

Introduction

0.0 Introduction

In this chapter I plan to outline some of the issues that are related to caste. Secondly, I try to show how modern critical theory informs drama and its representation in theater and drama leading up to the notion of contemporary theory and a comment on caste from a traditional approach and how the arguments shape themselves in the hands of late twentieth century theorists who challenge caste from different angles.

I have outlined in this chapter what is called the ‘Dalit Panther Movement’ and how it gives impetus to Dalit Theatre in Maharashtra with the complexities of different positions and thoughts about it which might help me to articulate what I think of as ‘Post Dalit Panther Drama’ in this dissertation.

0.1 Locating Caste

In colonial India, the English word, caste was accepted by census officials as an equivalent of the Hindusthanee word, *jati*. The acceptance of the word, caste for *jati* was caused by the confusion faced in colonial India. The word, *jati* confused census officers because it was used to refer to categorization of caste, gender, occupational and regional identities. (Srivastava: 2016: 322-323) In colonial India, people would provide information about their regional and occupational identity as a caste identity when the census officials would ask them about their caste identity. In order to get rid of the confusion, caused by the word, *jati*, the census officials in colonial India opted for the word, ‘caste’ instead of *jati* to record communities in India. ¹

¹ Srivastava, Vinay Kumar. “Speaking of Caste: Merit of the Principle of Segmentation.” *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2016, pp. 317–38. p.322-323.

However, the confusion among the census officials did not disappear with the use of the word, caste instead of *jati*, as despite its use to signify socio-cultural communities in the census in colonial India, the census officials faced some challenges in the categorization of castes. The census officials equated caste with occupational identity of people which was successful in case of agrarian castes but could not grasp castes which had no fixed occupations, especially ex-untouchable castes. On the other hand, Herbert Risley, an anthropologist, and the Census Commissioner in 1901, looked at caste with reference to the Aryan and Non-Aryan theory. He took anthropometric nasal measurements of people in colonial Bengal but still he did not get a reasonable explanation for the diversity among various castes in India belonging to one's occupation.²

In colonial India, census officials and anthropologists paid more attention to racial and occupational explanation of caste than social institutions like marriage and its relation to caste. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar pointed out the limitation of such an explanation and emphasized the role of endogamy in keeping the caste hierarchy rigid in his presentation on *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* at an Anthropology Seminar, taught by A. A. Goldenweiser, Columbia University in 1916. In this presentation, he has not only analysed the endogamous nature of the caste system but proves how caste is a hierarchical unit rather than an isolated socio-political unit like tribe. He says that endogamy does not approve marriage outside one's caste, to maintain one's caste identity as a unit of a closed hierarchical system, called the caste system. Further, he explains that endogamy puts limitation on social mobility

² Samarendra. "Census in Colonial India and the Birth of Caste." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 46, no. 33, 2011, pp. 51–58. p.56

of women by controlling them by prohibiting widow remarriage and maintaining socially glorified barbaric customs like *sati*.³

As the above-mentioned references used to define caste are from colonial India, one may have the impression that caste hierarchy is ‘a colonial construct’, which is a upper caste ploy to blame ‘outsiders’, here European powers, for developing caste hierarchy. The upper caste idea of caste hierarchy as a colonial construct is a completely unsubstantial way of dealing with caste question as caste hierarchy did exist before the arrival of the European forces in India. Caste hierarchy is evident in the writings of the medieval Bhakti tradition. For instance, Chokhamela, a medieval Marathi *sant* urges the god, Vitthal to come to his rescue:

Run, Vithu, don't be slow,
The *badwes* are beating me,
As if I have done a sin...
They are cursing the Mahar,
Saying he has polluted the god...⁴

In the above lines, Chokhamela, an untouchable by caste, urges the god Vitthal to come to his rescue as he is beaten by *Badwes*, Brahmin by caste, for polluting the god by his touch. Thus, the above-mentioned lines by Chokhamela not only negate caste as a colonial construct but reflect on caste discrimination in medieval India.

In the contemporary discussion on caste, Dipankar Gupta (2013) has expressed the difficulty in defining ‘caste’ in India, especially with reference to its vivid descriptions by different Indian and foreign scholars. However, he agrees with Bhimrao Ambedkar as far as the description of caste is concerned. He not only testifies what Ambedkar has mentioned in his presentation on

³ http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_castes.html

⁴ Omvedt, Gail. *Seeking Begumpura*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2016.p.85

caste but illustrates further by referring to its features: “endogamy, pollution, occupational differentiation and hierarchy, with the Brahmins at the top, are the important diacritical features of the phenomenon.”⁵

In the explanation of caste, Gupta has embedded most of the features of the caste system but has devoted much of his attention to a distinctive feature called the caste hierarchy. He agrees with Ambedkar on the issue of endogamy as one of the features of the caste hierarchy but he differs from Ambedkar in the respect of *jatipuranas* and its role in maintaining caste hierarchy. He points out that the different models of caste hierarchies are manifested through *jatipuranas*. According to him, the diverse models of the caste hierarchies are caused because each caste has its own *jatipurana* in which the origin of that caste and its position at the top in the caste hierarchy has been explained. Gupta looks at *jatipuranas* as an attempt to establish one caste’s supremacy over other castes. It is the longing of supremacy over other castes that might have caused the composition of *jatipuranas* and maintained endogamy.⁶

The term, ‘the caste system’ is sometimes associated with the *Chaturvarna* system which is nothing but its textual codification in order to classify castes with similar features into a category, called *varna*. Bhimrao Ambedkar locates this textual classification of castes in *Manusmriti*, a text that codifies and classifies castes into four hierarchical *varnas*: *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vyashas* and *Shudras*. He is of the opinion that the castes in India did exist before its codification and classification into the *chaturvarna* system. In his response to colonial perception of the *Chaturvarna* system, racially based classification of castes, Ambedkar opines

⁵ Gupta, Dipankar. *Social Stratification*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013. P.10

⁶ Gupta, Dipankar. *Social Stratification*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013. P.10

that though castes are classified into different *varnas* they are not racially different because he finds anthropological differences within castes and *varnas*.⁷

Unlike Bhimrao Ambedkar, Louis Dumont has looked at the *chaturvarana* system from a racial perspective. He perceives the *chaturvarna* system based on racial differences by referring to the skin colour and physical features of people belonging to different *varnas*. It is evident in his use of words like 'colour and estate' as the basis for categorization. Though Dumont differs from Ambedkar with respect to the racial understanding of the *chaturvarna* system, he is in agreement with Ambedkar's idea of untouchable castes as castes lower than *shudra* castes in the caste hierarchy.

The untouchable castes are different from *shudra* castes in many respects but the main difference lies in the location where untouchable castes live in villages. According to Ambedkar, untouchable castes are made to live outside villages, in ghettos, in order to restrain them from social intercourse. For him, the social restriction is maintained by the consideration of the touch of untouchable castes as impure. Ambedkar comments on the locational segregation of untouchable castes in the following words:

Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The Hindus live in the village and the untouchables in the ghetto.⁸

Thus, Ambedkar regards castes, included in the *chaturvarna* system, as Hindus whereas he does not consider untouchable castes as Hindus. To determine the non-Hindu identity of untouchables, he might have utilized the exclusion of untouchable castes from the *chaturvarana* system as a difference from the rest of the castes who claim to be Hindus.

⁷ <https://www.ambedkaritetoday.com/2020/06/why-chaturvarna-is-problematic.html>

⁸ Ambedkar, Bhimrao. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol 1.. Bombay: Education Department, State of Maharashtra, 1979. p.266

Though, there are differences between untouchable and *shudra* castes, attempts have been made to bring them together against the upper caste domination. Jotirao Phule, a social reformer from Pune in the nineteenth century, grouped *shudra* castes and untouchables together under a category, called *shudratishudra*. He succeeded in keeping untouchable and *shudra* castes together to strengthen the movement against their exploitation at the hands of high castes. He could keep these castes together by putting peasants at the centre because these castes would rely on peasantry for their wellbeing.⁹

However, after Phule's death in 1890, the alliance, *shudratishudra* collapsed due to the longing for upward mobility of *shudras* especially land-owning castes, who identified themselves as *kshatriya*, a *varna* lower than *Brahmins* in the *varna* system. The collapse of alliance, *shudratishudra* is explained by Anupama Rao in *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (2009). Rao says that in Jotiba Phule's time, meetings of *Satyashodhak Samaj*, founded by Jotiba Phule, would be held in Bhawani Peth in Pune, an area known for the residence of the *Mahar* and *Mang* castes, ex-untouchable castes in Maharashtra but after 1895, the place of meeting was shifted to Shukrawar Peth where *shudra* (land-owning) castes were in majority.

For Rao, it is not the change in the meeting place but the expulsion of ex-untouchable castes from the anti-caste movement. She opines that it might have been caused due to the desire of landowning castes to move upward in the caste hierarchy by distancing themselves from ex-untouchable castes and claiming to be castes belonging to *kshatriya varna*.¹⁰

⁹https://www.shaalaa.com/question-bank-solutions/mahatma-phule-unfolded-the-history-of-the-shudratishudra-communities-in-his-book-_____-indian-historiography-various-ideological-frameworks_201755

¹⁰ Rao, Anupama. *The Caste Question: Dalits and Politics of Modern India*. Ranikhet, 2010. p.47.

Thus, the alliance between untouchable and *shudra* castes, *shudratishudra* by Jotiba Phule, lasted till 1895, the year in which untouchables were expelled from the *Satyashodhak Samaj*. The dissolution of this alliance was caused by the introduction of the census in colonial India. The attempts of upward mobility of *shudra* castes have been illustrated by M. N. Srinivas in his book *Social Change in Modern India*. (Srinivas: 2016:11-106)

M. N. Srinivas finds that the agrarian *shudra* castes, as a result of their desire to move upward in the socio-religious hierarchy, categorized their castes as *kshatriya varna* in the census. As the census was conducted on two grounds: one's caste and the classification of that caste into the *varnas*, Srinivas says that *shudra* castes had no problem in registering their caste, but calling themselves *shudras* seemed to be insulting, therefore they registered as *vyashas* and *kshatriyas* in the census. According to Srinivas, untouchables were left with no *varna* identity, therefore the census officials might have categorized untouchable castes as the 'Depressed Classes' as they were not included in the *chaturvarna* system. Thus, the untouchable castes had to opt for the governmental identity out of compulsion rather than choice.¹¹

0.2 Dalit Identity as Caste Identity

The Marathi word, 'Dalit' has been taken from the Sanskrit language meaning 'broken' or 'crushed'. It was used to refer to people who are oppressed. It is Jotirao Phule (1827-1990) who used it with reference to castes who were victims of the caste hierarchy. However, he did not use it to refer to a specific caste.¹² However, in the 1930s, the word, Dalit came into existence as a parallel to the term, the Depressed Classes which was used for the formerly untouchable castes in India.

¹¹ Srinivas, M. N. *Social Change in Modern India*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2016 p.100-106

¹² Zelliot, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalits: From Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. Delhi: Manohar, 1992. p.267-271

At that time, there was a Marathi newspaper, *Dalit-Bandhu* which was published by the Depressed Classes Mission, an organization founded by Vitthal Ramji Shinde (1873-1944) for the welfare of the formerly untouchable castes. The newspaper would function as a link between the formerly untouchable castes and the British administration in colonial India because it would share the plight of the former with the latter through letters, published in it. In the paper, the formerly untouchable castes would be referred to as ‘Dalits’.¹³

In the 1930s, the formerly untouchable castes went through identitarian transformations. The Depressed Classes Mission called them Dalits whereas Mohandas Gandhi came up with a euphemism, *Harijan*. Apart from these two identities, the British government in colonial India introduced a governmental identity—scheduled castes—which is still used by the Government of India to refer to the formerly untouchable castes in India. Along with these identities, the census provided religious identities, like Ad-Dharma, Adi-Dharma and Adi-Dravida to formerly untouchable castes in India. During the census, the formerly untouchable castes registered themselves with a separate religious identity. They opted for the aforesaid religious identities.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956) was very cautious in choosing an identitarian word as he was seen using ‘Depressed Classes’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, and ‘Dalits’ as the situation demanded. He used ‘Depressed classes’ and ‘scheduled castes’ when he would appear before commissions, set up by the British government. When he appeared before the Simon Commission, he was officially representing the Depressed Classes and when he addressed a rally at Yeola, he referred to the formerly untouchable castes as Dalits.¹⁴

¹³ Pradhan, Atul. *Emergence of the Depressed Classes*. Bhubaneswar: Bookland International, 1986. p.125

¹⁴ Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions: The Anti-caste Movement and the Construction of Indian Identity*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2006. p.61

Even after Indian independence, the formerly untouchable castes were known by different identitarian terms. They were known as scheduled castes, *harijan* and 'Dalits'. Especially *harijan* was negated by them because it was used by Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) to deny ex-untouchable castes a separate religious identity. (Muthaiah, 2004:387)

As far as scheduled caste is concerned, ex-untouchables are not seen to be confused because they accept the label out of compulsion and because it is a governmental identity, they cannot deny it. It is also because the still ex-untouchable castes rely on the welfare of the government for 'upliftment'. The term 'Scheduled Castes' is only used for governmental procedures and not outside its ambit.¹⁵

As the terms, the Depressed Classes, *harijan* and Scheduled Castes are assigned identities, these identities were rejected or ignored by ex-untouchable castes. They opted for a self-assertive identity, Dalit, which has been established due to the production of literature by Marathi writers belonging to ex-untouchable castes. These writers described the life of ex-untouchable castes, which was missing in so-called Marathi mainstream literature. They identified themselves as Dalits by forming the Dalit *Sahitya Sevak Sangh* and termed the literature, produced by them, as Dalit literature.¹⁶

Though Marathi Dalit literature asserted the Dalit identity through the representation of Dalit life, it remained limited to the literate Dalits, who were residing in cities like Pune and Mumbai. The self-assertion of ex-untouchables as Dalits is seen in the momentum after the establishment of the Dalit Panther Movement in 1972. This is because, for the first time it was used in relation to activism, based on literature, produced by the formerly untouchable castes. Through activism, the Dalit Panthers reached illiterate Dalits residing in rural area. They raised issues

¹⁵ Muthaiah, P. "Politics of Dalit Identity." *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2004, p.387.

¹⁶ Kirwale, Krishana. *Baburao Bagul*. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi , 2013. p.43

like atrocities committed against Dalit women, living area/spaces of Dalits, and visited villages where such crimes were committed.¹⁷

The Dalit Panthers not only popularized the term, Dalit but tried to expand its scope, by incorporating people facing exploitation because of their caste, class, gender and religious identity. Its definition of the Dalit incorporated the following:

members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists,
the working people, the landless and poor peasants,
women and all those who are being exploited politically,
economically, and in the name of religion.¹⁸

Though the Dalit Panthers expanded the scope of the term, Dalit by referring to almost all the oppressed in the Indian context, it remained as an identitarian term for ex-untouchable castes, especially those castes in Maharashtra who converted to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar in 1956.¹⁹

Dalit identity as a caste identity has been challenged on the ground that ex-untouchable castes have already abandoned their caste identity by converting to Buddhism, which is a casteless religion. Raja Dhale (1940-2019) is of the opinion that one cannot be a Dalit and Buddhist at the same time, which seems to be true to some extent, because Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and his followers converted to Buddhism to give up the caste identity.²⁰ Nevertheless, ex-untouchable castes who converted to Buddhism are still confused about their caste identity as 'Dalit' and

¹⁷ Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai: Popular, 1995 p.73.

¹⁸ Satyanarayan K. and Tharu Susie. *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013, p.62.

¹⁹ Contursi, Janet A. "Political Theology: Text and Practice in a Dalit Panther Community." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 52, no. 2, 1993, p.320.

²⁰ Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai: Popular, 1995, p.66.

their religious identity as 'Buddhists' because they are seen asserting both through performances of rituals belonging to their caste identity as Dalits.²¹

The mixture of ex-untouchable castes' identity and religious identity is called Dalit- Buddhist which has been severely criticized by a faction of the Dalit Panthers, led by Namdeo Dhasal and Arjun Dangle who are of the view that 'Dalit' is not just a caste identity of ex-untouchable castes but whoever is oppressed due to one's caste, class, tribe, gender and religious identity.

Apart from Dalit identity as an identity of being oppressed, the term Dalit refers to one's consciousness of oppression and reaction, based on one's rational thinking. Gangadhar Pantawane, a Marathi writer and critic, has defined Dalit as a person who is aware of his/her exploitation and reacts to it with an intention to change.²² He does not associate Dalit identity with one's caste but one's consciousness of oppression. For him, Dalit is not just a passive identity marker which refers to the oppressed ones but it also means one's consciousness of exploitation and a response to oppression. Pantawane's definition differs from Dalit identity, proposed by the Dalit Panthers in its manifesto because it only considers one's oppression when defining the term, 'Dalit' and does not incorporate one's consciousness of oppression.

The term, Dalit was introduced to mean ex-untouchable castes in colonial India but remained limited to its occasional use. Then, Marathi Dalit literature in the 1950s established Dalit identity as a caste identity, which was mainly accepted by newly educated Dalit youth. In the 1970s, the activism of the Dalit Panthers and the definition of Dalit in its manifesto attempted to go beyond Dalit as a caste identity, by incorporating socio-political identities like one's class, religious, tribe and gender identity. Nevertheless, it failed in its attempt because Dalit remained a caste identity: descendants of the formerly untouchable castes. Such an understanding was

²¹ Srinivas, M.N. *Social Change in Modern India*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2016, p.48.

²² Pantawane, Gangaram. *Sahitya: Prakruti ani Pravrutti*. Aurangabad: Swarup, 1999, p.13.

challenged by ex-untouchable castes, converted to Buddhism. Their challenge to Dalit identity as a caste identity did not last long, because ex-untouchable castes, converted to Buddhism are still yet to prove that they are free of their caste identity. For Marathi thinkers like Gangadhar Pantawane, Dalit is not a negative identity signifying oppression but an identity that contains consciousness of one's oppression. Despite all the above meanings of the term, Dalit, it has remained a caste identity for descendants of the formerly untouchable castes.

0.3 The Dalit Panther Movement

The Dalit Panther Movement was established in 1972 by a group of young Dalits in Mumbai who were mainly writers like Namdeo Dhasal, J. V. Pawar and Arjun Dangle. They were influenced by the Black Panther Party in the United States of America and its revolutionary activism against racial discrimination faced by Afro-Americans. They got attracted towards the Black Panther Party because they were not satisfied with the prevalent Dalit leadership which was limited to electoral politics and did not address issues like atrocities, committed against Dalits, epistemic and systemic violence, etc.

The idea of 'Dalit' as revolutionary, inspired by the Black Panther Party, was introduced to young Dalits in Mumbai through magazines like *Times* and *Asmitadarsh*. The Black Panther Party was introduced to them by periodicals like *Asmitadarsh* which juxtaposed racial discrimination faced by Afro-Americans with caste discrimination faced by Dalits in India. They got attracted towards the Black Panther Party because they were not satisfied with the way they were treated by upper castes.²³

The ideas and activism of the Black Panthers Party, introduced by such periodicals, caught the attention of Dalit youth in Mumbai, because they were looking for revolutionary activism. They were not satisfied with the prevalent Dalit leadership because it failed to address issues of

23 Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai: Popular, 1995 p.76.

atrocities against Dalits. As the newly educated youth did not find the prevalent leadership as revolutionary as the Black Panthers Party, they established The Dalit Panther Movement in 1972 in Siddharthnagar, Mumbai; as an anti-caste force similar to the Black Panthers Party, to challenge the prevalent leadership and its failure to address atrocities against Dalits.²⁴

As the Dalit Panther Movement was established by the newly educated youth in Mumbai, initially it remained limited to adjoining cities like Pune and Nasik where Dalits, particularly people belonging to the Mahar caste were concentrated. (Murugkar: 1995:76) The presence of the Dalit Panther Movement in these cities developed its connections with other left-oriented socio-political movements. The association between the Dalit Panthers and left-oriented organizations like *Yuvak Kranti Dal* proved significant in spreading the Dalit Panthers' ideology because the Dalit Panthers could publish their literary works in newspapers and magazines, run by such left-oriented organizations. By doing so, the Dalit panthers could reach the readership already established by such periodicals.²⁵

After the completion of one year of its existence, The Dalit Panther Movement came up with its manifesto. In this manifesto, the identity of the Dalit and objectives of the movement were defined. It was done as per the teaching of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar who said that one should be ideologically clear about one's socio-political achievements.²⁶

The ideological interaction between the Dalit Panthers and the Left organizations might have compelled the Dalit Panthers to opt for the ideological base in written format as the prevalent Left-oriented organization would follow the Communist Manifesto, published in 1848. The Dalit Panthers Movement also opted for a written document to spread its agenda through

²⁴ Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions: The Anti-caste Movement and the Construction of Indian Identity*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2006 p-76.

²⁵ Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai: Popular, 1995 p.76

²⁶ Pawar, J. *Dalit Panther: An Authoritative History*. New Delhi: Marginalised Publication, 2017. pp.55-56

booklets and pamphlets. Like the Communist Manifesto, the Dalit Panthers also used the term, 'manifesto' for a document containing its ideological base, especially the definition of Dalits and the objectives of the Dalit Panther Movement.

The definition of the Dalit Panthers has widened the scope of the term—Dalit—which was reckoned to be limited to the formerly untouchable castes. According to the definition in the Dalit Panther Manifesto, the term, Dalit refers to whoever is a victim of servility, caused by one's subjugation irrespective of caste, class, race, religion and gender. The manifesto also contained remedies to such subjugation, located in the revolutionary ideas, proposed by the Dalit Panthers. They believed that these ideas are different from organizations which were propagating violence (systemic, epistemic and brutal) in order to change the oppressive system. It may be because most of the Dalit Panthers were influenced by Buddhist philosophy and were Buddhists as far as their religious identity was concerned.²⁷

Though the Dalit Panthers accepted one's economic condition responsible for their exploitation, it differed from the prevalent Left parties which failed to address caste discrimination completely, as these organizations remained limited to one's class identity only to address caste issues. This is the failure of the left according to me. By addressing class discrimination, to some extent, left parties understood half the problems of Dalits as they raised issues concerning their economic status, especially daily wages and their exploitation at work places.

Nevertheless, the left parties failed to address the idea of purity and impurity which determines one's position in the caste hierarchy. In addition to their class-based activism, the Dalit Panthers blamed them for indulging in electoral politics which was rejected by the Dalit

²⁷ Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai: Popular, 1995 p.117

Panthers because the left parties would compromise with the parties in power, which were severely criticised by the Panthers for being casteist.²⁸

Though the Dalit Panthers were not in agreement with left parties, it maintained a tacit relationship with them, which is reflected in boycotting by-election in the Central Mumbai Lok Sabha Constituency in 1974. In the election, the Dalit Panthers did not field its candidate but made it clear that they were not going to support the Congress candidate because the Congress Party was held responsible for the violence against Dalits in Maharashtra. The Dalit Panthers' boycotting of the election and condemnation of the Congress candidate was decided in the meeting which was held at BDD (Bombay Development Department) chawl in Worli (Mumbai).

0.4 Idea of Representation and Marathi Dalit Theatre

The word 'representation' in political discourse has been used to denote the political representation of a particular group of people by a person who shares some socio-cultural features with that group. Representation, in the political sense, has been highlighted here as one conceives it mostly as a political apparatus which functions as a symbol of an inclusive politics. It takes care of including as many socio-cultural groups as possible to democratize political institutions.²⁹

As far as linguistic representation is concerned, Karl Buhler (2011) opines that "linguistic representations do not resemble what they represent, instead they depend on conventions. He further states that sound and the object it stands for are joined together by a certain convention which embalms and holds them together. (Buhler, 2011:37).

²⁸ Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai: Popular, 1995 pp.117-118.

²⁹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-representation/>

Richard Bailey (1979) is of the same view when he discusses Saussure's idea of the sign in which he locates representation as the relation between the signifier and the signified. He is also seen emphasizing the role of conventions to form a relation between these elements of the sign. Conventions, according to Bailey stay outside the signifier and signified and stabilize their relationship. From the above two references, it can be said that the relation between them is maintained by various conventions throughout the history of humankind.³⁰

Jonathan Culler has emphasized the role of conventions to establish a link between a thing and its representation. According to him, the conventions in various forms determine the representation of an object or thing and if it is established convention, then it, sometimes, leads to form a long-lasting relationship between a thing and its representation (Culler. 2000:57)

Jacques Derrida has also accepted this view of a long-lasting bond between the signifier and the signified. He says that this established relation between a thing to be represented and its representation makes the representation repetitive and he has rightly pointed out the repetitive representation, especially in case of theatre, in an essay, *'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation'*. (Derrida, 1978:07-08) He identifies the reason behind the repetition in theatrical signs, especially in classical theatre which revolves around humanism, theology and metaphysics of the classical theatre.³¹ When Derrida elaborates on theatrical representation and its repetition, he holds 'humanism' as one of the things responsible for making performance repetitive. According to him, humanism means human beings are assigned with a set assumption that place them at the centre of interpreting things.³²

³⁰ Bailey, Richard. "Style", 13.03 (1979) p.296.

³¹ Derrida, Jacques. "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation". *Theatre 09* (1978): pp.07-08.

³² Derrida, Jacques. "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation". *Theatre 09* (1978): p.12.

Derrida is also of the opinion that humanism is not just a school of thought or belief but the central position assigned to human beings in the perception of the world. It also stands for the change in academics in the medieval period that emphasized “an educational programme founded on the classical authors and concentrating on the study of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy.”³³ These educational programmes seem to have been introduced to keep humans at the centre of academics.

After considering all the above references on humanism, I am of the view that the term ‘humanism’ refers to Renaissance and Medieval Schools of thought in which the (hu)mans have been placed in the centre, how the perception of the world and things are defined according to his/her perspective. There is one reason to make me look at its medieval understanding because during the medieval period, humanities entered university education, especially in Italy and the (hu)man became the centre of study. It is called anthropocentrism which means “humans as separate from and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value while other entities (including animals, plants, mineral resources, and so on) are resources that may justifiably be exploited for the benefit of humankind.”³⁴

An idea of the human being as the centre of all the studies might have migrated from the classical period (Greek) to medieval Europe, especially Italy as Aristotle is seen to be propagating similar views about man in his theory of mimesis. Aristotle discusses human actions to be imitated in the works of art, which are meant for the purgation of human emotions: pity and fear.

I think that due to the spread of classical ideas during the period of the Renaissance in Europe, anthropocentrism might have become one of the conventions in Medieval European

³³ <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/humanism/v-1>

³⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anthropocentrism>

philosophy. As classical ideas were revived in Renaissance, humanism became the mediator between thoughts and their representations and it governed representation of thoughts/things.

Here, it should be noted that man does not mean woman as mentioned in the dialogue between Oedipus and the Sphinx. This dialogue from *Oedipus, the Rex*, has been quoted by Barbara Freedman in an essay '*Frame Up: Feminism Psychoanalysis Theatre.*' (Freedman: 1988:384) She says that in this dialogue when Oedipus means man, he does not consider woman. She wants to suggest that humanism covers only men and their perception of the world in which woman is perceived from men's perspective. She is of the view that the sexual identity of woman seems to be disfigured as it is based on the male perception of the world. In order to substantiate her argument, she has quoted Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan who are psychoanalysts. According to her, Sigmund Freud, an Austrian psychoanalyst, is carried away by the male-dominated understanding of female sexuality, based on what is missing or absent in women especially the phallus. For her, this phallogocentric attitude towards women seems to have its origin in humanism as the term castration is defined from a male's point of view.³⁵

As far as Jacques Lacan is concerned, she says that he follows Freud but the only difference one can notice between them is that Lacan locates gender identity in language systems, in which things are understood in relation to their differences. In this case, woman is defined in relation to man. He is seen to be trapped in binaries, based on humanist understanding of the world. Freedman has referred to the above-mentioned thoughts, expressed by Freud and Lacan in order to address an issue of representation of female sexuality in theatre.³⁶

Even the spectatorship of performance by women or men in women's garb has been dominated by the male gaze in humanism as discussed by Jill Dollan in her essay, '*The Dynamics of*

³⁵ Freedman, Barbara. "Frame-up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1988, p.384.

³⁶ Freedman, Barbara. "Frame-up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1988, p.385.

Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance.’ (Dolan, 1987:157-58) She refers to William Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (1623) to substantiate her argument.

Derrida in the above-mentioned essay has destabilized representation of thoughts/things, based on the medieval notion of humanism while discussing ‘the theatre of cruelty.’ (Derrida: 1978: 09) Derrida openly says that theatre is not made to talk about man’s actions and their representations. By doing so, Derrida makes the ground ready for the representation of various socio-cultural identities, and Freedman and Dolan directly or indirectly refer to Derrida when they discuss representation of women, free from the male gaze, and man as a defining factor in determining female sexuality.³⁷

Apart from humanism, according to Derrida, the metaphysics of the classical theatre has been the determining factor in theatrical representation. He says that according to classical metaphysics, the author is considered to be a creator like God and his/her presence on stage is felt in the form of the dramatic text. From his point of view, though s/he does not appear on stage as a part of the main performance, s/he has complete control over actions on stage, and director and actors remain subservient to him/her because they follow his/her directions and it leads to repetitions of the performance as a play can have more than one director but there is no replacement for the author. In order to avoid repetition of performance, the author’s presence as omnipotent and omnipresent has been destabilized by Derrida by replacing him/her with the director whose presence on the stage is felt through the movements of actors on stage. By removing author from the stage performance, Derrida seems to be challenging the classical notion of author as creator (God) who plays a vital role in the formation of meaning (representation). Therefore, Derrida desires to remove a God-like being from theatrical

³⁷ Dolan, Jill. “The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance.” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1987, pp. 156–74. p.157-158.

representation. By doing so, he does not want to open the debate between theism and atheism because when he talks of removal of God, it means removing the authority of the author over the stage performance. He seems to be getting rid of the parallelism between the author and God as the Creator in classical metaphysics.³⁸

Francois Lyotard, a postmodern critic, expresses views about the author and the director contrary to Derrida. He does not discuss the author and his role but he refers to Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), a Japanese dramatist and director who would arrange theatrical signs like semiotics. Lyotard differs from Derrida as far as the representation of theatrical signs is concerned. In Derrida's case, the author is not supposed to be a part of the performance as the controller of actions on stage as mentioned above. However, Lyotard in the essay '*The Tooth, The Palm*', (1976: 106) does not deny space to the author and the dramatist as the controller of actions on stage but they are not just the followers of the text; rather they arrange theatrical signs, connected to each other on the basis of the use value of those signs. Thus, he does not make a distinction between the author and the director, when he refers to Zeami and though he does not directly talk about the removal of the author from the performance but indirectly challenges his/her authority by giving importance to the theatrical signs according to their use values.³⁹

Lyotard does not want to remove the text from the performance but to use it differently in different contexts as per the current use value. In order to explain the term 'use value', he refers to political economy in which things are exchanged on the basis of their use value' and the exchange between things remains temporary and not fixed. He says that the exchange between two things in political economy remains limited to a particular time as they come together, and form different combinations with other things according to the current use value. The same

³⁸ Derrida, Jacques. "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation". *Theatre* 09 (1978): p.11

³⁹ Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "The Tooth, the Palm". *SubStance* 05:15 (1976) p.106.

thing, he finds in the relationship between a thing and its representation, and the use of value functions as a determining factor in their relations.⁴⁰

Lyotard's understanding of theatrical signs and their representations can be observed in Jill Dolan's essay, *The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance*. (1987:156-174) She discusses woman's body in various performances. She thinks that its representation differs from performance to performance, depending on how it was represented in different contexts. According to her, the female nude body, in cultural feminist's performance, differs from its representation in contexts which are heterosexual and lesbian pornography. I mean the motive one possesses during the performance. In this case, according to me, the end one wants to achieve plays the role of the 'use value' because in the cultural feminist performance, the female nude body is also placed along with nature in order to spiritualize it and defuse the male gaze. Whereas in its representation in lesbian and heterosexual pornography, it serves different purposes as sometimes it makes male viewers feel annoyed due to presenting it as already consumed.

Among all the theatrical signs, language seems to be the most sought-after theatrical sign which is elaborated in all the four essays. Especially in Derrida's essay, it is found that he does not consider language in its 'customary sense.' He has propagated an idea of language which precedes the word. He thinks that the naming of things and giving expression to thoughts through words have made the use of language repetitive. In order to avoid repetition or representation in the classical sense, he proposes a language, which is free from the fixed relation between sound and thought it represents. The sounds, uttered before words were formed, are considered for theatrical performance, especially sounds which fit into the category called, onomatopoeic sounds and along with these sounds, he seems to be interested in the use

⁴⁰ Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "The Tooth, the Palm". *SubStance* 05:15 (1976) p.107.

of words but in their 'new sense'. Thus, Derrida not only uses language in its 'customary sense' but replaces it with a language that is free from repetition.⁴¹ Apart from this view of language, Derrida, to some extent, refers to psychoanalysis, especially the dream mechanism but it is Lyotard who has illustrated this point in his essay, '*The Tooth, The Palm.*' (1976:108-109)

Lyotard is interested in displacement rather than replacement, when he discusses representation and the use of theatrical signs including language and movements of actors on stage. He has used a psychoanalytical concept, 'displacement' which is used by Sigmund Freud to discuss the dream mechanism. Lyotard seems to be thinking of how it can be applied to theatrical signs including language of performance. He explains that one does not experience things as they are but in their displaced forms as one dreams. From his point of view, in the case of the dream, an image displaces the thought that one wants to express and this act of displacement has been caused by libidinal energy/force.⁴²

As both, Derrida and Lyotard, do not discuss the expulsion of representation from stage performance, they refer to a new way to establish the relation between sound (signifier) and what it represents (signified). They locate it in psychoanalysis, especially Freud's idea of dream mechanism as expression of thoughts. Expression of thoughts through dream is more economical and effective. There is a basic difference between Derrida and Lyotard. According to my point of view, the former seems to be confused as he refers to Antonine Artaud's idea of 'the theatre of cruelty' which is associated with the conscious rather than the unconscious and Lyotard seems to be firm in using 'displacement', a dream mechanism that is associated with the unconscious to discuss the use of language. According to him, the signifier and the signified displace each other and by displacing them they change their positions i.e., the signifier

⁴¹ Derrida, Jacques. 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation.' *Theatre* 09 (1978): 06-19. p.13.

⁴² Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "The Tooth, the Palm". *SubStance* 05:15 (1976) p.108-09.

becomes the signified and the signified becomes the signifier. He calls it 'reversibility' that destroys the very nature of language that is referential as mentioned in structural linguistics.

Feminist critics are seen complaining about the language of performance as they feel entangled by the language of patriarchal society. Barbara Freedman, a feminist thinker, has expressed concern for the language use to 'look back and forward' and she finds that she is short of language to express views against patriarchal norms. She refers to Julia Kristeva, a French feminist, who says that, the very dichotomy, man and woman, is problematic as it forms a language, suitable to men because language being a social construct is controlled by patriarchal norms and therefore, she wants to destroy all the established patriarchal linguistic norms so that woman will be free to 'look forward rather than look back'.⁴³

Freedman seems to be focusing on the representation of women in a language which does not suit their representation. She says that the act of looking back, she means to address patriarchy in patriarchal language, does not work well for feminism because she thinks that they get more entangled by using that language. Therefore, she supports the idea of 'looking forward' rather than 'looking back' as far as the language in which women are represented is concerned. Here, I think, the term 'look back' is related to responding to patriarchal norms in patriarchal language whereas 'look forward' deals with the overcoming of the language barrier by looking for a language free from patriarchy.

Jill Dolan looks like she is going beyond Freedman because Freedman says 'no' to the representation of women in patriarchal language, while Dollan supports the idea of using male-dominated language in performances, in which the female body is being gazed at by male spectators. She is in favour of using a language, which annoys them, as they feel to be

⁴³ Freedman, Barbara. "Frame-up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1988, p.384.

overtaken, when they listen to a language which they think is their privilege. She gives two examples containing a language which keeps male spectators' interest alive and a language that shatters their expectations.

In the former example, she describes a performer singing a romantic song in which she represents her body in such a manner that the spectators' gaze is maintained and entertained, and in the latter example, Karen Finley, a performer in a striptease show, uses 'foul' language to represent her body that disturbs the male gaze and the spectators feel irritated and they throw lighted cigarettes towards her in despair. According to me, there is no doubt that she uses language which most of the time is used by males, but she uses it in such a manner that spectators look like they are helpless before her performance. As the male gaze is also governed by a certain image of the female body with certain features, it gets disturbed if the female body is represented with the opposite features.⁴⁴

As far as language is concerned, Marathi Dalit Theatre seems to be in a state of confusion with regard to language of performance, especially in the case of *lavani* songs which are considered to be vulgar. Sharmila Rege has explained how *lavani* songs are denied space in main stream theatre performances due to the use of vulgar language.⁴⁵ The same problem is faced in *tamasha* performances according to her. She notices that in order to get rid of vulgarity, *lavani* and *tamasha* performers are leaning towards a language which is pure according to the upper castes.

I think that if *tamasha* and *lavani* performers follow Karen Finley and the way she uses patriarchal language to represent her body, they will not only feel comfortable with the

⁴⁴ Dolan, Jill. "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1987, p.167.

⁴⁵ Rege, Sharmila. "Conceptualizing Popuar Culture: 'Lavni' and 'Powda' in Maharashtra". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37 No. 11, 2002, pp1038-47.

language but also at the same time they can overcome the upper caste gaze, especially in *lavani* performances. (Rege, 2002)

It is not just language but there are other factors that control the theatrical representation especially spectatorship. In classical theatre as mentioned by Derrida, distance is maintained between performance and spectators, and by doing so performance was made voyeuristic. According to him, Artaud wants to get rid of voyeurism in theatre by making spectators play the role of actors on stage. For him, performance is like a festival in which spectators function as performers for some time and get back to their position as spectator.

Lyotard's idea is different from Derrida's on spectatorship. He refers to Bertolt Brecht, a German dramatist and playwright. According to Brecht, in Aristotelian theater a spectator is expected to be away from performance and look at the performance from a certain distance. In Brechtian theater the spectator is not expected to identify herself/himself with the performance on stage. He calls this dramatic technique as 'alienation' which stands contrary to what Derrida emphasizes by referring to Artaud.

Though Lyotard does not seem to be discussing 'alienation' as a dramatic technique, he takes it as a term in political economy and uses it to free theatrical signs so that they can form relations with each other based on their use value. Thus, in terms of spectatorship, the difference between Derrida and Lyotard is the difference between Antonine Artuad and Bertolt Brecht. Both these views about space of spectators in performance contribute to the architecture of theatre.

I think that Derrida's idea of performance as a festival does not suit *tamasha*, a Marathi folk performance, which is mainly performed by the *Mahar* and *Mang* castes in Maharashtra. These castes come under the scheduled castes in Maharashtra, today. As they are still being considered untouchable, though untouchability is a crime in India, they maintain a certain

distance between themselves and spectators to avoid physical contact with the upper caste spectators. As far as spectators are concerned, there is hardly any possibility of the upper caste people taking part in *tamasha* performances because according to Bharata's *Natyashastra*, any type of performance is supposed to be performed by *shudras*, the lowest in the hierarchy of *varna* system. Thus, performance is associated with the lowest *varna* and therefore the upper caste spectators are seen maintaining a distance between themselves and the stage.⁴⁶

Both Freedman and Dolan's ideas are different from Derrida's about spectatorship because they are serious about the maintenance of physical distance between performance and spectator. They are more connected to Lyotard's idea of spectatorship in which the physical distance is maintained. It looks like they are interested in following the classical modal of theater architecture, which makes performance voyeuristic, as they are dealing with the female body as perceived in different types of performances, especially in the cultural feminist, the heterosexual and in lesbian pornography. According to me, *lavani* performance follows the above-mentioned views about spectatorship, expressed by Freedman and Dolan as in *lavani* performance; one does not identify oneself with performance but one experiences voyeurism by maintaining a fair physical distance.

Along with these two elements, language and theatre architecture, the male gaze also contributes to their understanding of spectatorship. In the beginning of the essay, *Frame Up: Feminism Psychoanalysis Theatre* (1988), Freedman discusses how representation of woman in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1611) is being controlled by the male gaze. According to her, though, a boy in woman's garb is performing the role of a woman; it perhaps

⁴⁶ Rangacharya, Adhya. *Introduction to Bharata's Natyashastra*. Delhi: Munshiram Mahonarlal Publishers, Pvt. Ltd., 2011, p.4-5.

did not make a difference to the spectators.⁴⁷ Thus, it is their perception of womanhood that determines the representation of woman on stage.

Freedman's example from Shakespearean theatrical practice can be compared with Narayan Shripad Rajhans, famously known as Balgandharva who would play women's roles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Marathi musical plays. People would throng to the theatre houses to see him in the 'drenched *sari*.' In both these examples, female sexuality is perceived from the perspective of male gaze/desire. They ignore the female gaze in their discourse on the representation of the female body and the male gaze. Freedman refers to Sigmund Freud's idea of sexuality, which is patriarchal in nature and Joshi is looking for the prevalent Brahminical womanhood in Balgandharva's performances. They ignore women's perception of the representation of female sexuality on stage.

Jill Dolan in the essay, '*The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance*'⁴⁸ elaborates on how desire is being shifted from male to female depending on the nature of the performance. She, initially, highlights the representation of the female body, in the cultural feminist performance, in which it has been portrayed as a passive thing, to be exhibited and viewed according to male desire.

Then Dolan moves on to make a point by placing the female body in lesbian performances, in which she claims that the sexual identity of woman is blurred, because she thinks that it is possible because of the change in the viewership. In this example, she says that the sexual identity of woman blurs because she is either considered as *femme* or *butch* but I think that it is not just representation of the female body in lesbian performances that matters, but how it is presented. *Femme* is presented with an excessive feminine make-up, and *butch* with a leather

⁴⁷ Freedman, Barbara. 'Fame-up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Theatre' *Theatre Journal* Vol 40 No.3.1988, p385.

⁴⁸ Dolan, Jill. 'The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pronography and Performance.' *Theatre Journal* Vol. 39No. 2, 1987, p.157-158.

jacket and without make-up. Thus, both Freedman and Dolan bring out the difference between the representation of the female body and how it is perceived in heterosexual medieval performance, and lesbian performance respectively. As both the above-mentioned writers highlight the female body as a social construct, whether it is nude or in a specific garb, it could be interesting to see how the glorified womanhood has been represented and perceived by male as well as female spectators. The glorification of womanhood is observed in *Sangeet Natak*s in Marathi theatre.

Marathi *Sangeet Natak* in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has portrayed a glorified version of womanhood to maintain control over female sexuality through the glorification of customs like *sati*. The custom of *sati* has been worshipped in a play, *Thorle Madhavrao*, written by V. J. Kirtane. Vishnu Vatave was the leading actor who played woman's role in *Thorle Madhavrao*, (1861), a play based on the life of Thorle Madhavrao Peshwa. Vatave played the role of Ramabai, Madhavrao's wife who becomes a *sati* after his death. It should be noted here that in this case, women do not make a difference between the gender of the actor that is male and role in a play, female, because they are also following the male spectator's perception of the prevalent womanhood on stage. Thus, it is not only male spectators but also female who acquiesce with the patriarchal representation of woman on stage and it is evident in the above-mentioned example from *Thorle Madhavrao*.

0.5 An Outline of Dalit Feminism

The caste Hindu women in India, irrespective of their castes, have been the victims of endogamous nature of the caste system because endogamy maintains the caste system by obstructing people from marrying outside their castes. Jotirao Phule, a nineteenth century anti-caste activist recognized the endogamous nature of the caste system because he locates the oppression of women in upper castes as well as *shudra* patriarchy. Phule finds:

The 'double standard' which oppressed women was prevalent, he [Phule] argued, not only seen in the pitiable conditions of Brahman widows, but also in the patriarchy of *shudra* household in which the woman was expected to be loyal *pativrata* while the man was free to have as many women as he wanted.⁴⁹

In the above quotation, Omvedt finds two standards by which *Brahmin* and *shudra* women are victimized: *Brahminical* and *shudra* patriarchy. According to Omvedt, Phule seems to have realized the politics of controlling female sexuality as one of the ways of maintaining the caste system which was academically established as the principal feature of the caste system by Bhimrao Ambedkar in his presentation in Columbia University in 1916, on *Origin of Caste: Its Mechanism and Development in India*.⁵⁰

Jotirao Phule's comprehension of high castes and *shudra* patriarchy appears to be not different from Dalit patriarchy, though they differ at the level of caste hierarchy. The role of Dalit patriarchy in the suppression of Dalit women at political and cultural level has been explained in detail by Gopal Guru in the article, *Dalit Women Talk Differently*. In this article, he has brought out the struggle of Dalit feminism as an autonomous group of women by pointing out the differences between Dalit feminism and other autonomous groups of women, mainly high caste women.

In *Dalit Women Talk Differently*, (1995:2549) Guru not only explains the differences between Dalit feminism and high caste feminism but emphasizes the political and cultural suppression of Dalit women at the hands of Dalit patriarchy. He points out that Dalit men do not give enough representation to Dalit women in the anti-caste movement and Dalit women are

⁴⁹ Mugali, Shiladhar Yallappa, and Priyadarshini Sharanappa Amadihal. "Mahatma Jyotirao Phule's Views on Upliftment of Women as Reflected in Sarvajanic Satyadharma." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 69, 2008, p.693.

⁵⁰ http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealcac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_castes.html

deprived of the central position as far as conferences on Dalit literature are concerned. According to him, Dalit women hold Dalit men responsible for ignoring the presence of Dalit women in literature and their writing in the literary discussions. Guru is of the opinion that Dalit women are victims of marginalization as a result of Brahminical patriarchy in general and Dalit patriarchy.⁵¹

A similar opinion has been expressed by Chhaya Datar (1999:2966) in her criticism of Dalit patriarchy. She believes that political parties and organizations, which would boast of the eradication of the caste system, denied representation to Dalit women in political and cultural spheres. To substantiate her stand, she explains the denial of representation to Dalit women with reference to The Republican Party of India and Dalit Panthers. She blames them for ignoring the oppression of women as a result of Dalit patriarchy:

The parties representing Dalit votes such as the
Republican Party of India have never offered
seats to Dalit women while bargaining for seats
with the other political parties. Dalit Panthers
never took up women's issues in their revolt
against Brahminical culture during the 1970s.⁵²

In this sense, Dalit women seem to be the victims of Dalit patriarchy, which is nothing but the culmination of endogamy that maintains the caste system.

Endogamy seems to be one of the reasons for the exploitation of women irrespective of their castes but Dalit feminism and high caste feminism differ from each other in the respect of

⁵¹ Gopal Guru. "Dalit Women Talk Differently." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 30, no. 41/42, 1995, p.2549.

⁵² Datar, Chhaya. "Non-Brahmin Renderings of Feminism in Maharashtra: Is It a More Emancipatory Force?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, no. 41, 1999, p.2966

hierarchical position of their respective castes. The high caste women are proud of a higher position in the caste hierarchy in comparison with Dalit feminism.

The difference between Dalit women and the high caste women in terms of their hierarchical positions in the caste system has been explored by Uma Chakravarti in *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2003:03-04) with reference to the implementation of the Mandal Commission. She states that though high caste women and Dalit women are victims of endogamy, they are poles apart when it comes to reservation for formerly untouchable castes and Other Backward Castes. She has taken cognizance of the protest against the implementation of the Mandal Commission that created 'a bunch of castes, called as 'Other Backward Castes'. According to her, in Delhi, the high caste Hindu women, especially students of colleges and universities were protesting the reservation policy because they thought that they would have to marry jobless people from their respective castes.

Chakravarti is of the opinion that for the protesting women, the implementation of the Mandal Commission would take away jobs from high caste men and as a result they would have to marry jobless men from their caste. By addressing the issue of reservation, based on caste, Chakravarti reveals an inability of high caste women to marry outside their castes. According to her, it is probably caste and not class that governs their decisions to marry within their castes.⁵³

Sharmila Rege has also found the fissure between high caste feminism and Dalit feminism as far as caste is concerned. She blames the Left-party based women's organizations, which is essentially high caste feminism, for considering class and caste as equal. Further she opines that both these groups of women have ignored Brahmnism in the analysis of exploitation of

⁵³ Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Kolkata: Stree, 2003. p.03-04.

women, caused by caste hierarchy. Her allegation against the Left-party based women's organization is explained in the following quotation:

It is clear that while the left-party based women's organizations collapsed caste into class, the autonomous women's groups collapsed caste into sisterhood-both leaving Brahminism unchallenged.⁵⁴

Rege says that there is no doubt that autonomous women's groups and the left-party based women's groups have addressed issues concerning women of Dalit, tribal and minority communities like agitations against dowry system but they have failed to win the trust of Dalit women. Rege desires that autonomous groups of women, left-party based women and Dalit women come together in order to overcome 'narrow identity politics', a hindrance to the collective identity of women but before forming such identity, she expects all the groups to recognize each other's struggles for dignified life as a woman:

The Dalit feminist standpoint which emerges from the practices and struggles of Dalit women... may originate in the works of Dalit feminist intellectuals but it cannot flourish if isolated from the experiences and ideas of other groups who must educate themselves about the histories, the preferred social relations and utopias and the struggles of the marginalized.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Sharmila Rege. "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, no. 44, 1998. p.43

⁵⁵ Sharmila Rege. "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, no. 44, 1998. p.43

The alliance between Dalit feminism and other factions of feminism in India seems to be a distant reality because there are some differences among women in India, especially differences based on the caste hierarchy and educational background of women, to be settled before the formation of the collective identity for women in India. The reservation against such alliance has already been raised by Dalit feminists like Chhaya Datar and Shailaja Paik.

Chhaya Datar, in her article entitled *Non-Brahmin Renderings of Feminism in Maharashtra: Is it a more Emancipatory Force?* (1999) has explained the limitations of the possible alliance of women's groups in India. She has given some instances of the clashes between high caste feminism and Dalit feminism. For instance, she criticizes high caste feminists for being the spokesperson for Dalit feminism and blames the same for not allowing Dalit feminists to get to the podium to voice their problems. Another allegation, she has leveled against the high caste women's groups, residing in urban areas is that they are not aware of the lives of rural women and the upper caste urban women cannot speak on behalf of the rural women.⁵⁶

In comparison to Datar, Shailaja Paik in *Amachya Jalmachi Chittarkatha (the Bioscope of Our Lives): Who is my Ally?* (2009: 41) perhaps comes up with more clarity in the case of the alliance between Dalit feminism and high caste feminism. As per her understanding, feminism in India has been mainly the prerogative of high caste women who have concentrated on class based patriarchal violence against women even if they are essentially victims of the caste system. Paik looks at the demand for alliance as a political ploy of high caste feminism to *sanskritize* Dalit feminism in the name of forming a homogeneous identity for women in India. She raises an important point, the prioritization of caste instead of class as the crucial point in

⁵⁶ Datar, Chhaya. "Non-Brahmin Renderings of Feminism in Maharashtra: Is It a More Emancipatory Force?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 41, 1999. p.2967.

the collective gender identity for women in India and the inclusion of tribal women in the collective gender identity.⁵⁷

Thus, the Dalit woman is mainly a victim of caste hierarchy, maintained through endogamy rather than her economic class because her economic status is the result of the position of caste in the caste hierarchy. As far as the alliance between Dalit feminism and high caste feminism is concerned, it seems possible on the ground of the recognition of caste as one of the main reasons behind the plight of both the aforesaid factions of feminism.

In summing it up, it can be said that Dalit is a caste identity as opposed to ‘the Dalit Panthers’ perception of Dalit as a victim of caste, class, economic and gender discrimination. Further, it has been categorized into its facets such as religion, culture, language and gender to bring out the distinctiveness of Dalit identity. Through all these facets, it is observed that it has not been static but dynamic in its nature as it has gone through many transformations and still looks for perfection which is a continuous process of development. The identity of Dalits, mentioned in this chapter is in accordance with Judith Butler’s idea of identity which she perceives in the case of performativity of being. She says:

Identities are not made in a single moment in time.
They are made again and again. This does not mean
identities are made radically new every time they are
made, but only it takes some time for identities to be
brought out; they are dynamic and historical. ⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Paik, Shailaja. “Amchya Jalmachi Chittarkatha (The Bioscope of Our Lives): Who Is My Ally?” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, no. 40, 2009, p.41.

⁵⁸ Vasu Reddy, and Judith Butler. “Troubling Genders, Subverting Identities: Interview with Judith Butler.” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, Vol. 62, 2004, p.116

0.6 Outline of this Dissertation:

I have chosen to have three main chapters for this dissertation besides the introduction and conclusion. The chapters occur as:

Introduction

Chapter1: Marathi Dalit Theatre: Challenge to Upper Caste Hegemony

Chapter 2: Politics of Representation and Marathi Dalit Theatre

Chapter3: Dalit Women and Marathi Dalit Theatre

Conclusion

Now I will give a brief account of each chapter in brief:

Introduction:

In the introduction, I endeavour to locate caste as an endogamous notion. Before establishing caste as an endogamous notion, an attempt is made to explain how caste was perceived by the colonial census officials and anthropologists who paid attention to occupation and physical features of people belonging to different castes. In the introduction, Dalit as a caste identity has also been justified by referring to Vinay Srivastava, Padmanabh Samarendra, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and Dipankar Gupta. The idea of representation is also explained with reference to Marathi Dalit theatre. The contribution by Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Barbara Freedman is considered to explain the idea of representation. At the end of the introduction, distinctive identity of Dalit women is elaborated on with reference to the works of Sharmila Rege, Shailaja Paik, Uma Chakravarti and Chhaya Datar.

Chapter I. Marathi Dalit Theatre: Challenge to Upper Caste Hegemony

In the first chapter, an attempt has been made to locate upper caste hegemony in Marathi theatre, especially through the performance of *Seetswayamwar* (1843). Even the introduction

of English education and liberal thoughts in colonial India did not make any difference to upper caste hegemony in Marathi theatre. It was maintained through adaptation of English plays and translation of Sanskrit plays. It was challenged by *Tritiya Ratna* (1855) , a play by Jotirao Phule, Satyashodhak Jalsa and Ambedkari Jalsa but it remained till the rise of the Dalit Panthers. The activism of the Dalit Panthers made upper caste Marathi dramatists take notice of caste discrimination.

Chapter II: Politics of Representation and Marathi Dalit Theatre

The second chapter deals with the representation of Dalits by non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists. They differ from each other because non-Dalit dramatists depict Dalit activism as opportunist and revengeful. On the contrary, Dalit dramatists portray Dalits as liberal and inclusive in their approach towards upper caste characters. Non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists are also different with respect to the representation of inter-caste marriage, linguistic identity of Dalits and portrayal of rural Dalits.

Chapter III: Dalit Women and Marathi Dalit Theatre

In the third chapter, the difference between upper caste and Dalit women characters is noticed with respect to caste, class, education, a variety of language they use and how they are represented. Besides this, the distinctive identity of Dalit woman is illustrated along with systemic, epistemic and brutal violence against them. Victimization of Dalit women characters are located in their caste identity and lack of education. They are also seen to be victims of Dalit patriarchy that does not allow them to enter public places like college quarters and upper caste localities.

0.7 Conclusion:

In the conclusion, the argument in the dissertation is summarised in order to provide an overview of the dissertation. An attempt is also made to assess why Marathi Dalit theatre is in

decline after 1990s and the reason is detected in the decline of Dalit activism and repetitive nature of Marathi Dalit theatre.

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