

## Caste and Gender in Contemporary India

‘How can I bend to the authority of a small caste woman?’\*

Even before India became independent the caste question had fractured the representation of a consensus in the national movement: the leadership of Gandhi had been unchallenged in the main except for Ambedkar and to an extent by Periyar. The dalit view of post-independent Indian society had led to a major confrontation between Gandhi and Ambedkar. The critical difference could be seen in the issues raised by the two respectively—for Gandhiji the campaign against caste discrimination was focussed on the temple-entry movement, for Ambedkar it was the discrimination in the very access to a life-giving resource such as water, which the dalits were debarred from. The Mahad Satyagraha was therefore more important to the dalits than Gandhiji’s temple-entry, which had more relevance perhaps for the upper castes.

Unfortunately, as a consequence of the Poona Pact (1932) the caste question was made to conform to the Gandhian view. The Pact was a consequence of Gandhi’s fast against the grant of separate electorates proposed by Ambedkar in the early 1930s. Based on emotional blackmail, the Pact did not resolve the caste question on terms acceptable to the dalits.

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\* Dominant caste Kamma woman, Andhra Pradesh, 2001, on why she could not join a micro-credit group where some office bearers were dalits.



The Poona Pact is perceived as a great betrayal by the dalits and women still sing about what it has meant to the dalits. A song composed by a woman singer refers to Kasturba Gandhi coming to Ambedkar and pleading with him for the life of Gandhiji. This plea was difficult to resist and that is how the Poona Pact came about. They also sing about how Gandhiji made wearing khadi so central to his campaign and had he done the same with untouchability the dalits would not have continued to suffer degradation as they do even today.<sup>1</sup>

When the Constitution was framed for post-independent India, Ambedkar was one of its main architects and the caste question was then sought to be built into the provisions of the Constitution. Untouchability was abolished; so was the practice of discrimination in any form from public spaces. What did not get carried was another provision suggested by Ambedkar which was, 'Any privilege or disability arising out of rank, birth, person, family, religion or religious usage and custom is abolished,' a more radical way of containing the manifestation of caste in daily life. In a sense the Constitution makers were working with the notion that caste could not be abolished in toto, so the practice of caste was sought to be confined to the private realm, of course without any real success. In actual practice caste and caste discrimination including the practice of untouchability continues even in public spaces as the existence of what is called the 'two glass system' (one for 'untouchables' and one for the others) which is widely prevalent, and has been documented by activists of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee in the early nineties. Even from the public sphere caste cannot be banished so easily and never has been. The Constitution recognized and built into its provisions an attempt to create 'protective' discrimination for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who were at a disadvantage in relation to other social groups in Indian society. 'Reservations' as these provisions have been called—unlike in the USA where the term 'affirmative action' has been used instead—have been disapproved of by the upper castes who have never conceded the validity of such provisions, and have decried them on the ground of dealing a death blow to the 'merit' principle.

Changes in social and political structures following independence, the varying transformations in landholding patterns through land reforms, and the emergence of a new class structure in parts of India through the rise of various



tenant castes into the ranks of the landholding groups, have also translated into what is called backward caste (BC) politics. The dalit castes, at the bottom of the hierarchy, have hardly experienced substantial change. Large sections of their ranks remain a class of toilers; being landless they have only their labour power to sell and continue to have very little access to education, to health and to secure livelihood. Contradictions in the rural countryside are now often between the upwardly mobile middle castes and the dalit castes who work for them. These castes are unequal to the 'forward' and 'backward' castes in everything except in sharing the right to vote with them in formal terms—even though they are often unable to exercise this right freely. Democracy and universal suffrage have thus in turn led to changes. Certain castes which are numerically strong and have gained economically are feeling empowered. Others, which were of high status and had wielded power in the past, are feeling threatened by the loss of their power and the dent in their unstated reservations in the political system and in educational institutions in the past. The entire structure of class and caste linkages are being reworked under new social processes. For example, the historical advantages of the upper castes in relation to education and professional occupations through making use of opportunities provided by the colonial regime—as they were already advantageously placed—means that they continue to wield enormous social power. Both men and women of the upper castes share in this even as upper caste men would have a much greater advantage in comparison with upper caste women. Nevertheless, the upper caste woman is invariably better placed than the lower caste man in terms of access to education and employment as she not only has a more secure economic location but also possesses cultural capital. But at the same time the growth of the middle class in general also implies a certain opening for castes lower down the line, always however unequally available to the lowest and most impoverished castes. Globalization will further exacerbate the situation as opportunities will open up for some but increase the distance between castes for others. Competing interests between castes, therefore, is a fact of life—if the caste system continues as it has, so will the tensions between castes whether castes are enumerated in the census or not.



**DALIT POLITICS**

Dalit assertion is also an important aspect of contemporary politics: in the seventies the dalits were deeply influenced by the Black movement in the USA, especially by the radical Black Panther movement. At the cultural level, drawing from the experience of cultural oppression, the Dalit Panther movement of western India has foregrounded the caste question and forced the attention of the liberal intelligentsia, and the academic community, especially in Maharashtra, to take cognisance of the issues they have raised. Both dalit men and women have written powerfully of their experiences of caste oppression. In public debates led by the upper caste middle classes, the caste question is sought to be reduced to a battle over reservations. But at the level of people's movements and the women's movement, the existence of caste-based oppression is now being recognized, at least to an extent, and attempts are made to factor caste into conceptualizing oppression. The Left, especially the larger and older parties, has been less ready to rethink its understanding on the basic nature of contradictions in Indian society or how to bring caste oppression into its framework of analysis. Believing that current fora do not speak for them, whether at the level of recognizing the specific forms of oppression that dalit women experience or the inability, or the tardiness, of the women's movement in giving the caste question its due, dalit women have taken the initiative to set up the Dalit Women's Federation. This has forced the women's movement to address the caste question. Further, dalit feminists have formulated the position of the three-way oppression of dalit women:

- (i) as subject to caste oppression at the hands of the upper castes;
- (ii) as labourers subject to the class-based oppression, also mainly at the hands of the upper and middle castes who form the bulk of landowners;
- (iii) as women who experience patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men, including men of their own caste.

The dalit woman's voice is now being heard, perhaps for the first time, as a force in politics but not yet as seriously as it should.



## CASTE IN POLITICS

caste can exist

Caste has made its presence felt at another level too. The last two decades have witnessed the emergence of caste-based parties; the open appeal to caste identities that prevails now has grown with the collapse of the more implicit appeal to caste under the earlier Congress regimes which passed themselves off as a broad consensus of competing interests. This 'regressive' face of caste—as a factor in electoral politics—comes in for immediate condemnation by our secular-liberal intelligentsia, which never fails to articulate its horror of caste-based politics in social science writing, in classrooms and in the media. <sup>2</sup> What does not come in for any condemnation, and perhaps is consciously erased from notice, is the vibrant continuation of caste practices in the arranging of marriage—of ensuring an unchanging structure of social reproduction—so evident in the matrimonial columns of our newspapers. It is this one-eyed vision of caste that enables the hypocrisy underlying the anti-Mandal agitation with which we began this book. Further discussions on this issue will be taken up later. Let us first explore the other changes taking place in contemporary caste society in the context of gender.

## WOMEN'S COMPLICITY IN THE CASTE SYSTEM

<sup>1</sup> The process and the mechanisms by which women internalized certain values such as stridharma, or the appropriate codes of conduct for women, and came to invest in them, thus becoming complicit in reproducing the whole structure of inequality in which caste and gender were inextricably linked, have been discussed in Chapter 4. It is useful now to examine complicity a little more closely and see how it works in our everyday lives in contemporary times. It is fairly evident that women are not passive recipients of forces acting upon their lives but deploy their agency in a variety of ways. However, we need to remember that agency does not exist in a vacuum: to a large extent ideological and material structures shape the way agency can be expressed by women.

Why do women become complicit in systems which subordinate them? If we look at women today their lives are located at the intersection of class, caste and patriarchy/ies. These structures can all work to oppress them, as in the case of dalit women, but most other women are located in a way



that they can be both subordinated and also wield a degree of power. This is so especially if women belong to an upper caste and have access, through their menfolk, to economic resources and social power. [So while women lose in relation to their own menfolk, within a patriarchal situation, they derive certain benefits from the system of which they are a part. Further, these benefits are available to them only if they conform to the patriarchal codes of their families and communities. Compliance brings them gains, both material and symbolic. Deviance, on the other hand, expels them from the material resources of the family, of which they can partake only on condition of 'good' behaviour.]

② <sup>impacts power</sup> [The compliance of women, or the consent they extend to structures that are oppressive is however 'invisibilized' under the seemingly more neutral notion of upholding 'tradition', or the specific 'cultures' of families, or of communities, then moving outwards to the Hindu 'nation' whose cultural repository somehow resides specifically in women.] Women are regarded as upholding the traditions by conforming to them; men on the other hand uphold traditions by enforcing them—not upon themselves but upon women. The greatest impact of the upholding/enforcing of such codes is in the arena of marriage and reproduction. These, as we have seen throughout this book, are crucial if not the primary means by which caste is being sustained and reproduced as a system despite numerous changes in the public sphere. [While many castes have been delinked from traditional occupations and moved out of their original habitats, it is in the field of marriage that caste continues to structure the lives of people. The survival of caste in turn continues to structure production, property and labour, especially in rural India, thus creating a circuit that reinforces the deeply embedded aspects of inequality inherent in the caste system.] <sup>adapted from newspaper.</sup>

Should we be surprised then at the uninhibited proclamation of caste identities in the pages of newspapers where partners are sought in the matrimonial columns or even on the internet? Should we be surprised at the conjunction of NRI partners with caste and other qualifications in these advertisements? Are we exaggerating the links between arranged marriages and property, status, production, labour and reproduction while looking at something as 'harmless'



or 'amusing' as matrimonial columns? Let us take a look at Figure 9.1, Matrimonial Columns, and we may be able to see how caste still governs our lives.

At the end of the day we must recognize that it is not just reservations or caste-based electoral politics that is keeping caste alive but rather the very factors that we have just mentioned: unequal control over property, unequal performance of labour and the endogamous marriage system, which still bounds/binds production and reproduction together.

**Figure 9.1** Matrimonial Columns

BRIDES WANTED	BRIDES WANTED
<p>Alliance invited for Chennai based Architect Affluent Reddy boy B. Arch, 24 yrs, 175 cms Good looking, smart, from Beautiful, Qualified girl below 22 yrs of the same community and similar status.</p>	<p>D E S H A S T H A M A H A R A S H T R I A N BRAHMIN groom 29/175, handsome, M. Tech, software engineer, stable, USA trained with handsome salary, looking for a beautiful, fair, tall, educated girl, upper caste no bar. Send horoscope and photograph.</p>
<p>IYER BRAHMACHARANAM Kashyapa Moolam B.E. 28/178 Software engineer, USA fair, handsome, teetotaller, confident, ambitious, humorous. Seeks fair, slim, good looking, homely girl with pleasing personality minimum graduate, height above 163 cm, age below 25.</p>	<p>IAS ALLIED SERVICES B.E. IAS officer, outside Tamil Nadu cadre, fair, 27 years, 174 cms, Tamil, Hindu, SC AD seeks 23-25 years, fair, good looking, tall girl, IAS allied services, professional PG status family only. Horoscope and photograph a must.</p>
<p>REDDY 26/157 Arudhra doing MBA in USA (visiting in December) Seeks alliance from REDDY/REDDIAR studying or working in USA/Abroad. Reply with horoscope and bio-data.</p>	<p>SC AD Hindu 37 years, DM PSU 17,000/ seeks suitable groom. Caste, religion, language no bar.</p>
<p>ALLIANCE INVITED with horoscope and bio-data for Nambiar boy 33/170 B.E. MBA, Sudha jatakam, vegetarian, senior executive MNC, from parents of educated, religious minded girls of same/allied castes prepared to settle anywhere.</p>	<p>BALIJA NAIDU inter-caste parentage (mother Bengali Brahmin) girl, 26/164, star jyeshta, smart, fair, good-looking, convent educated, studying MS in USA seeks well educated and professional groom settled in USA, caste no bar. Girl visiting Hyderabad in December 2002.</p>



The importance of endogamous marriage, in cementing, holding blood within a bounded group, and keeping one group distinct from the other, was recognized by Ambedkar. 'The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as a solvent of caste,' he emphasized. Thus the problem of the bounded nature of the circulation of women is explicitly tied to the formation and persistence of caste.

The larger matrix of family culture too needs to be addressed because it is within this that particular castes enact their everyday rituals—of worship, marriage rites, and food. Leela Dube, the noted feminist anthropologist, has argued that women play an important role in maintaining caste boundaries through the preparation of food and in maintaining its purity. The bodily purity of upper castes is believed to be linked to what is ingested—so what is eaten, how it is prepared, and how it is served, plays a crucial role in the purity of the men of the family and of the caste. In Dube's words:

*Food constitutes a critical element in the ritual idiom of purity and pollution . . . Women, key players in the process of socialization, are also principal protagonists in this arena. The task of safeguarding food, averting danger, and in a broad sense, attending to the grammatical rules which govern the relational idiom of food, falls upon women. The concerns of purity and pollution centring on food begin at home. The principles of caste involve a clear distinction between the domestic space/home and the outside world . . . Women's practices in relation to food play a critical role in the hierarchical ordering of castes. The place of women as active agents and instructors in the arena of food and rituals also implies that women who command its repertoire of rules gain special respect . . .<sup>2</sup>*

Thus we see that whether it is conforming to codes of conduct, the upholding of family traditions, and more specifically maintaining the purity rules in the kitchen, women who conform are honoured and respected; at the same time they perpetuate caste and its restrictions in their everyday lives.

Women's investment in the practice of the caste system is not confined to marriages according to norms of their families and communities, or to maintaining the purity of the food and rituals, though both are related to the internal organization of the household and its reproduction, and in maintaining its



power in the economic and public domain. The anti-Mandal slogans of women students are not an isolated expression of upper caste women's reaction to a perceived threat to their power as a caste. It has much wider reference to the relationship between caste and patriarchy, as well as women's material location in a complex structure which both expects compliance from women and grants them a degree of power. We can see these factors being articulated within the caste and class contradictions of rural India. What is notable is that women's compliance to structures of caste and class is not merely passive but can extend to incitement of their menfolk to hold on to the unchallenged social power that they have wielded into contemporary times.

## CASTE CONFLICTS AND WOMEN

RUPASPUR, 1971

Longstanding agrarian tension between rajput landowners who did not till their land because of caste norms and santhal sharecroppers who had been their tenants for many generations led to one of the first major violent eruptions in independent India in Rupaspur, Bihar, in 1971.<sup>3</sup> The santhals had been part of a mobilization of sharecroppers that went back to 1937, which was resolved to an extent through the land reforms in Bihar in the early 1950s. The running class contradictions in the region led to many conflicts among which Rupaspur was significant because rajput women are reputed to have incited their menfolk to attack the santhal huts and to use violence against them. This show of force was necessary in order to keep them under control and to assert the power of the rajputs *as landlords* whose 'honour' was at stake. Their incitement had also taken recourse to the popular symbolic humiliation of men by asking the men to wear bangles, thus challenging their manhood. Typically, when the case was filed, the defence for the accused had transformed the onus of the attack from the attackers to that of the victims themselves, by accusing santhal men of insulting the womenfolk of the rajputs. They were charged with making obscene gestures at the rajput women. We can see here that gender is a factor in shaping the account of the incident—women's modesty being outraged, even if true—is reason for wreaking violence



when upper caste women are involved. Not so, if it is lower caste women as they are perceived as having no modesty in upper caste sentiment.<sup>4</sup> Further, the upper caste woman can use incitement in defence of property and/or honour, of which lower caste women have neither according to the same sentiment.

TSUNDURU, 1989–1991

Tsunduru in Andhra Pradesh was the scene of a series of incidents culminating in the killing of 22 dalits. Transformations in the political economy of the region, educational and occupational changes in the lives of the dalits and agrarian tensions provided the wider context of the series of incidents in which both caste and gender were core issues. New arrangements of public spaces (which cannot be controlled in the same way as village streets) conflated with a perceived threat to the unchallenged power of the upper caste landowners underlay the tragic events. From the point of view of this work the powerfully written and suggestive essay of Vasanth and Kalpana Kannabiran can form the basis of discussion.

Among the points that emerge from the Kannabirans' account is the way caste and gender intersect to create a justification for violence by the upper castes against the dalits. In one incident the foot of a dalit boy accidentally scraped against a reddi boy in a cinema house, leading to the death of 22 dalits. Reddi girls claimed that a dalit boy purposely brushed against two reddy girls (leading to the knifing of the alleged assaulter by a reddy man). In another incident a dalit boy was said to have teased an upper caste girl on the street (he was killed for this alleged act). After the killing of the 22 dalits in Tsunduru, 300 upper caste women were reported to have marched in the streets declaring that their modesty had been outraged, serving to justify, in retrospect, the prior massacre of the dalits. Since dalit women on the other hand are not entitled either to respect or to autonomy, the upper castes can humiliate and execute summary justice according to their whims. For example, Muthamma, a golla woman—a dalit—was stripped and paraded naked for allegedly helping a reddi girl to elope with a golla boy. Nobody intervened; the dalit men covered their eyes, unable to bear the humiliation of



Muthamma, and the reddis derided the golla men for having no manhood. As the Kannabirans put it, the insult is double-edged: it indicates both the power to appropriate the body of a dalit woman and to castrate the lower caste man through the appropriation of his woman.<sup>5</sup>

The complicity of upper caste and upper class women in violence perpetrated by their menfolk against lower castes—both men and women—is disguised by their own class/caste interests but also by deeply internalized codes of 'honour' or 'izzat' as it called in the Hindi-speaking belt. Izzat is a wide-ranging concept, very masculine because even women of the upper castes cannot evoke izzat outside of how it is perceived by the men of their families or communities. Further, action to uphold izzat is always a male prerogative: women may only 'incite' action, as they are reputed to have done in the case of Rupaspur. Izzat, or sammanam or honour is a term that I am personally deeply uncomfortable with even when, as feminists, we may put it in quotes to distance ourselves from it. The very use of it implicates us in the meanings attributed to it by a patriarchal discourse and what it seeks to symbolize. Since violence is sanctioned as a way to uphold izzat, the use of the term masks its real meaning for those who experience the violence. In actuality, as we will see in the discussion that follows, the concept of honour in punishing those who are seen to 'defile' it is about maintaining the structures of 'social' power. This, as we have argued, is a complex formation to maintain control over land, status, and women's sexuality intact. Social power then is located at the intersection of material power or class, status-based power or caste, and power over women or patriarchy as they work together. The concepts of dominance and dominant caste have unfortunately been treated as gender-neutral categories but they are in actuality deeply gendered and deeply permeated by patriarchal codes. I must emphasize that while class and caste have been seen as making for social power, patriarchal power has not. It needs to be recognized for what it does to the whole structure of hierarchy in India. But before we turn to the ways in which this power is being viciously manifested in parts of the subcontinent, we need to look at how 'honour' appears in its apparently 'neutral' and sanitized manifestation and particularly at the meanings attached to it by women.



## THE NOTION OF HONOUR/IZZAT IN THE SUBCONTINENT

Honour is one of the most valued ideals in the subcontinental patriarchies whether Hindu or Muslim. Most communities pay constant attention to gaining and maintaining honour. In general, honour or prestige—izzat—is measured by the degree of respect shown by the others. No matter how much honour is ascribed to their particular caste, individual families can gain or lose honour through money and power. But since all families do not have money or power other aspects are also critical. A family can gain or lose honour through proper or improper behaviour—most critically through the behaviour of its women. In sum, actions that are appropriate, or according to the dharma, maintain the purity and honour of the family, lineage, or caste whereas actions that are inappropriate defile the honour and purity of the caste, family and lineage. Thus, because the purity of women is crucial to maintaining the blood purity of the lineages and also the position of the family within the wider social hierarchy, women are seen to have a special place in families. Women are the repositories of family honour—of their own family as daughter, and of their husband's family as wife and mother. 'The prestige of the family is in the hands of its daughter' is a common saying and oft repeated to girls by the parents and to married women by their in-laws. The implication is that if their conduct is dishonourable, women can ruin their families forever. The concept of honour serves as a link between the behaviour of an individual woman and the idealized norms of the community. By constantly evoking the twin notions of honour and dishonour, families either condition or shame women into appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

This somewhat benign notion of izzat along with women's own stakes and therefore their complicity in the material and social power of their communities, for those who have access to such power, creates the conditions for upholding the normative codes of their families and communities. Even those women who occupy the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy, and do not necessarily derive material benefits from their place in the social structure, share in the cultures of their castes and communities. They too have codes to uphold and marrying an appropriate partner, negotiated by male kinsmen, is as



much an aspect of their lives as it is for other women. The endogamous marriage is ubiquitous and is practised even by non-Hindus, as many such communities also practice caste and status differentiation.

This intricate web of social, material and cultural factors, which require the specific marriage structures that operate particularly in the caste-based societies in India to perpetuate the hierarchical systems in place, are deeply threatened by 'love' between partners as the basis of marriage. Once this is conceded as a principle, reining in the choice to suitable partners from within an acceptable circle becomes difficult. Elopements then are a way to demonstrate 'love' or 'choice' as families actually prevent or are seen as preventing these marriages from being made. This is ground upon which the 'criminality of marriage' is played out in India, as the work of Pratiksha Baxi and Parveen Mody shows, and elsewhere in the subcontinent as Neelam Hussain's work demonstrates.<sup>7</sup> The classic pattern is that the elopements are contested by parents, especially of the girl, and almost invariably the girl's age—of being incapable of granting consent and as being still under the custody of her guardian—is brought into question. Parents file complaints against the husband, charging him with 'abduction' or of seducing the girl away from her lawful 'custodians' and the 'love' marriage, often surreptitiously entered into, is 'criminalized' in order to nullify the marriage. Abduction could also be accompanied by charges of rape if the girl's age is stated as under 18, the legal age for a woman to be able to exercise consent and contract a valid marriage. If the marriage is hypogamous, that is, between a high caste girl and a low caste boy, it will almost certainly be contested and criminalized; the whole weight of the police and even of the legal system works to uphold the cultural codes of marriage. There is widespread 'consent', in the sense in which Gramsci outlined it, within civil society to regard choice, particularly when articulated by a woman as disruptive of the whole social order: This creates a major anomaly. While the weight of new social forces celebrates, at least notionally, freedom of choice in buying, selling, and in the political system—freely elected parliaments, freely elected heads of state and so on—'whenever an innovation has to do with free choice of partners involving women, the whole social fabric seems to suffer a terrible tear'.<sup>8</sup>



The criminalization of love is to be seen as a response to such disruptive actions on the part of women.

The process of criminalizing love is apparent in the following cases:

#### IN PURSUIT OF LOVE<sup>9</sup>

This is the story of a love affair between Chetna, a young patel woman in Ahmedabad, and Roshan, a prajapati, a young Scheduled Caste man, who lived in the same neighbourhood. Chetna was only 17 and therefore still legally a minor when her mother chanced upon a letter written by Chetna to Roshan which made her feelings for him explicit. Earlier Chetna's parents had tried to break up the relationship between them. Angry at her daughter's 'recalcitrance' the mother threw Chetna out of the house and Chetna promptly went to Roshan's house. Even before Roshan could persuade her to return, Chetna's mother filed a complaint and accused her of stealing jewellery. Her mama [uncle], accompanied by his sons and a number of young men, arrived in Roshan's house, beat him up and demanded that Chetna should return. They also threatened to abduct Roshan's younger sister, who hid herself, in retaliation for abducting Chetna. The latter stood her ground and refused to go. The mama and his troop left but soon afterwards the police arrived, acting on the complaint of the mother who charged Roshan with abduction, with the motive of having illicit sex with Chetna. Chetna was charged with decamping with valuables from the house. Both Roshan and Chetna were taken into custody and beaten in the police station; they were also sent for a medical examination and bodily samples were sent for a forensic examination which 'established' that Chetna was still a 'virgin'. Roshan was arrested and secured bail a week later. Chetna was also arrested, and first sent to the Central Jail and then to a remand home till she was 18. She sat for her Class 12 exams from the remand home. Nine months later the police moved the court to drop the charges against Chetna.

After she turned 18 and the charges against her were dropped, she married Roshan. By the time the case came up for hearing on the complaint against Roshan, a couple of years later, they had a small baby. Her mother then changed her stance and agreed to a 'compromise' by not pressing the charge of abduction and rape against Roshan and suitably amending her story in court. At least in this case the story turned out to have a 'happy' ending but in the meanwhile both Roshan and Chetna—who was only 17—had been arrested,



beaten, and subjected to an invasive medical examination to rule out rape. All because the relationship was across caste—in fact it was transgressive because it was a pratilomic relationship, as the girl was from a higher caste, and the parents of the girl were opposed to it. It was regarded as a criminal connection according to caste norms, though perfectly legal according to the 1956 amendments in Hindu law. Since it could not be criminalized according to the extant marriage law, other criminal clauses were used to criminalize the relationship. The residue of what the young couple suffered haunts their narrative. Death executed by caste panchayats may be the worst articulations of violence related to inter-caste marriages, but there are other deeply scarring dimensions of violence in the manner in which inter-caste marriages are punished which go unnoticed by us.

## LOVE DENIED

A-not-so-happy ending to a similar romance between a jat girl and a dalit boy of Narela was aborted after a legal marriage some months later. The couple had eloped and were untraceable for a few months while the girl's father, who had connections in the police, filed a case of abduction charging the dalit boy and his family of abducting the girl whom he claimed was under 18. The police picked up the boy's brother for questioning and beat him up. The brother then tried to mobilize women's groups, civil liberties groups, and the press to stop the harassment and make it possible for the couple to return to Narela. The boy's family circulated evidence of the girl's age by

- ① attaching her Class 10 certificate—widely regarded as an authentic proof of age for purposes of official records such as obtaining a passport or getting admission into college. A marriage certificate at
- ② an Arya Samaj temple and a statement by the girl of having chosen to marry the boy of her own free will, and that she had not taken
- ③ anything from the father's house when she left it to get married, were also appended to petitions to various fora to intervene in the case.

The way the documents were assembled suggests that the couple were seeking to pre-empt the standard charges against runaway couples who are pursued by their families.

It was at this point that I got involved in the case: another democratic rights activist and I went to the Police Commissioner's office in New Delhi. After a long wait at the office we finally got to meet the officer that we had been asked to see in this case. The response of the police official was to bark at me—I was the older of the two of us and could have had a daughter who was of the age to elope: 'Why are you



pursuing this case? If your daughter had done such a thing as this girl has you too would have pressed the same charges.' He was talking about a shared set of 'norms' that regarded such a marriage as ipso facto criminal. When we referred him to the girl being legally a major he went on to dismissing the Class 10 certificate as worthless; everyone knew how easy it was to fraud anything in this country. The only foolproof evidence he was willing to accept was a bone density test for the girl to undergo in order to establish her real age and nothing else!

We then went to the SC and ST Commission. We got a more sympathetic reaction here but there was really nothing that they thought they could do—there were hundreds of cases of violations of all kinds that they were confronted with. In the meanwhile the father's influence worked; the couple surfaced, and despite making a statement in court that she had married of her own free will she is now in the 'custody' of her parents. As of now her husband has filed a petition for the restitution of conjugal rights, while the girl is alleged to have given a statement that she had earlier acted under intimidation from the husband's side. The case is still on and at the moment the marriage of the couple is an abortive love marriage. In public discourse the endogamous marriage is still the norm, the father still decides for the girl (and the boy too), even as the edifice of such marriages are occasionally interrogated by young men and women in pursuit of self-choice.

While the police and the courts may not overtly strike down the 'choices' made by women in the context of marriage, they subvert the legal provisions governing marriage through the 'great universals' in the unwritten codes to which they subscribe: 'morality', 'family', 'filial obedience' as seen in the context of religion-based traditions and notions of 'cultural identity.'<sup>10</sup> Occasionally the honourable judges may also indicate that consent in India was never meant to apply in reality to the partners contracting a marriage: A judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court observed even as late as 1992, and this sentiment would be widely shared even today: consent in the context of a Hindu marriage includes a consent 'to marriage given by a spouse through his/her parents, elders in the family, and other friends and relatives.'<sup>11</sup> Although this judgement suggests the validity of consent on behalf of the partners by parents as one of the acceptable ways of locating consent, in reality this is the only notion of consent that operates in the



minds of most people. A valid marriage in the India that practices caste remains one that is negotiated and contracted by the parents on behalf of the actual partners in it.

In the foregoing discussion we have outlined the violence and uncertainty experienced by some young couples for forging socially transgressive alliances in the urban areas. However, in the examples just cited the violence, though reprehensible, falls short of actual killing, although these do occur even in cities. Both in cities and in rural areas social transgressions are also perceived as tempered by caste and class hierarchies such that when an upper caste/class man desires a lower caste woman, and rapes or seduces her, the act is regarded as violative of the caste norms of permitted sexual relationships, but is accepted or even naturalized. Feminist research has shown that 'dalit women's bodies are seen as collectively mute and capable of bearing penetration and other modes of marking by upper class/caste hegemony without the intervening discourse of desire because of the over determination of this violence as "caste privilege".<sup>12</sup> While in recent years mobilization by dalit and Naxalite groups has focussed attention and created the basis of resistance on the issue of rape, or the abuse of the lower caste woman's sexuality, that is, on the naturalness of this 'privilege', there is no vocabulary as yet by which the lower caste man who desires an upper caste woman, and who in turn desires him, can express this publicly.<sup>13</sup> Certain modes of desiring are prohibited and have been regarded thus from the time caste itself is referred to in the brahmanical textual traditions. The very mention of such a possibility can lead to violence: thus a statement made during a speech after the murder of a dalit woman that dalit men should seek brides from the upper castes let loose a wave of repressive violence in which 30 people were killed.<sup>14</sup> There is thus a close connection between caste, desire, and patriarchy which undergirds the possibility or impossibility of love and marriage in caste society. The nature of caste-related violence also points to this connection.

Given these structures of love and desire when the lower caste man dares to fall in love or enter into a relationship, or elope with and marry a higher caste woman, he is thus still subject to the *collective power* of the upper castes who will stop at nothing to punish the transgression. The last few years



have witnessed a spate of brutal killings of such couples (see Afterword). Since a woman's sexuality is still under patriarchal and caste control, and still requires to be formally transferred from father to husband, these killings have the explicit consent of the community, especially that to which the woman belongs.<sup>15</sup> Thus while the lower caste man is killed, even the 'erstwhile' daughter (who loses her status as daughter through her transgressive relationship) of an upper caste household is regarded as someone who must die for her sin of violating the pratilomic codes of marriage. Both men and women of the upper castes uphold this gruesome ideology of 'private' justice, or rather retribution, to deal with 'errant' couples who violate the norm of endogamy—no matter what the law says about the legality of such relationships. This brutal and informal application of the death penalty upon young people is yet to receive the serious attention of human rights activists in India, although it has been the basis of a campaign in Pakistan where the slogan has been: There is no 'honour' in killing.

What is now routinely called 'honour' killings (both in South Asia and among South Asian feminist groups in the United Kingdom) first hit the headlines in a big way in India with the Mehrana killings in 1991. Roshni, a jat (the dominant caste in western Uttar Pradesh) girl of the village, eloped with Brijendra, a jatav boy, regarded as a low caste in the region, assisted by his friend. All three were caught. The jat panchayat sat all night and passed a judgement on the 'errant' couple and their friend: under its decree they were tortured all night, hanged in the morning, and then set on fire. The entire village is said to have witnessed this brutal murder. When the story broke and the press came to investigate, the villagers, both men and women, including family members of the girl, defended the action on the ground that it was necessary to restore the violated 'honour' of the family and the community. Even jat peasant leaders regarded the 'punishment' as justified. Needless to say no male political leader of the country publicly condemned the killings—or scores of other similar cases. It is as if a woman who is regarded as violating sexual norms of her caste is not a citizen of the country and entitled to the right to life that the Constitution of India gives to all its citizens. In other cases the punishment



meted out extends to those who may extend support to the 'transgressing' couple: for example as mentioned earlier, a dalit woman was stripped, beaten and paraded through the streets for aiding a runaway couple.

In another case in North India, in a village named Ali Nagar near Muzaffarnagar, a jat girl, Sonu (the region is a predominantly jat belt), was seen with a brahmana boy, Vishal, under a neem tree; they were both killed in August 2001. They were in their teens and were believed to have been in love with each other, and had been to the same school. Sonu was killed by her father for 'wrongdoing' and for bringing shame upon him; he thrashed her, put a rope round her neck and killed her. Once Sonu was killed, Vishal's brother was called upon to do the same to Vishal and he readily complied. In 2002 the judge sentenced four people to life terms including Sonu's father and Vishal's brother. Sonu's mother and Vishal's sister-in-law were said to be present when the killings took place. But while no one in the village claims to know anything about what happened—no one from within the village is usually willing to give testimony to such incidents—many will defend the need to punish 'errant' couples as Bhopal Singh did in this case. His statements give a clue to the way people think: 'People in this village live *within their caste*. Big people like Indira Gandhi can afford to marry whom they please, but we do not. If something happens to my daughter I will have to do something about it,' says Bhopal Singh. The judge recognized the deep-rooted prejudices of caste, and said, 'Villagers here consider such incidents as a blot on the social standing of their village.' He upheld the charges against 4 of the men named, let off 8 others, and particularly let the women off on the ground that since women's opinion carried no weight in the panchayat decisions they could not be held to be complicit in the crime. As Pamela Philipose, who visited the village after the judgement, wrote:

*While the local cinemas celebrate Bollywood's latest essay on young love, under the neem trees of Ali Nagar, deeply entrenched and horrifically cruel caste hierarchies script another story. There, only the pregnant words of Bhopal Singh hold sway: 'If something happens to my daughter, I will have to do something.'*



Brutal killing then is the communitarian<sup>16</sup> response to the 'oppositional agency' of women who may attempt to renegotiate the traditional boundaries of their lives.<sup>17</sup> Such women are given the 'death penalty' with no qualms by their own families and communities. It appears that as the norms of the caste system and its marriage patterns are increasingly disturbed through social changes—upward mobility, caste assertions, changes in the land and occupational structures, and political transformations—the virulence with which the control over female sexuality is asserted increases, as these cases show.

### CONTINUING REALITIES: THE RESILIENCE OF THE CASTE SYSTEM AND BRAHMANICAL PATRIARCHY

To sum up we need to take note of the continued resilience of the caste system and brahmanical patriarchy, despite the constitutional guarantee of social and political equality to all citizens. The broad congruence between caste and class has continued into contemporary times. Local dominance in rural India combines landholding and caste status with access to state power. These are the factors that account for the social power of the dominant castes which enables them to have a continued hold over the landless labouring poor, largely comprising dalits. Caste and class links have made it possible for dominant groups to appropriate, in a sense, 'the paraphernalia of the state'.<sup>18</sup> This is marvellously brought out in dalit writing such as 'The Paddy Harvest', a short story by Mogally Ganesh, which is a sharp indictment of state agencies and their partisanship for the upper castes.<sup>19</sup> The Constitution has formally ended caste-based discrimination in public spaces, but it has neither broken the hold of the upper castes on material resources nor their hold over the state machinery. Consequently the enforcement of the non-discriminatory provisions in public spaces remains a dead letter because the enforcers themselves, in many cases, subscribe to the ideology of caste. At the same time, brahmanical patriarchy remains intact because men and women uphold the principle of endogamous marriages, even in urban India, as we can see all around us in the way marriages are carefully arranged to uphold material and status interests. Even the Constitution can do nothing about marriage practices! Women of the upper



castes may experience gender-based discrimination but they also share the material resources and the ideology of the men of their caste. At the other end of the hierarchy, dalit women and men remain the most vulnerable sections of our society, with the oppressions of the dalit women far outweighing that of their men. The existential reality of caste continues to be a phenomenon of our society, even though some of its contours may have changed. The upper caste male who wields the maximum amount of power is still the most privileged segment of our society. At the opposite end is the dalit woman who, when she is also poor, is the most vulnerable person in the scale of power, subject to multiple forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, at the hands of the upper caste men. The tragedy of our times is that this exploitation is so routinized that when incidents of violation of the rights and personhood of dalit women, including sexual assaults, make it to our newspapers they do not evoke the reaction that they should in any civilized society. Only a few incidents make it to our newspapers and get taken up by activists—when they do they expose the reality of caste. Three cases, among many others, have succeeded in making a dent in our consciences in recent times and are briefly outlined.

#### MATHURA

[The first case of sexual assault in which social power was a factor was the rape of Mathura, a young tribal girl, in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra by policemen in a police station, where Mathura had been called in for questioning, making it a case of custodial rape. The charge of rape was rejected by the trial court on the ground that Mathura had 'consented' to sexual intercourse as there were no bodily marks to indicate 'stiff resistance'. The court also found that Mathura did not conform to the understanding of the judges of a chaste woman as she had allegedly had sexual relations with her fiancé. Therefore she was not the normative Hindu woman from an upper caste who was required to be a virgin—a kanya—till she was married. The High Court on the other hand upheld the charge of rape. But when the matter went to the Supreme Court the charge was dismissed again.] This led to an open letter to the chief



justice written by four law teachers and marked the beginning of a nationwide campaign on custodial rape in which women's groups and other democratic groups participated. Although Mathura's rape charge was still not upheld, even by the Supreme Court review, the question of the rape law as well as the specific question of custodial rape was taken up in real earnest by women's groups. The Mathura case began a phase of feminist legal activism that has continued in varying degrees since then. Mathura herself, however, never got justice.

### PHOOLAN DEVI

The case of Phoolan Devi and her rape by upper caste men is significant at another level. Phoolan's life would have had parallels in the lives of many other women of her social location but what made her experiences so notable was her career as a dacoit. In fact, her position as the leader of a dacoit gang and, according to the legend, the revenge she sought against her rapists by killing 23 men of the village in which she had been allegedly raped, made her a dramatic figure, difficult to dismiss from public notice. The public ceremony of her laying down arms, and later her career as a politician added even more drama to her life, and her story has circulated widely both in print and through the film *Bandit Queen*. Phoolan Devi's murder in 2001 consolidated her image as a doomed woman who never could rewrite the script of her life in a way that made up for her vulnerability as a poor low caste woman, subject to the power of upper caste men. She began her life with this vulnerability and could never escape from it, even though she wielded a gun for many years. While women's groups did not actively engage in mobilizing opinion on Phoolan Devi (except when the film on her life became controversial) the media attention she drew and the folklore that was built up around her did focus on the oppressive caste system as it operated in rural India.

My regular taxi driver, a malla from Uttar Pradesh like her, never failed to tell me some little story of her life, some account of what she did for women. On one occasion I was going to a political demonstration and he told me that if Phoolan was alive she too would have come to our demonstration! Her



life was perceived by many as a crusade against both caste and patriarchy.

### BHANWARI DEVI

The last of the three examples cited here of the way class and caste power work to act upon a dalit woman is that of Bhanwari Devi, a sathin in the Women's Development Programme of the Government of Rajasthan. Bhanwari was gang-raped at the behest of the prominent gujjars of her village whom she had antagonized by daring to try and prevent an infant marriage from taking place in a gujjar household during a government directed campaign against child marriage. Bhanwari's position as a low caste woman who had not only tried to empower herself and the women of her village, but was also perceived to have thereafter challenged the powerful men of her village, had met with severe reprisals. Although women's groups in Rajasthan, and across India, were involved with the campaign to ensure justice for Bhanwari and punishment for the culprits, Bhanwari was also targeted by powerful men—and women—of the state Bharatiya Janata Party which was the ruling party then. She (not her rapists) was accused of bringing a bad name to Rajasthan. When the judgement at the trial court came it ① confirmed the continuing and unchallenged power of the upper castes in the state machinery. The honourable judge rejected the charge of rape. He argued that it was impossible to believe that Indian culture/rural culture had reached such a low state that a gang of men above 40 years in rural India, belonging to different castes, would have joined together and stooped so low as to have raped Bhanwari, a 'low' caste woman. (Village India was pristine and pure in his view! Also rape was a malady afflicting only teenagers.) Bhanwari was pronounced to be an unreliable witness, who probably had sexual relations ② with men other than her husband, in the judge's reading of the medical 'evidence'. The deeply held beliefs of the upper castes could pass off here as judicial pronouncements simply because of the power of the position occupied by the honourable judge. The matter is in the High Court at the moment but whether Bhanwari will get justice is a moot question



given the balance of caste, class and patriarchal forces that prevail to date. (We must remember that the statue of the 'honourable' Manu, propagator of the reprehensible codes for women and the lower castes, graces the High Court premises in Jaipur—perhaps the only place in government premises in contemporary India to honour Manu so!)

In all three cases just cited, which do not in any way exhaust the reality of the range of oppressive practices that dalit women experience (being merely the most visible and better known incidents) we can see that the violence inherent in the caste system extends also to use of violence to enforce the caste-based gender codes. Despite two decades of legal activism by dalit groups to address the specific context of oppressive social power of the dominant upper castes and classes, we seem to be back to the days of the Mathura judgement. In a recent judgement on a case of rape (*Pappu Khan vs State of Rajasthan*) filed within the ambit of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes Atrocities Act, a judgement has held that the rape of a tribal woman has nothing to do with her status as a poor tribal woman (even though the judge acknowledged that the rapist was fully aware of her tribal status) but is merely a consequence of being overwhelmed by his 'lustful' feelings.

These dramatic and well-known instances of sexual assault, starkly revealing the power of the upper castes over the dalit woman, should not cloud us into thinking that the only, or the major way, in which class, caste and patriarchy intersect to oppress dalit women is through sexual assaults. Material deprivation and humiliating and degrading conditions of interaction with the upper castes are both relentless and routinized in the lives of dalit women and form the everyday practices through which they experience caste, as the accounts that follow reveal.

Urmila Pawar describes the poverty of her childhood, the early death of her father, her mother's strong desire to educate her so that she could seek an exit from the life of degradation, which was the normal lot of the dalits, and her early experiences of caste biases. The following paragraphs have been extracted from *Ghosh Seshwachi: A Childhood Tale*.



Ayee wore a tattered nineyard sari that only came up to her knees. She sat in a corner of the courtyard weaving baskets—big ones, small ones, wide ones, and shallow ones. Even when one woke up in the morning, she could be seen sitting in the courtyard, weaving a winnowing fan or a sieve. One could see her like that till one went to sleep at night. In between she would meddle around near the kitchen fire. That's it. If it was father's legs that moved [he was always going somewhere] with Ayee it was her hands.

Ayee often asked me to deliver the baskets to people's homes. Those people would make me stand outside the door, sprinkle water on the baskets before picking them up. They would drop money onto my palm from above. Was their hand going to burn and turn black if it touched mine, I wondered? If there was a child from my class in the house I would feel so ashamed, it was worse than death itself...

One day Urmila returned from school crying as her teacher had beaten her up for refusing to be treated as a remover of dung, a routine way in which she was humiliated in the school until then. Urmila's mother was infuriated and confronted the master:

'Guruji, my daughter studies in your school, right. Why did you beat her so much, see, just look at her cheek.' [And when the guruji weakly began to give an explanation she turned on him with ferocity.] 'You are so well educated and yet you talk like a small child. Look here, I am not educated, I live under this tree, by the roadside, with my children like an exile. Why? So that they can study, become important people. And you harass the girl like this?' Ayee was speaking incorrectly, ungrammatically. In a loud voice she was threatening guruji, 'After this, if your finger so much as touches my daughter, I will see to it that you will never walk on this road again . . . '

After that day many things changed, collecting dung and guruji's beatings were no longer a part of my fate and destiny . . . And I began to look upon my mother as a tremendous support.<sup>20</sup>

In a powerful autobiographical work *Karukku*, Bama, a dalit Christian girl of Tamil Nadu, describes her first experience of a caste conflict in her village in early childhood, a conflict that introduces her to the workings of state power and its relationship to caste and class. The dalit paraiyars of the village were arrested while the higher and better off caste of chaliyars were not.



The crying and shouting didn't come to an end until evening time. But then in the evening the whole street was as still and as desolate as a cremation ground. Not a single man could be seen. Only the women huddled here and there, whispering among themselves. I couldn't understand anything. Nobody from my house spoke to anyone outside. We sat there silent. . . . Then Paatti [grandmother] arrived and explained to us what had happened. 'It seems that the Chaliyar invited some people from the "Reserve Police" all the way from Sivakasi, butchered a sheep for them and arranged a feast. Do we have such means? Here we are struggling just for this watery gruel. So how will the police or the government be on our side?'

Bama also describes her Paatti's life as an agricultural worker, a life of relentless labour.

Everybody says that my Paatti was a true and proper servant. She worked as a labourer to a Naicker family, but she was also a kot-thaal, she hired labourers for them, brought them to work regularly and supervised them and made sure that she received her wages. Except for Sundays she went to work every single day. Sometimes, if the Naicker insisted, she would rush through the service before daylight on Sunday and then run to work. She'd rise before the cock-crow at three in the morning, draw water, see to the household chores, walk a long distance to the Naicker's house, work till sunset and then come home in the dark and cook a little gruel for herself.<sup>21</sup>

Bama was deeply marked by the discrimination she experienced as a dalit girl and went on to become a teacher. She joined the church in order to find a space that was not marked by caste but was disappointed in this too. Finally she left the church and continues to search for a way to live with dignity.

### RETELLING OF MYTHS

The Dalit movement has since the late 1970s actively contested the ideology and the oppressive practices of the caste system. Literature and writing have been a powerful means of depicting the experiential dimensions of caste in which both men and women have written powerful essays, poems, autobiographical pieces and short stories. The Dalit Panther manifesto published in 1973 reflects important themes in the thinking of dalit activists: dalits are described as those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the



working people, landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Among the friends of the dalits are revolutionary parties set to break the caste system and class rule and Left parties that are Left in a 'true' sense and all other sections that are suffering due to political and economic oppression. The enemies of the dalits are listed as landlords, capitalists, moneylenders and their lackeys, and those parties who indulge in religious and casteist politics and the government that depends on them. The manifesto declared that the movement would hit back against all injustice perpetrated on the dalits and also swore to destroy the varna and jati system. It was the Dalit Panther movement that drew attention to the need to re-define the oppressed and exploited castes as dalits rather than be defined by the patronising term of Harijan, the name given to them by Gandhiji.

Among the creative expressions of the dalit literary movement which tied in with the new self-definition of the dalits was the rewriting of myths. Two such re-tellings deal with Ekalavya and Renuka/Matangi.<sup>22</sup> In one interpretation Ekalavya has been depicted as someone who betrayed his community by agreeing to give up his thumb, accepting thereby the brahmanical values. Another interpretation uses the metaphor of the blood of Ekalavya's thumb as a moment of recognition of the worth of that blood whereby a new resolve was created. In another version the narrative's end is recast as one where Ekalavya refused to give up the thumb and flaunted it at the upper castes instead.

The story of the sage Jamadagni and his wife, Renuka, recounted earlier, also has an interesting caste dimension to it. The sage had demanded that his son, Parshurama, should cut off his mother's head for her 'infidelity' which the son had dutifully complied with. In the retelling the sage is cast as a suspicious husband, forever policing his wife as husbands often do, and then being outsmarted by that ever philandering god Indra who was responsible for Renuka's fall from her elevated position as a chaste wife. We may recall that her fall occurred when she admired the good looks of a flying gandharva, whose form was assumed by Indra, as his image was reflected in the water below. Later, when Parshurama had



finished proving his filial devotion, Jamadagni asked him to seek a boon. Parshurama did and sought his mother's life. The sage said that it was impossible to revive her as he needed a head to put back on the body of Renuka. A passing Matangi became the victim, and her head was placed on Renuka's body who then revived. Matangi's head now sat on a brahmana woman's body and in a sense this new creation makes for the **perpetually transgressive potential of all women, whether high caste or low caste!**

The **retelling of myths** is only one dimension of the dalit standpoint. From the point of view of the feminist critique of oppressive structures, particularly patriarchy, an important issue that has arisen in the women's movement is the need to recognize the specific **triple oppression** experienced by dalit women and the difference between dalit women and upper caste women, a point that has been alluded to earlier. This has been outlined as the dalit feminist standpoint by **Sharmila Rege**.<sup>23</sup> Rege has thus provided a way to move beyond the notion of 'difference' from a narrow identity framework, in which we can all be locked into, to one in which individual feminists, whatever their birth-based identities—dalit or non-dalit—may be, can be transformed into oppositional and collective subjects who struggle against all oppression, from whatever quarters these may emanate.

## NOTES

1. Sharmila Rege, 'Dalit Counterpublics', unpublished manuscript.
2. Leela Dube, 'Caste and Women'. In *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, edited by M. N. Srinivas (Delhi: Viking, 1996), pp. 6-9.
3. The information on the incident in Rupaspur is derived from the field notes of Anand Chakravarti compiled in 1976.
4. It is only with class and caste mobilization in recent years that the rape and sexual abuse of lower caste women are being resisted by the dalits. The issue of izzat is central to peasant movements in Bihar under various Marxist-Leninist formations and in dalit movements. See Rashme Sehgal, 'They Don't Dare Abuse Anymore,' *Times of India*, 4 Oct. 1998.
5. Kalpana Kannabiran and Vasanth Kannabiran, 'Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence.' In