyar opposed calling every "anti-priest anti-ritual marriage as self respect marriage and said that with

time, one of the objectives of the movement should be to do away with marriages themselves."

The First Self-Respect Conference (1929) took place at Chenglepet. Moving orations were made by Nagammai, the first wife of Periyar, Moovalur Ramamirthammal, and S.R. Kannammal, Periyar's sister. The speeches and resolutions at this conference advocated for widow remarriage, divorce, the abolition of dowry, and women's right to inheritance and property (Vijaya, 1993, p.592). The Second Annual Conference in 1930 discussed the age of consent and inter-caste marriages. Vijaya (1993, p.592) notes women's active and vigorous roles like those of Nagammai, S.R. Kannammal, Moovalur Ramamirthammal, Neelavathy, Karaikudi Visalakshmi, Neelambigai Ammal and Dharumambal. The 1931 Annual Conference passed resolutions supporting widow marriage, the right to divorce, compulsory education for girls, and the abolition of the devadasi system. Moovalur Ramamirtham, a woman political activist of the Dravidian Movement, systematized a separate conference on the devadasis under Periyar's leadership, where more rigorous resolutions were passed. Much like Ambedkar's strategies, the Self-Respect Movement always housed an exclusive Women's Conference in addition to the General Conference. Anandhi (1991, p.31) remarks, "The fact that there was a separate conference of women did not come in the way of the general conference and the youth conference taking up women's issues...women were not 'ghettoized' within the Movement." Anandhi (1991, p.32) reminds the reader that in the 1938 Conference of Progressive Women's Association, Ramasamy was bestowed upon the honorary title 'Periyar (The Great One)' for his unprecedented activism to reconstruct South Indian Society.

Another significant women-led uprising and activism were seen in the Anti-Hindi imposition agitation starting in 1937 with the antagonism to the introduction of mandatory Hindi curriculum in the schools of the presidency by Congress. To protest against the binding imposition of Hindi in schools, Periyar addressed the Tamil Nadu Women's Conference in November 1938 under the presidency of Neelambigai Ammal. The outcome was so consequential that numerous women participated in the 1938 Anti-Hindi Agitation in the subsequent days, some to the point of detention and

imprisonment. Women swathed in sarees with prints of the Tamil flag chanted pro-Tamil watchwords and slogans became a spectacle for the Self-Respect Movement. Several women went to prison and organized farewells to see off their male comrades (Anandhi, 1991, p.32). “In total, 73 women were arrested and jailed for involvement in the anti-Hindi agitation. Significantly, several of them went to jail with their children; thirty two children accompanying their mothers to jail”, Anandhi (1991, p.33) remarks for the year 1939. Kudi Arasu meticulously reported these protests and agitations and disseminated transcripts of the arguments between women and police inspectors.

Vijaya (1993, p.593) notes that some preeminent women activists who played a significant role in this agitation were Poongothi, Arunmozhi, Alamelu Appadurai, Dharumambal, Moovalur Ramamirthammal, S.R.Kannammal, K.E.Veera Kalyani and K.V. Kamatchi. 1939, 1948, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1956, and 1965 saw more rigorous anti-Hindi agitations, 1965 being the most agitative. Annai Maniyammai entered the Self-Respect Movement in 1943 due to Periyar’s widespread influence and joined the agitations movements. These agitations did not stop the happening of Women’s Conferences. As Vijaya (1993) notes, in 1944, Maniyammai, at Erode, addressed the Women’s Welfare Association. The Self-Respect Movement also ushered the All-India Women’s Conference in Madras the same year. Anandhi (1991, p.31) says, “The success of these self-respect conferences in politicizing women can be summarized in the following words of Singaravelu Chettiar:

Women who have been confined to the kitchen are speaking today from public platforms; they are debating about public issues; they are involved in social work as equals of men: the credit for facilitating all these goes to Periyar.”

The Self-Respect Movement’s political wing Dravidar Munnerra Kazhagam (DMK), was formed in 1949. It was seminal in giving Tamil people the political and historical identity they deserved and constituted a fundamental facet of Tamil Renaissance. As Vijaya (1993, p.594) notes, the DMK extended to constitute the first Dravidian Party of Tamil Nadu since independence, laboring very hard for the cause of women’s liberation. Under C.N. Annadurai’s leadership, it gave seminal legal sanctions to Self-Respect

Marriages by amending the 1955 Hindu Marriage Act. Furthermore, it also passed the Women's Right to Property Act in 1989 (Vijaya, 1993, p.594). The achievements of the Self-Respect ideal would not have been possible without the bountiful representation of women in political parties, rallies, processions, protests, government jobs, and public conferences. In a nod to Periyar's radical legacy seen in the light of Indian feminism, Vijaya (1993, p.595) conclusively writes:

"With a view to synchronize the views of Periyar who fought for women's Liberation and for the upliftment of women in Society, Maniyammai requested the Self-Respecters to celebrate the death anniversary of Periyar as 'Mothers' Day' so as to infuse new blood to women for their enlightenment and not for celebrating the day in a sentimental way like orthodox people do."

Chapter 4

Queer Feminism in India

4.1 Background

The term feminism dates back to have been first used in 1871 in a French medical text to illustrate “a cessation in the development of the sexual organs and characteristics in male patients who are perceived as suffering from ‘feminization’ of their bodies” (Fraisse, 2002 cited in Pande, 2018). Feminism, as a word, was then reaped up by the Frenchman Alexander Dumas, an anti-Feminist writer, to ‘describe women who behaved in a supposedly masculine way’ (Pande, 2018). Ever since, the term has been popularly used in the 19th century Women’s Rights Movement and politicized in the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. Subsequently, it was adapted into literature in the writings of liberal feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Wollstonecraft, who canvassed the many mistreatments and injustices women faced in the West. Ideally, the women’s rights movement under the label feminism had no right to overlook queer identities within and outside the movement because the origins of the word imbibe an inherent essence of queerness. The term queer/queerness, usually defined in the pejorative sense of deviating from assumed normalcy, has today been re-owned and used as a positive trope to study and frame queerness and queer theory, and subsequently voice centuries of dampened and stigmatized oppression.

Most mainstream feminist movements in India and outside have traditionally eyed the binaries in society: man/woman, upper-caste/lower-caste, white/person of colour, and minority/majority, to name a few. These long-held prerogatives of mainstream feminisms have seldom addressed the queer discourse of differentiating existing differences to comprehend the plurality within patriarchy-subjugated subjects. Because the queer

movement in India is sensed as relatively new and with the evolving notions and methods of feminist praxes, mainstream Indian feminism ought to see the potential in situating the queer discourse within and as an integral part of the ongoing Indian feminist movement. Queer theory not only politicizes the body and the state but also de-stigmatizes the long-forbidden conversations that are often deemed too eccentric. Queer feminism is a departure from binary-modeled feminism as it entitles in its framework safe spaces for more identities, primarily along the lines of gender, sexuality, and disability. Queerness can thus be supplemented and imbibed inside mainstream feminisms to theorize gender, sexuality, race, caste, ability, psychology, sociology, and human rights within the existing intersectional framework adopted by most mainstream feminist movements. Rudy (2001) says, “Queer theory has challenged the largely phallocentric and androcentric way that pleasure is constructed in our culture by representing women as active sexually. It challenges the radical feminist predilection that nurture of children and the preserves of home and neighborhood are naturalized women’s activities.” In the grander scheme, queerness needs to be situated within feminisms and not as an extension.

Queer feminism in India has definitely lacked support and solidarity from mainstream and intersectional feminisms in India and continues to negotiate between existing movements of feminism in India. Much often alienated from traditional feminist viewpoints, queerness frequently becomes a topic that faces a high number of stigmas, appropriation, fetishization, and stereotyping in society. The norms of heterosexuality, binary genders, gender rigidity, and able-bodied politics form the majoritarian upper hand at the community, legislative, and judiciary levels. Furthermore, queer politics also risks asserting a male-dominated tendency; thus, the ideal for all feminisms situating queerness as a subject must scrutinize and de-gender’ gender.’

Suzanna Danuta Walters exclaims, *“In a culture in which male is the default gender, in which homosexual is all too often imaged as male, to see queer as somehow gender neutral is ludicrous and willfully naive. Feminism has taught us that the idea of gender neutrality is not only fictitious but a move of gender domination. I applaud queer theory’s expansion of the concept of difference but am concerned that, too often, gender is not complicated but merely ignored, dismissed or transcended”* (Rudy, 2001, p. 217).

Examples can be seen in a plethora of domains within existing queer politics — the male-dominated AIDS campaign, the casting of heterosexual cis-gendered actors in queer film and media, the inadequate representation of diverse queer identities in legislative bodies, and the patriarchal bogarting within rainbow capitalism and rainbow politics being some of them. Although these also form an essential facet of queer politics and queerness, the missing reciprocating factors and solidarity make it more complicated for queer feminism to assume an appropriate banner. While mainstream feminisms deal with male-centered politics, queer feminism tackles woman-centric feminism outside and male-centric tendencies within the queer community.

Queer feminism in India has focused primarily on transgender and same-sex rights, with a much less extensive history than traditional feminist movements in India. A brief history of some landmark events in queer feminism in India can be read in the table below. The list is not exhaustive but outlines a rough trajectory of how queer issues have been legally addressed in India.

Year	Event
1994	● AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan filed a lawsuit in Delhi High Court against Section 377, that criminalized homosexual activities between consenting adults
2001-2005	● Naz Foundation, an NGO, filed second a lawsuit in the Delhi High Court against Section 377 ● The High Court denied the consideration on grounds of no *locus standi* ● Naz foundation approached the Supreme Court of India which nullified the claims of the Delhi High Court based on no *locus standi,* and demanded the Delhi High Court to reconsider the case; it invited the opposition of several political parties

2006	• National AIDS Control Organization made a similar move against Section 377
2009	• The Delhi High Court delivered their judgment locating the offenses made by Section 377 on existing Articles of the Constitution, declaring it unconstitutional
2012	• Swati Bidhan Baruah, approached the Bombay High Court over her family denying her gender-affirmation surgery (GAS); the Bombay High Court declared that no rule of law in India prohibited GAS; moreover, adults need not need parental consent for GAS
2013	• The Apex Court overturned the 2009 decision declaring that courts cannot change laws and upheld the constitutionality of Section 377
2014	• Transgender people were constitutionally recognized as 'third gender' (i.e. the right to identify as male/female/transgender was constitutional) with proper affirmation of fundamental rights (NALSA Judgment) • The NALSA judgment did not insist on GAS for the legal recognition as transgender
2015	• West Bengal positioned a transgender welfare board to harmonize all policy decisions and development work for the trans community
2016	• Writ petitions were filed again in the Supreme Court • Free GAS were started in the government hospitals of Kerala (Wal, 2015) • The state of Odisha allowed "welfare benefits for transgender people, giving them the same concessions as those living below the poverty line." (Jatindra, 2016)

2017	● Tamil Nadu became the first state to initiate a transgender welfare board with transgender representatives (Divya, 2017) ● Transgender people were legally allowed to use public toilets and restrooms of their choice ● Pension plans for the trans community were enacted in Karnataka
2018	● A constitutional bench of five judges of the Supreme Court of India, in a milestone verdict, decriminalized consensual sex between adults, homosexuality and outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation
2019	● Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (TPA) ● The Act required mandated GAS for legal recognition ● Milder punishment for the sexual abuse of transwomen was noted as compared to the sexual abuse of cis-women through the TPA ● The Madras High Court expanded the definition of bride in the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 to include intersex and trans women, and transgender people who identified as female (Gupta, 2022)
2022	● Conversion therapy was banned by the National Medical Commission ● The Supreme Court recognized and expanded the definition and scope of family to single parenting, queer, cohabitation, and unmarried partnerships ● A private bill to legally recognize same-sex marriages under the Special Marriages Act was introduced (ENS, 2022)
2023	● The Centre opposed the legal recognition and validation of

	queer marriages ● A five-bench judge will make a decision on validating same-sex marriages in April

Despite the statutory measures, the private sensitization programmes, queer activism, and the unprecedented apologies that history owes to queer people, the Indian political scene still fosters queerphobia, transphobia, and homophobia to a considerable extent. Most queer people in India are first-hand sufferers of hate, bullying, stigma, and isolation. Dalit-trans women, non-binary individuals, intersex people, and every other queer individual are at high risk of facing physical and mental abuse in the domains of education, medicine, employment, and familial relations. Between 2014 and 2016, more than 4000 individuals were booked under the despotic Section 377. Although the Section has been read down, the stigma still prevails, as evident from the debates on same-sex marriages this year. Moreover, queer individuals face extreme difficulty finding and accessing queer-affirmative resources like therapy, doctors, housing, and employment. With the added variables of caste, class, religion, and ability, queer issues pose a more convoluted question of understanding both individuality and group identity. The visibly queer population of India, the urban educated, upper-class, upper caste, becomes the mouth and eye of the queer movement. This is not the only issue why queer politics is more difficult to articulate because queerness in India at this point must also be seen and comprehended within the existing picture of Hindu right-wing nationalism.

Oishik Sircar, in “A brief prehistory of queer freedom in the New India”, takes the case of a queer matrimonial advertisement that read as: ‘Seeking 25-40, Well-Placed, Animal-Loving, Vegetarian, GROOM for my SON (36, 5′ 11″) who works with an NGO, Caste no Bar (Though IYER Preferred)’ (Borges, 2015 cited in Kumar, 2022). Sircar explains how advertizing harboured a ‘Brahmanical qualification in parenthesis’ (Kumar, 2022, p.228). The point to note is how queer politics, deemed the most progressive form of politics we have attained, still tries to enforce practices like caste endogamy, legitimizing more hierarchies in an already heterogeneous unit.

The caste-queer intersectionality is an inherent complication within queer feminism in India due to the eternal nature of caste identity and its generational marks. As Pushpesh Kumar notes, “States can extend queer freedom, for example, without addressing caste, class and gender inequalities despite the fact that the majority of queer subjects are not only ‘sexually oppressed’ but their experiences of precarities in class, caste and gender basis are equally intense and constitutive of their existence (Kumar, 2020 cited in Kumar, 2022).” The case of Allahabad High Court’s suggestion of including all transgender people within the OBC category, for example, invited harsh reactions from within a large section of transgender communities who demanded horizontal reservations cutting through the vertical ones (Mandal, 2022). Queer feminism also needs to be warier on issues of queer-baiting and vote bank politics and the need to view queer feminism beyond Section 377. Sircar contextualizes Congress’ promises of repealing Section 377 nearing the elections; they say, “While the Congress’ move was celebrated by many, I would argue that, it was used as a convenient ploy for the then ruling government to portray itself as progressive (in contrast to the right-wing and Hindu majoritarian BJP, its biggest opposition), and taking attention away from the fact that it was the same government which unleashed brutal armed violence against India’s adivasi populations, at the behest of huge mining corporations (Roy 2009 cited in Kumar, 2022, p.232).” The battlefield for queer feminism in India is enticingly vast due to the queerphobic sentiments of the majoritarian Hindu right, who have openly discouraged queer expression and identity and continue to do so.

Conceptualizing contemporary queer feminism comes with the task of seeking a reinvigorated political position that is wary of these strengths, weaknesses, and hurdles of community building. Furthermore, contemporary feminisms that do not address queer issues (yet) need to stop viewing queerness as an out-of-place entity that is presumed to be not a “woman’s concern.” An intersectional invoking is evidently necessary, and so is the need to be cautious of group identities subverting critical and radical voices that need equal engagement. Along the lines of how Rege (1998) frames it, mainstream feminists need not speak for or on behalf of queer feminists; instead, an informed dialogue where they speak ‘with’ and ‘about’ each other is essential; furthermore, mainstream feminists may re-invent their positions as queer feminists to develop a

standpoint that “avoids the narrow alley of direct experience based ‘authenticity’ and narrow ‘identity politics’” (Rege, 1998, p.45).

4.2. Invoking Ambedkar and Periyar

A pacifying stimulant for queer feminism in India is to look into the rich feminist history in the Ambedkarite and Periyar anti-caste movements. A community built upon the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity guides not only constitutional morality and rationality but also tethers to the mortal mind a revitalized sense of personhood and autonomy. Ambedkar and Periyar rigorously preached the significant consistencies of liberty, equality, fraternity, rationality, self-respect, and social endosmosis in their radical movements. Although these leaders never explicitly spoke about queerness or opposed queerphobic tendencies that we know, their ideology manifested in an Ambedkar-Periyar queer standpoint position helps interpret the queer subject as a superimposition of multiple identities better and re-affirm the feelings of pride, self-respect, and dignity. Because social insulation always remains a fable, readings of Ambedkar and Periyar forever remain immortal and relevant to any human-rights movement. V. Angayarkanni, in her essay, “Queer, Dalit And Not Yet Proud: This Is My Story”, writes:

“I am also Dalit. Unlike my queerness, I do not know well enough what this means. I know that I have seen my brothers fight the Vellalar boys and not come home, at least not with breath. I know that my ancestors were slaves, bought and sold between landlords. I know my grandmother couldn’t look herself in the face on even the good days. I know that my parents, my cousins, my sisters and brothers, they all show me their scars. I show them mine. I also know I am not wanted as a queer in my Dalit family. I am not held, I am not heard in political spaces. I am told Ambedkar did not speak of queerness. But, I told myself, Ambedkar likely didn’t speak about coconut trees, or the platypus, or cancer, or predict global warming. I don’t know. Maybe he did.” (Angayarkanni, 2017)

The massive extent to which Ambedkar's writings are influential is evident in the 2018 Supreme Court judgment reading down Section 377; the judges read out Ambedkar's theory of social endosmosis that he writes in Annihilation of Caste:

"An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy." (Ambedkar, 1936)

As evident in the aforementioned sections, Periyar's writings on marriage, love, social relationships, sex, birth control, and family planning deeply underline the plural and queer nature of existence. His feelings of self-respect, dignity, and unity become essential facets of queer feminism that must be sincerely preached and imbibed. Moreover, Periyar's infamous saying that masculinity must be destroyed for women's liberation can be expanded to a larger umbrella of queer liberation, which intrinsically and perpetually combats masculinity and heteronormativity in a patriarchal power structure. Although feminist trajectories in India and worldwide are and should be perpetually capricious, the present and future, however, must strive to be significantly queer. The processes of learning, un-learning, accommodating, and queering are essential characteristics that the global humanities and social sciences department must be proud of nurturing, promoting, and politicizing, the derivative of which is to learn to make sociologically informed decisions for societies that are imbalanced, unjust, and overbearing in some or the other way.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to understand interlocking systems of oppression under patriarchal stimulants by first understanding the genealogy of intersectionality within feminist movements. Then it posed the questions of applicability and relevance within the fora of

Indian feminisms. It was then exemplified that Indian feminist subjects are heavily entangled at various crossroads for which a multi-axal, dynamic analysis ought to be carried out. A literature review of existing debates on intersectionality in general and caste-gender intersectionality, in particular, revealed the need to use intersectionality as a critical dialogue decentering and deconstructing presumed normalcies and the normative concerns within mainstream feminisms. It is certainly not true that intersectionality did not exist before its coinage. As several authors have pointed out, intersectionality was seminal in naming an old problem of differentiating the subjugated within feminist scholarship and situating the conversation of mobile and fluid identities within the feminist discourse. One of the primary successes of intersectionality was prized due to its effortless fit within existing feminist phenomenologies, namely postmodern and poststructuralist. (Davis, 2008).

Moving back in time, this thesis paid detailed attention to the feminist movement spearheaded by two pioneers of women's rights in India, Dr B R Ambedkar and EVR Ramasamy. A thorough literature review and historiographies of the anti-caste struggle led by these pioneers urged the need to re-historicize and re-memorialize an affluent thought and outlook that tethers communities through social endosmosis. Various scholars' narrative accounts of women in these movements offered deep perspicuity into the practical and collaborative methodologies adopted in 20th-century activisms. Furthermore, the simultaneous study of the feminist and colonial subjects delivered a multi-dimensional connotation to understanding feminist subjectivities. Examining the Ambedkar and Periyar movements helped identify the disjunctions between mainstream Indian feminism and Dalit feminism. Discourse on religious, constitutional and societal rectitude took centre stage in Ambedkar and Periyar feminism, as evident from their ideas of nationalism grounded in gender justice and rationality. Revisiting Ambedkar and Periyar and their life and missions ascertains invigorating wisdom for feminist scholarship and pedagogy today.

Augmenting these discerning principles into queer feminism widens the scope of political and academic inquiry, creating a more collaborative, representative, and plural understanding of power structures. Exploring uncharted domains adds more dimensions

to research practices and widens the doors for dissent outside academia. Feminist ontology innately relies on cultivating geo-political and socio-political differences, and feminist methodology should actively reinforce it by perpetually passing the mic.

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