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THEORY AND PRACTICE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction:

"Any thought, any idea, any theory, is simply a way of seeing, a way of viewing an object for a particular vantage point. It may be useful, but that usefulness is dependent upon particular circumstances--the time, the place, the conditions to which it is applied. If our thoughts are taken to be final, to include all possibilities, to be exact representations of reality, than eventually we run up against conditions where they become irrelevant. If we hold them in spite of their irrelevance, we are forced either to ignore the facts or to apply some sort of force to make them fit. In either case, fragmentation is the result"

Bohen Xi

These words of wisdom by Bohen Xi, a Chinese philosopher, eloquently sums up in few words, all that we attempt to show in our thesis. Ideas, thoughts and theories are often held in fixity, as a matter of truth, and of life and death. In the process, the dynamism and the growth of ideas is lost. What remains are the rigid, dogmatic claims of different positions which in themselves are nothing but different ways of seeing reality.

There exist different perceptions on women's oppression in India and of ways to overcome them. However, it appears, in the first instance that these different perceptions have not led to a celebration of a plural practice of feminism. Instead, they have led to divisiveness and sectarian tendencies within the movement. They have also led to an inclusion and exclusion of certain issues as women's issues thus creating a hierarchy of issues in the process. This has lead to legitimatisation of the affiliation of certain groups with the women's movement and at the same time invalidated the affiliation of certain groups as being a part of the women's movement.

In this connection, Kishwar (1990) notes that the labels of bourgeoisie feminists, radical feminist, marxist feminists or socialist feminist are used not "as descriptions of positions taken by individuals or groups or the work done by them but as epithets to condemn people you don't like, that is as good or bad character certificates". She states" label givers assumed that the most respectable term was "socialist feminist". This was usually reserved for oneself and one's friends, as proof of one's correct political credentials. Those one did not like were sought to be condemned as "bourgeois feminists" or "radical feminists"......These versions of available isms have been used as sticks with which to beat up people, to stifle intellectual growth and enquiry, to frighten people from thinking things out for themselves, to bully them into blindly accepting formula ridden politics and repeat meaningless mantras, and to subject them to slander if they resist" (p4). In this way Kishwar shows the divisive effects that feminist theories can achieve, through its claims to truth, as theories of emancipation.

The sectarian and divisive tendencies within the movement remains a point of concern for me as also many of the movement activists. This paper arises from this concern as it explores the discourse on women's movement in India. Our views will reflect our own circumlocation, viz, that of a political activist engaged with the struggle of adivasis[1] in India, for last six years, and as a woman belonging to a middle class and an uppercaste in Hindu

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[1]   Throughout this text, we will be using the word 'adivasis' instead of tribals. We do this for two reasons : a)the word 'tribe'has been used as a evolutionary categorisation. Nirmal Sengupta (1988) points out to an extension of evolutionary race theories among colonized people, by the colonizers, thus introducing the notion of differential evolutionary achievements among colonized people, through the usage of the word 'tribes'. He points out to the internal racism within India through the usage of the word 'tribes' so as to fit in people who did not confirm to Aryan hindu caste tradition(pp943-944). b)Secondly we use the word 'adivasi' because people we have worked with as also those elsewhere in India call themselves adivasis and identify with this identity. The word 'adivasi' connotes original settlers.

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religion by birth in India.

The paper will explore following lines of argument:

In the first place, we argue that women's movements can be treated as 'discursive practices'[2]. As discursive practices, women's movements redefine the traditional understandings of theory and praxis. They do not depend for their existence on prior theories of emancipation, but rather seek a new relation with theory through localised articulation and understandings of emancipation. In this way, we displace the foundationalist claims of theories of emancipation (here feminist theories) in organising an (feminist) emancipatory practice. Instead we unravel the functioning of theories of emancipation (here feminist theories), as discursive practices, producing certain effects, through their claims to truth.

Feminism as a discursive practice aspires to emancipate the subject 'woman'. However, the category 'woman' is itself discursively organised. However, our main contention is that, the constructed nature of the category 'woman' does not exclude possibilities of emancipatory practices around that category. The category 'woman' is discursively organised through articulation. However, this very practice of articulation constructs the category 'woman' as a fragmentary whole, given the fact that, every attempt to fix a centre through any articulation, is always subverted by its field of discursivity. In other words, different articulations around category woman, could open up a possibility of different, localised emancipatory practices, based on solidarity, but without suppressing differences under the overarching category 'woman'.

This opens up a possibility of plural practice of feminism. Such a practice would replace the notion of 'Emancipation' informed by theories of emancipation, and instead work with the notion of 'different forms of emancipations' based on localised discursively organised plural struggles. Such a practice could explore the possibility of coalition politics between different women's movements in India on different issues at different points of time. Recognition of plurality of women's movements is only a first step forward in creating a political culture of coalition rather than that of opposition. We finally argue that solidarity through coalition, in final instance, has to be sensitive towards practices of articulation. It is through practices of articulation, that solidarity or exclusion are made possible. In other words, it calls for certain ethics of articulation.

1.2   Objective of the study:

The study seeks to develop a conceptual framework that gives politics of difference a central place in feminist practice. The recent postmodernist trends in feminist theorising and organising have opened up important debates of organising politics around difference. The study seeks to enter these debates by contextualising its analysis in the Indian context. A major concern for us as also many more activists involved in women's struggles are sectarian and divisive tendencies within women's movement in India. This paper seeks to explore ways to counter such tendencies within movement politics by asserting that the question of difference between women, need not become a point of immobility but a point of solidarity towards the other. The paper hopes to achieve this by entering into a dialogue with different feminist activists theorising on women's movements in India.

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2   We borrow the understanding of discursive practice from Laclau and Mouffe, (1985). The concept of discursive practice affirms that every reality is constituted as an object of discourse, i.e as an object of articulation. It overcomes the dichotomy between "pure mental thoughts" and "outside reality". It also affirms that there can be no distinction between what are usually called as linguistic and behavioural aspects of social practice.

Thus the purpose of this paper is twofold: to argue for the necessity to recognise differences between women so as to contribute to the ways of overcoming them; and to contribute to the current debate in India, on implications of such recognition on any feminist theorising and organising.

1.3   Research Questions:

The following research questions will be addressed :

What effects does feminism as a discursive practice produce on social and political practices? How does the feminist theorising, as a discursive practice, articulate the category 'woman', and particularly so, in Indian context? What is the potential of such articulation in building up a political culture of coalition around different discursively organised struggles, and particularly so, in the Indian context?

1.4   Methodology:

The methodology adapted for this paper primarily draws from methods used in discourse analysis. Treating women's movement as discursive practices justifies our usage of discourse analysis as a critical analytical tool for our study. Discourse analysis will allow us to unravel the functioning of emancipatory theories (feminist theories) and their claim to 'truth'. The books/articles and documents to be used to illuminate on articulations around the category 'woman' are written by feminist academician cum activists involved with the struggles of women in India. This identity of these writers, is an important reason as to why we take their work for our discourse analysis. We recognise the authors of these writings as not just theoreticians involved in an academic debate but activists representing different women's movements. Further, the fact that they are involved in women's struggles, means that the discourses have an influencing effect on the movements themselves. Thus the reason as to why these writings are taken for the purpose of discourse analysis and not other.

1.5   Limitation and the Scope of the study:

The paper intends to develop a conceptual framework that gives the question of difference a central place in feminist political practice. The case of women's movement in India will illuminate on implications of such recognition for feminist political practice. As such the study does not claim to study the entire theory and practice of women's movement in India. Rather, certain cases in the Indian context are used to exemplify the above. Feminist theorisation in the Indian context is used for our discourse analysis. Here too, the study will engage into discussion with only those theorists, whose writings are available to this author, given the limitations of the research context and duration. As such the study does not claim to study all the trends in feminist theorising. However, we do feel that, however selective, the sample of feminist theorising taken for analysis is broad based enough to arrive at some generalisations in the Indian context.

1.6   Organisation of the paper:

Following this introductory chapter, chapter II seeks to develop a conceptual framework, for the analysis of the notion of 'differences' between women, which has been given a central place in feminist political practice since 1980. To do so, it draws from different theoretical strands. Its philosophical foundations are built upon the contributions of Foucault who shows in his works, the operations and effects of claims to truth. The chapter builds on these insights in the context of feminist theories, which as emancipatory theories, make certain claims to truth. This discussion also draws from the contributions of new social movement theorists. It critically

reviews different feminist emancipatory trajectories and the articulation of differences between women within them. It brings together Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' and Foucault's notion of 'discourse' to unravel the operation of power to argue for different forms of emancipations rather than 'Emancipation'. To be able to do so we build upon Laclau and Mouffe's notion of Radical democracy.

Chapter III analyses articulations of category 'woman' in Indian context. The approach used in this chapter is two fold : On one hand it draws from the conceptual framework to build its analysis, and on the other, it allows the experience in the Indian context to speak for itself, to illuminate on the objectives of our study. In the light of above, the chapter gives a background to the politics of women's movement in India, by looking at 'India' as a discourse of nationalism and an 'imaginary' construct. It also looks at the articulation of category 'woman' by the feminists and its appropriation by communalist and other forces who seek to objectify women. Finally, it looks at the articulation of differences between women in a) campaign against rape and b)in different articulations around the category 'woman' by different feminists in the Indian context.

Chapter IV will be the conclusions of this study.

2. FEMINISM, POWER, AND POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter deals with feminism as a discursive practice, focusing on the ways in which dimensions of theory and practice interact with each other. Central to this interaction are following issues: As an emancipatory project, feminism has borrowed from the traditional Marxist position, to converge its intellectual and political goals thus fusing theory with practice (Truong, 1989,p12). As such feminist emancipatory politics needs a notion of 'agency' or a meaningfully acting subject which it tries to emancipate. However, this very need for a meaningfully acting subject poses several problems. First, in the definition and identification of an 'ideal' conscious subject that acts in a 'meaningful way', there is a tendency among feminists to include and exclude certain subject positions. Second, in strategising and organising for change this tendency leads to essentialism and vanguardist positioning which affects fostering of solidarity. This raises a central question regarding what constitutes acting subject, and for whom is her/his actions meaningful.

In response to this question, several others have delved into a postmodernist framework that posits theorising about emancipation as a domain of power. Thus even the enlightenment project and its conscious rational subject is regarded as a construction. Taking this line of critique to it's conclusion would lead to an end of subject. This framework leads to a crisis for emancipatory projects which are left with no subject to emancipate. In the process, this framework does not allow us to understand and analyse the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that an emancipatory practice may engage in. This perspective then puts the vanguardist claims in emancipatory theories and practice under the carpet. In effect this perspective does not allow us to unravel the functioning of emancipatory theories, precisely because of their claim to truth. In our view, both the above frameworks are inadequate to understand the relationship between emancipatory theory and practice.

This chapter will point to some directions which will help to overcome the limitations of the above frameworks and at the same time preserve their critical potential. We suggest that new social movements have grown as a response and a challenge to the traditional fusing of theory with the practice. New social movements and womens movements can be treated as discursive practices. As discursive practices, we shall allow for the dispersion of the subject positions while displace the effects of the unified subject on a political practice by giving this totality and unity of an unified subject an 'imaginary' dimension. The shift in treating NSMs as discursive practices justifies our usage of discourse analysis as a critical analytical tool for our study. Discourse analysis will enable us unravel the functioning of emancipatory theories claiming to represent truth. This will allow us to analyse the knowledge-power-truth nexus. Thus we will not study theories to understand the social reality they claim to illuminate, but rather study the effects they produce as discursive practices, i.e as discourses which claim to be true. We argue that this mode of looking at the interaction between theory and practice does not have to give away the normative concerns articulated by emancipatory practice. This analysis will enable us to develop a framework which formulates the notion of different forms of women's emancipation. We argue that this perspective articulates a normative framework which rests between the logic of complete identity and complete difference. Such emancipatory practice would have politics of difference at its core.

2.2 The Politics of truth and 'discourse' as an analytical category:

Emancipatory theories through claims to 'truth' create certain effects. We believe that concept of discourse could be used as a critical analytical tool to study these effects of 'truth'. Today, the concept 'discourse' is used by sociologists very freely in any academic writing. The concept has been much popularised after Foucault's

work. Yet very few scholars either use it in a Foucauldian way or develop their own understanding of this concept. In this subsection we will state how and why we use this concept in our study. Earlier, the power-knowledge relation was disclosed by the critique of ideology. Now the critique of discourse is used to expose this nexus.

The concept 'ideology' finds its antecedents in Philosophy which used it to denote 'systems of ideas'. Sociology appropriated the term to analyse social relations and social life (Mann M, 1986,p22). Emancipatory politics used the critique of ideology for the first time to articulate the nexus between knowledge and power. This articulation has been from a certain vantage point which presupposed the disclosure of truth. The 'true' knowledge was taken to be the vantage point from where ideological distortions were revealed. Ideology works in such a way that it makes the false appear as true. Thus, in critique of ideology, power operates by creating an effect of an illusion, in other words, ideology is not true knowledge, it is distorted knowledge. The critique of ideology carries with it three simultaneous assumptions: a) The relation between knowledge and power is negative, i.e power distorts knowledge. b)There exists a subject in whose interest the power works, by producing ideology. c)True knowledge is possible.

The classical Marxist theory understood ideology in terms of a base-superstructure relationship. Ideology it claimed, is an expression of a class myth, a part of superstructure, which served as a propaganda to justify the base, i.e economic structure. As a critique of ideology, Marxism claimed the status of science through its claim to being scientific (Oruka O,1985, p43). Thus the classical Marxist theory, identified ideology with 'false consciousness of the agents'.

Gramsci bought in a fundamental shift in this conception of power and ideology. He introduced the notion of power through the concept of 'hegemony'. The concept of hegemony was introduced to understand how domination works through consent of the oppressed through a whole range of ideological field of culture. Gramsci through this concept showed that power operates through the consent of the oppressed. This then radically alters the content, nature and form of power from the classical Marxian notion of power. It means power of the dominant has to be recognised and accepted by the dominated. Only then power can operate as power. This then makes power contingent on the dominated. In this sense, then power can never operate in a singular and mechanical way i.e that of dominant over dominated. To the extent that power is dependent for its recognition on the oppressed, the oppressed too holds power over the oppressor. Thus power in this conception ceases to only act as a repressive force. It can repress but it can also be used in the opposite way i.e to resist. This conception of power then gives the domination a relational status than an absolute status. Also it means every domination carries within it the seeds of its resistance. Gramsci thus gives power a positive force in his critique of ideology. In doing so, he goes beyond the reductionist base-super structure model, which treats ideology as a part of superstructure.

The critique of ideology was further developed by Louis Althusser who was influenced by structuralism. The impetus to the development of structuralism lies mainly in the works of Saussure. Saussure argued that meaning of the words derives from the structures of language, not the objects to which the words refer. Saussure theorised language as "an abstract system, consisting of chains of signs. Each sign is made up of a signifier (sound or written image) and a signified (meaning). The two components of the sign are related to each other in an arbitrary way and there is therefore no natural connection between the sound image and the concept it identifies. The meaning of signs is not intrinsic but relational" (Weedon C, 1987,p23). For Saussure, meaning are not determined by anything positive but created by the differences between related concepts which the rules of a language recognise (Saussure, 1974, p120 quoted in Macdonnel, D, 1986,p10). Every concept gets its

meaning in 'articulation'[3].

Althusser, developed the Saussurean insights that language does not reflect an already existing social reality but constitutes social reality for us. Thus for Althusser, language structures various ideologies and is a place through which we represent to ourselves our lived relation to our material conditions of existence (Althusser, quoted in Weedon C, 1987, p26). It is from here that Althusser theorised "Ideology has a material existence" (Althusser, quoted in Macdonnel D, 1986,p74). For Althusser, 'ideas' and 'representations' were neither ideal nor real; they have no existence of their own. An "ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (Althusser quoted in Macdonnel D, 1986, p74). Althusser's analysis of 'ideological state apparatus' showed how domination operates and is reproduced through various sites within civil society. Thus Althusserian notion of ideology implied that civil society is also a seat of numerous relations of oppression, and in consequence, of antagonisms and democratic struggles (Laclau and Mouffe,1985,p 179).

The above trajectory gives us an understanding of shifts and displacements made in understanding, of how domination works through ideology. A radical breakthrough in the Marxist theory of ideology can be seen with Gramsci and later with Althusser's work who influenced post structuralist thought among his contemporaries, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Kristeva and others. The post structuralist turn in theory goes beyond the insights of structuralism and departs from the various earlier views of ideology given above. This is also where the concept of discourse as an analytical tool came to replace the concept of 'ideology' as a critical analytical tool to understand the nexus between power and knowledge amongst many post structuralist scholars.

The critique of discourse does away with the vantage point granted to the 'true' knowledge through which truth could be revealed. Instead it uses the logic underlying the critique of ideology to critique 'ideology' and to investigate, how, effect of 'truth' is created. By producing truth itself, power operates not by creating illusion but through truth itself. Foucault argues, why ideology cannot be a sufficient analytical tool to understand the relation between power and knowledge. He says,

> "The first is that, like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth ...... the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, **but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.** The second drawback is that the concept of ideology refers, I think necessarily, to something of the order of a subject. Thirdly, ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, etc" (emphasis mine) (Foucault, 1980a, p118).

In the above critique of 'ideology', Foucault shows that there is an implicit relation between discourse and any claim to truth, whether based on scientific facts or otherwise. According to Foucault, every society through various "mechanisms and instances" distinguishes between "true and false statements" and develops a "regime of truth" that is a type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true (Foucault, 1980a, p131). Truth in other words "is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements". Thus "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (Foucault, 1980a,p133). Further it is in this claim to truth that power and knowledge come together. Foucault thus

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3   We borrow the definition of 'articulation' from Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Articulation is any practice establishing a relation between differential elements or components of concepts such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice.

maintains that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together". Discourses are conceived by Foucault "as a series of discontinues segments whose tactical functions" are "neither uniform nor stable". Discourses cannot be imagined as " divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse or between dominant discourse and dominated one; but as multiplicity of discursive elements that can come in to play" in a given field of power relations (Foucault, 1980b, p100). Discourses are an "instrument and an effect of power" (Foucault, 1980b, p101). In this way Foucault builds up a framework that explores the relation between discourse, truth and power.

Discursive practices, for Foucault are, "rules, systems and procedures which constitute and are constituted by, our will to knowledge". All these comprise a realm of discursive practices i.e the order of discourse-a conceptual terrain in which knowledge is formed and produced. Discursive practices are thus characterised by "a delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories" (Foucault, 1977, p199). Discourse analysis for Foucault, are a methodological tools to explore these discursive practices : "it is more a question of determining the conditions under which it may be employed, of imposing a certain number of rules upon those individuals who employ it, thus denying access to everyone else. This amounts to a rarefaction among speaking subjects: none may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not from the outset qualified to do so" (Foucault,1970, p224).

We feel that discourse analysis as a critical analytical tool, will allow us to unravel the functioning of emancipatory theories (here theories regarding women's emancipation), claiming to represent the truth. On the one hand, the critique of ideology works through a claim of being scientific and true. On the other, critique of discourse is often used to disclaim every truth claim. This position, in our opinion, leads to relativism. We, in our thesis wish to avoid the following of this schema. Relativist positioning which disclaims 'truth' altogether cannot allow us to study the 'effects of truth'. Indeed, effect of truth can only be studied, by granting an existence of 'truth'. **We use discourse analysis, not because we believe that 'truth' does not exists, but because we believe that 'truth' creates certain effects.** In other words, emancipatory theories achieve certain effect by a claim to truth. It is to study these 'effects' of the truth claim of emancipatory theories, that we use discourse analysis as an analytical tool in our thesis. Instead of giving emancipatory theories a vantage point through which one can discover the truth, we make emancipatory theories the object of our investigation, in so far as they make a claim to truth. As such, we do not suggest that the emancipatory theories are either true or false, or claim that we have a more true and more wholistic picture to offer.

Our attempt in this thesis, is neither to justify nor to falsify the claims of emancipatory theories. Our attempt is simply to understand and unravel the mode of their operation, in the hope that emancipatory politics be better grounded. As Foucault has articulated:

> "the essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, **but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth.** The problem is not changing people's consciousness--or what's in their heads--but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power), but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. **The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself"** (emphasis mine) (Foucault,1980a,p133)

It is in the above spirit that we undertake to write this research thesis. Our attempt will thus be to investigate the functioning of truth in emancipatory politics so that our emancipatory politics is grounded in a 'new politics of truth'.

2.3   New Social Movements as discursive practices :

A notion of praxis has always been used to denote the inter-relation between theory and practice. Indeed emancipatory projects claim that a dialectical relation exists between them. Theory has always been regarded to be as an intellectual domain, while practice has been regarded to be rooted in a concrete terrain. It has also been presupposed that theory makes the practice intelligible to the actors while the practice grounds the abstraction of the theory in concrete contexts. This mediation of theory and practice was done by bringing in a notion of a conscious unified subject. It was the 'consciousness' of a subject that mediated theory and praxis. From this perspective, emancipatory theories bought in notions of false consciousness and thus argued for conscientisation or consciousness raising processes. We do not contest what theories think about their relation to practice. However, we shall not study theories with regard to their self understanding. Beyond the self understanding of theories we wish to study the effect of theory on practice.

Historically, action has been analysed in terms of structure and motivation (i.e the meaning that the actor attaches to his own action). Different theorists have given primacy to either structure or motivation depending upon her/his theoretical orientation. Collective actions were also viewed as the result of various types of action and elements of structure and motivation. After the world war, we have witnessed the emergence of some mainstream theories of collective behaviour, namely through the work of Kornhauser, Smelser etc. These theorists conceptualised social movements as forms of collective behaviour. These theories saw collective action as a pathological reaction to the strains produced by modern societies. Nonrational components of collective action was emphasised. Collective action was seen as a result of structural changes which trigger a breakdown of the organs of social control and legitimation (Melucci, 1989,p191). Further, theorists drawing their orientation from Marx analysed social movements primarily in terms of class conflicts.

The late sixties and early seventies saw the emergence of student movements in the west. The existing collective behaviour theories or structural functionalist theories were considered inadequate to explain the student movement. Neither the collective behaviour model which emphasised irrational psychological reactions nor the Marxian mode of analysis which emphasised social conflict in terms of class conflict could explain the student movement. Thus new theoretical formulations were sought to explain and understand social movements. Late seventies and eighties has thus seen a new shift in the theorisation on social movements. Social movements are increasingly theorised as new social movements (NSMs) by the new social movement theorists. In this discussion, we delineate five main positions, viz, that of Melucci, Touraine, Habermas, Cohen and Laclau and Mouffe.

Melucci critiques a generalised and loose use of the term social movement. He reserves the term for specific kinds of movements. He defines analytically, social movements as a form of collective action a)based on solidarity b)carrying on a conflict c)breaking the limits of the system in which the action occurs (1985,p795). Melucci argues that the conflicts of the eighties reveal new contradictions, which imply an intense redefinition of the location of social movements and their forms of action. He further clarifies,

> "Actors in conflicts are increasingly temporary, and their function is to reveal the stakes, to announce to society that a fundamental problem exists in a given area. They have a growing symbolic function; one can probably speak of a prophetic function. They are a kind of new

media. They do not fight merely for material goals, or to increase their participation in the system. They fight for **symbolic and cultural stakes**, for a different meaning and orientation for social action". (emphasis mine) (1985,p797).

The meaning of the action is found in the action itself more than in the pursued goals. He states that these movements display new organisational forms. He states

"new organisational form of contemporary movements is not just "instrumental" for their goals. It is goal in itself. Since the action is focused on cultural codes, the **form** of the movement is a message, a **symbolic challenge** to the dominant patterns......The medium, the movement itself as a new medium, is the message". (p801) (emphasis mine).

The above perspective developed by Melucci clearly shows that he locates the novelty of the new social movements in terms of their reflexivity. Movement, themselves acts as a new media, and are a **message** in themselves. The movements through their existence offer different meaning of reality. They challenge and redefine the dominant logic on a symbolic ground. They start with the here and now of individual experience and do not separate individual change from collective action and change. Since movements challenge the dominant cultural codes, their mere existence signifies "a reversal of symbolic systems embodied in power relationships" (p813). All this points out to the reflexive capacity of the actors and the reflexive character of the movement itself. In this sense Melucci attributes discursivity to the movements.

Another perspective offered in this direction is by Touraine who argues that, social movement is an agent of conflict for the social control of the **main cultural patterns** (1985,p785). He argues against the generalised use of the concept 'social movement' to describe all kinds of conflict. Instead, Touraine argues that there is 'a' central conflict existing in any given type of society. All other conflicts can be considered as disintegrated or partial forms of the central type (Touraine,1985,p760). He calls this central conflict as social movement and defines it by a clear interrelation between conflicting actors and the **cultural stakes** of their conflict (1985,p760). These cultural patterns, for him are of three main kinds: "a model of knowledge, a type of investment, and ethical principles". Touraine calls these as representations of truth, production, and morality which depend on the capacity of achievement, of self production, of a given society (1985,p755).Touraine argues that this type of a social movement can take place only in a specific type of social life and society, viz, post industrial society. He thus calls these social movements as NSMs.

In this way Touraine differentiates the old social movements from NSM through the discursive character of NSMs. He states that past social movements opposed domination through meta social principles. NSMs do not challenge domination through a call to metasocial principles but through a direct call to personal and collective freedom and responsibility. NSMs are no longer inspired by the images of an ideal society but by a search for creativity (p779). In other words, metasocial principles i.e a search for truth and an ideal society no more act as a mediatory force for the emergence and sustenance of new social movements. NSMs relate to 'truth' in a different way. They remain aware of the dangers involved in granting any truth claim a foundational status in their political practice.

Cohen(1985) too like Touraine characterises the identity of NSMs with self limiting radicalism rather than with a search for an ideal utopia and truth. She argues that the new identity can be interpreted through the new forms of consciousness exhibited by the NSMs. These characteristic forms of consciousness shown by NSMs are a)the relevant actors do not seek to return to an undifferentiated community free of all power and forms of inequality b)The actors limit themselves vis a vis one another. They struggle in the name of autonomy, plurality and difference without renouncing the egalitarian principles of modern civil society. c)actors are self limiting

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regarding their values. They do not contest cultural values as the uncompromisable solution to the social problems. They are willing to relativise their values with respect to one another through discourse on goals and consequences.4) Democratically structured associations and public spaces, plurality of types of political actors and actions within civil society, are viewed as ends in themselves (Cohen 1985,pp669-670). It is through the above characteristic forms of consciousness shown by NSMs that Cohen characterises the identity of NSMs with 'self limiting radicalism' rather than with a search for an ideal utopia and truth.

Habermas, essentially a communicative theorist, understands new social movements and the new social conflicts arising not out of problems of distribution but in concern for "grammar of forms of life" (Habermas, 1981,p33). According to Habermas, the capitalist development has attacked the "organic foundations of the life world" (p35). Thus for him, the new conflicts arise "at the seam between system and life world". The motivating force behind most of the alternative projects and action groups is "the pain of withdrawal symptoms in a culturally impoverished and unilaterally rationalized praxis of everyday life" (p36). For Habermas, the creation of alternative communication groups based on age, skin, religion, sex etc are a search for personal and collective identity. They intend to promote the revitalization of possibilities for expression and communication and hence operate in provincial small spaces, decentralised forms of interaction and despecialised activities (p36). In summary, it can be said that essentially, Habermas understands NSMs as 'meaning' givers to the otherwise impoverished every day life that people live in this capitalist society. Acting primarily as communicators of meaning rather than on any abstract notions of equality, justice, and truth, NSMs display a reflexivity.

Laclau and Mouffe too, after Habermas argue that capitalist relations have penetrated in all spheres of human life which has led to commodification of social life, destroying previous social relations and replacing them with the logic of capitalist accumulation. Thus an individual is subordinated to capital not only as a seller of labour power but through their incorporation in multitude of social relations; culture, free time, illness, education , sex and even death, i.e no domain of individual and collective life has escaped capitalist relations. Further the commodification has been accompanied by an increasing bureaucratization of public life. Thus new forms of subordination have arisen from this 'new' society, giving rise to new forms of resistances (1985,pp161-162). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue against a sutured social[4] and state that it is no more possible to fix any meaning of any event independent of any practice of articulation. Thus there can be no a priori privileged point given to any antagonism, which are themselves discursively constituted and undergo a process of constant displacement. In other words every moment of practice becomes also a moment of theorisation. The moment of theorisation and practice is no more deferred to any foundational moment either present in the past or in the future. What remains is the plural discursively articulated practice and multiple points of antagonisms. It is in these plurality of spaces that the NSMs arise.

All the theories discussed above agree on one chief character of NSMs: there discursivity. Indeed all the theorists differ on the conditions of their emergence. For example, while Touraine and Melucci explain the conditions of their emergence in post-industrial society, Habermas and Cohen attribute it to capitalist societies, while Laclau and Mouffe to advanced industrial societies. From our thesis point of view, the differences over there conditions of emergence do not have much significance[5]. We are more interested in the characterisation

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4   By sutured social, they mean closed society or totality.

5   While we accept the importance of the debate on the conditions for emergence of new social movements, we feel that it is beyond the scope of this research paper to enter into the same. Thus although we discuss in the later part of the thesis, women's movement in India as discursive practices, we will not get into an elaboration on what kind of a society India is.

that these theorists attribute to NSMs in terms of the discursivity they display. From the above discussion, we can summarise the following:

1)self reflexive character of NSMs: As stated before, NSMs display a certain reflexivity. However, this reflexivity does not mean self enclosed relation. On the contrary, it establishes a communicative relation with the other, which communicates meaning to the other.

2)NSMs relation with the truth: NSMs are not mediated through notions of equality, justice and truth. They problematise their relationship to truth. Instead of surrendering their reflexive power to the truth, they remain alert against the power relation that are effected through the very claims to be true. Through an inventiveness they perpetually displace themselves with regard to truth.

3)NSMs relation with the theory: NSMs are themselves a moment of theorisation. They do not depend for their existence on prior theories of emancipation. This does not mean that they invent new theory. What they invent is a new relationship to theory. The analysis of NSM theorists show that **structurally**, a new self understanding within social movements has emerged. NSMs struggle for discursive stakes. They contest and struggle over cultural stakes, viz, 'meanings'. For the older social movements, the struggle over the meaning was itself secondary in so far as the meaning was always subordinated and made instrumental to higher goals, whether revolution or equality or justice etc.

We believe that although the initial impetus to women's movement came from Universalist bourgeois democratic values of equality, liberty and justice, it has in its practice, gone beyond the parameters drawn by the above values. As Habermas (1981) says "emancipation of women means more than the merely formal attainment of equality and elimination of male prejudices. It means the toppling of concrete life styles determined by male monopolies" (p35). Further, the present trends within feminism emphasise difference with plural struggles discursively organised. As Laclau and Mouffe argue, "Feminism ..... exists in multiple forms, which depend upon the manner in which the antagonism is discursively constituted..... There are therefore a plurality of discursive forms of constructing an antagonism on the basis of the different modes of women's subordination.....The forms of articulation of an antagonism, therefore, far from being predetermined, are the result of a hegemonic struggle" (1985,p168). The recent emphasis on difference in feminism has led to discursive struggles, viz, struggle and contestation over the meaning of the category 'woman'. In this sense, we argue that women's movement can be treated as discursive practices.

2.4   Feminist emancipatory trajectory and their analytical categories

The second wave of feminism has created many emancipatory trajectories, each aspiring to emancipate the subject 'woman'. These trajectories have shown us the importance of looking at the struggles of representation, inclusion and exclusion imminent in the usage of the category 'woman'. One general point of this history has been the tension between search of a common bond for the struggle and the articulation of difference. This tension articulated by the logic of complete identity and that of complete difference remains unresolved.

The central tenet of radical feminism is that gender inequalities are the outcome of an autonomous system of patriarchy and that gender inequalities are the primary form of social inequality. They also argue that Patriarchy is a universal system in which men dominate women (Abbott et al, 1990, p217). While radical feminism has uncovered the ways in which even the most intimate and personal relationships are political --that is, are power relationships, it has also been critiqued for failing to take sufficient account of the different forms that patriarchal relationships have taken in different societies, its tendency to discount the differences that exist in the experiences of women from different social classes (Abbott et al,1990, p220). Thus it is argued that 'gender' as an analytical category is inadequate to understand women's oppression as also to strategise around for

women's emancipation. The biological reductionism with emphasis on woman's body by some strands of radical feminism inspite of the distinction radical feminism makes between sex and gender is another ground for criticism.

Socialist feminism attempts to develop an analysis that recognises the dual existence of two systems: economic and the sex-gender system. These are then analysed by applying Marxist concepts such as relations of production etc to the domestic sphere. This analysis is extended to North-South difference between women[6]. In the process socialist feminists displaced the unified concept of woman and included the class, nation, race etc difference within the body of their analysis. In other words, Socialist feminism, has based its analysis on the experiential difference between women. We feel that the use of the notion of difference as experiential diversity is inadequate. We fully agree with the critique of Chhachhi and Pittin (McMillan press forthcoming), viz, that socialist feminists in trying to accommodate these differences, have a tendency to stress the primacy of one identity over the other, or simply to add together gender, ethnicity and class as parallel identities based on parallel systems of domination, patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism (p82). We cite some of the work of these socialist feminists to exemplify our above contentions.

Some of these feminists have generally followed the standpoint perspective in their emphasis on difference between women. Standpoint epistemology perspective believes that the less powerful members of society have the potential for a more complete view of social reality than other because their disadvantaged position grants them a certain 'epistemic privilege' over others (Nielson J, 1990,p10; Narayan U, 1989, p262; Hawkesworth M, 1989, p536). These positions has, on one hand affirmed the validity of different experience while on the other invoked varying degrees of essentialism and intellectual separatism. For example, Amos and Parmar's essay (1984), titled "Challenging Imperial Feminism", attack the ethnocentrism and racism within the feminist movement. They state "Feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as 'feudal residues' or label us 'traditional', also portray us as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of western feminism. They need to be continually challenged, exposed for their racism and denied any legitimacy as authentic feminists" (p7). They further challenge the analysis and theorisations and experience of white feminists in the area of family, sexuality and women's peace movement. They say "each of these areas, in very different ways point to the 'imperial' nature of feminist thought and practice"(p8).

These feminists argued against the claims of universality of knowledge produced pointing out to the need to understand the difference between women based on race, class, ethnicity etc, thus arguing for black feminism a political identity, constructed in opposition to white feminism but which also suggested a common interest within and in opposition to white feminism. (A.Davis, 1984,p118; Amos and Parmar,1984,pp17-18). They not only argued for separate black feminist theory but also for a separatist political practice. In summary it can be said that although the above standpoint theorists argue against totalitarian theories and analysis, their own standpoint allows them to build up analysis that totalises reality of black and oppressed women. In short, such position simply means, instead of one totality, we have several totalities. In other words, **it recreates a macro totalisations at micro levels under the guise of politics of plurality and difference.**

Here it might be useful to look at Barrett's (1987) elaboration on the concept of difference. Barrett differentiates between three uses of the concept of difference. According to Barrett, the first category of difference is a recognition of diverse social experience, i.e recognition of difference as experiential diversity(p30). The second general use of the concept of 'difference' can be best located historically in the fundamental insight of

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6   See the writings on Internationalisation of Capital by feminist writers; Maria Mies et al etc.

saussurean linguistics, that meaning is constructed through linguistic opposition rather than by absolute reference .....i.e understanding meaning as constructed by position and relationship that is by difference (p33). One of the major achievements of this approach to difference has been to criticize and deconstruct the 'unified subject'(p35). This approach rather denotes multiple and shifting subject positions i.e identity in a fluid form, which does not attain a unity and is deconstructive in its approach to gendered subjectivity. The third difference raises the question of the fixity of sexual difference.It critiques the essentialism in thinking about sexual identity and recasts subjectivity and sexual identity in a fluid form (pp37/38).

In our view, socialist feminism addresses only first level of difference which in our opinion is inadequate, since it rests on the existence of an epistemologically unproblematic reality of a female subject which leads to essentialism. In our opinion, it is the post structuralist critique of subject that truly destabilises (to borrow the word from Barrett and Philips) theory as also any emancipatory practice. To start with, the post-structuralist critique denies any stability and a unity of any identity. In other words, it denies any coherent conception of identity and thus any conception of a subject or a agency. For example, if everything is in motion and is in constant flux, i.e if the moment of unity is denied at any point of time, then how can we ever hope to have any theory, since any theorisation is indeed a moment of totalisation? How can we ever hope to develop or have any emancipatory practice, since every such practice needs to have a coherent subject (i.e a unity and thus a moment of totalisation) to act as also to emancipate? To ask in Judith Butler's words "if there is no subject, who is left to emancipate?" (1990,p327). If there is no subject, then, on what bases can one talk about the concept of 'men' or 'women'? Can we do away with the essentialism that the use of concept may imply?

Feminist theory and praxis rests on the concept of 'woman'.The question that needs to be asked is :from where does the concept of 'woman' gets its meaning? What is it to be distinctively 'woman'? In a feminist discourse, the word 'woman' derives its meaning out of gender differentiation. Thus the concept of gender is immanent to any feminist project without which there is no one gendered subject (female subject) to either act or to liberate. However, if we are problematizing this category itself as Judith Butler[7] does, then on what grounds can one use this category 'women' without being essentialist and using it in such a way that does not have exclusionary implications. The above analysis then suggests that, critique of subject, when applied to feminist theories, means more than assuming the multiple and shifting identities of a unity called 'woman'. As Butler says (1990,p327), "the political critique of subject" questions "making a conception of identity into the ground of politics, however internally complicated", since "it prematurely forecloses the possible cultural articulations of subject-position" existing prior to its discursive articulation. The above critique of the subject thus forewarns us about giving the category 'woman' a foundationalist role even when we attribute to the category multiple and shifting subject positions.

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7   Judith Butler (1990) has developed a comprehensive critique of different versions of gender development by the psychoanalytic discourses, whether that discourse is by Freudian psychoanalysts or by Lacanian feminists. she argues that in Freudian discourse, gender identity is a "simultaneous accomplishment of coherent heterosexuality..... This disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilisation of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality" (p335). She also argues that in feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis implies "an expressive model of gender whereby identity is first fixed internally and only subsequently manifest in some exterior way"...."gender identity is understood as causally or mimetically related to sex"....thus the "order of appearance that governs gendered subjectivity is understood as one in which sex conditions gender, and gender determines sexuality and desire; although both psychoanalytic and feminist theory tend to disjoin sex from gender the restriction of gender within a binary relation suggests a relation of residual mimeticism between sex, conceived as binary and gender" (p336). she finally argues that gender core is "an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality". Thus she argues "if the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false but are only produced as **the truth effects** of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (emphasis mine)(p337). Butler concludes by arguing against reifications of gender relations but rather that gender coherence be understood as **"regulatory fiction"** rather than "the common point our liberation" (emphasis mine) (p339).

Some of the feminists have made an important attempt to address itself to some of the post-structuralist criticism and provided valuable discussion and insights on feminist theorising and organising. However, despite the important contribution, that such theorisation makes towards feminist theories, it often pays a price of theoretical inconsistencies, in so far as they do not take the critique of the subject to its logical conclusion, but limit their analysis to multiple and shifting identities of the subject. What we mean by the above is that, theorisations which consider multiplicity as a splintered unity, in effect, often retract from drawing the consequences of decentering the subject in terms of multiple and shifting identities. We exemplify this contention by the following:

Fraser and Nicholson argue that Postmodernism need not demand elimination of all theory. According to them the key is to identify type of theorizing which are inimical to essentialism. Thus they say "theorizing which is explicitly historical, that is, which situates its categories within historical frameworks less easily invites the dangers of false generalizations than does theorizing which does not"(1990,p9). They also add that "Postmodern-feminist theory would dispense with the idea of a subject of history. It would replace unitary notions of woman and a feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also class, race,ethnicity, age and sexual orientation (1990,p35). Fraser and Nicholson also point to the usefulness of such theorization on feminist practice. They say:

> "Such practice is increasingly a matter of alliances rather than one unity around a universally shared interest or identity. It recognizes that the diversity of women's needs and experiences means that no single solution, on issues like child care, social security, and housing, can be adequate for all. Thus the underlying premise of this practice is that, while some women share some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal; rather they are interlaced with differences, even with conflicts. This, then is a practice made up of a patchwork of overlapping alliances, not one circumscribable by an essential definition. One might best speak of it in the plural practice of feminisms"(1990,p35).

Their framework is able to evade some of the criticisms of socialist feminist theories. However, in our opinion, they do this at the cost of theoretical inconsistencies. They recognise that Women have different interests due to diversity in women's experience. However, the questions as to, from where the category woman gets its meaning, remains unclarified in their theorisation. To that extent, they make an unproblematic use of the category 'woman' even while arguing for plural conception of social identities. Thus, in so far as they do not problematise the 'meaning' of the category 'woman' they too in the final instance, give meaning to their category on the basis of gender differentiation. Indeed it is this 'apriori' formulation of the category 'women' that gives a stability, unity and coherence to the unstable concept of 'woman' that they formulate. The unstable formulation of the category women is proposed and used by Fraser and Nicholson in their analysis to overcome the post-structuralist critique of the subject i.e the use of category 'women' as a coherent female identity to analyse the cause of women's oppression and suggested practices to overcome it. However, their own formulation does not live up to the criteria through which they criticise others, since their formulation of women as "plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity" too has a 'apriori' coherence and unity to it, which thus can be critiqued as foundationalist in essence leading to exclusionary practices (See Butler's critique of the category women). Indeed it is this **'apriori'** coherence and stability given to the concept of woman that allows the authors to treat 'women' as subjects with different interests, inspite of their declaration to "dispense with the idea of a subject". We fully appreciate the moral impulse that leads these authors to retain a coherent and unified subject under the overarching term 'woman'. However they realise it at the loss to theoretical consistencies. Few others who can also be critiqued for similar inconsistencies are Di Stefano (1990).

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Others have deconstructed the concept 'woman' but have argued the need to use it strategically (Spivak G, Quoted by Butler,1990,p325). Spivak (1990,p109) has suggested a strategic use of essentialism. She suggests that feminists have to be strategic essentialists by using the irreducible moment of essentialism as part of one's strategy. In our opinion the use of strategic essentialism posits some important questions. In the first place, there is a question of 'who' this anonymous user of strategic essentialism is going to be. Secondly, such a formulation then gives ultimate authority to the person using the concept to use it in a way they may want to. Under the rubric of 'strategy', it recreates totalising moments at the level of strategic players. Strategic essentialising, trying to critique the subject, restores a much more stable, calculating and self assured subject as the player of the strategy. Indeed, any advocacy for the strategic use of concept 'woman', presupposes an objectification of the subject by an supposedly objective subject (having an attribute of the subject having total mastery and calculability), thus denying the social processes which essentially mediates any construction.

In our view, any theoretical articulation of emancipatory politics needs a notion of 'agency' or a 'meaningfully acting subject'. A discourse analysis with emancipatory interest cannot do away with a notion of agency, which it tries to empower and emancipate. However, this very interest in emancipatory praxis motivates us to undertake the critique of a unified subject. The question that then confronts us is, how do we reconcile the above two contradictory impulses. To be able to do this, we work with the notion of a unified subject, but decenter it, without granting it any foundationalist status in our political practice.

We feel that the critique of totality is fashionable today. It is also true that this critique of totalisation is motivated by emancipatory praxis, because totalisation leads to exclusionary practices. It excludes the non-identical particular. However, we should not ignore the ethical impulse behind such totalisation. The concept of totality is expected to bring the contingent and splintered particular in to an un-coerced unity. This is required to preserve the isolated particulars from dependency and anonymity and to strengthen them with solidarity and autonomy. However, today we know that, this emancipatory gesture undertaken by totalisation is 'prefused' with coercion. But a critique of totalisation should not push us behind the normative concerns already articulated by the concept of totality. So our task is not to splinter all totalities to a dispersion of particulars, throwing the latter to the vagaries of their fate, but to displace it from the centre of our emancipatory practice. This is important, because the object domain of our study contains emancipatory theories which makes totalising claims. Our intention is not to enlighten these theories to do away with the concept of totality. They are what they are because of their totalising claims. Our task is to chart out an effective way of intervening into their terrain without making yet another totalising claim. However if we deny ourselves the concept of totality by expunging it from our theoretical framework, we would deny ourselves access to the politics of the most crucial operation of those discourses we attempt to study. We thus would like to work with the concept of totality, i.e a notion of unified subject but displace their effect from our political practice. This we do by granting the unified subject an 'imaginary' existence. It is in this way that we would like to reconcile the critique of the subject with emancipatory politics which needs a coherent conscious subject agency.

We would argue that strategic essentialism (i.e use of the category woman strategically) can be deployed, without having the political implications mentioned earlier, by not granting or denying the anonymous user a mastery over its use. In other words, only by throwing its user in to a uncertain, unstable terrain, thereby destabilising the user, can we weaken the impact of any exclusionary implications that any strategically deployed formulation of the category 'woman' may have on political practice. This can be done by granting the totality 'women', an imaginary dimension.

This idea of 'imaginary' is used by Chandra Mohanty, to overcome the essentialism that any idea of totality may

posit. Chandra Mohanty a US based scholar of Indian origin, gives 'third world women' an imaginary status. Mohanty critiques the western feminist in their analysis for objectifying the third world women in their quest for seeking to uncover universality of women's subordination. She states that "besides being normed on white, Western (read progressive/modern)/non-Western (read backward / traditional) hierarchy, these analysis" (i.e by western feminists) "freeze third world women in time, space, and history"(Mohanty, 1991,p6). Mohanty also states that "These arguments are not against generalisations as much as they are for careful, historically specific generalizations responsive to complex situations" (1991,p69). Thus as such, she does not **a priori** negate the possibility of any cross cultural theorising. Mohanty (1991), also accepts that third world women do not constitute any automatic unitary group (p7), and argues for a **imagined community** of third world oppositional struggles. She says "The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliances. Thus it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, **it is the way we think about race, class and gender**- the political links we make among and between struggles"(emphasis mine)(p4).

The above theorisation shows that by giving 'third world women' a imaginary status, Mohanty denies the category third world women a foundational status through which political struggles are organised. Instead the category 'third world women' is discursively organised through common contexts of oppositional struggles. The moment of totalisation i.e conception of third world women, no more determines the political practice, that is, it is denied any foundational status. In this way, Mohanty manages to steer away from the charge of being a foundationalist and at the same time retains a concept of a meaningful agency.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) develop the idea of 'imaginary' still further in relation to the notion of 'subject'. Different theories have related with the idea of society in different ways. Society, it is argued, is a group of people living in particular territory and subject to common political authority. Foucault argues that one of the discoveries of political thought at the end of eighteenth century was the idea of society. The idea of society meant that "government not only deal with a territory, with a domain, and with its subjects, but that it also has to deal with its complex and independent reality that has its own laws and mechanisms of reaction, its regulation as well as its possibility of disturbances. This new reality is society" (1984,p242). In other words, after the end of eighteenth century, society was understood as self-regulating and self disciplining. This shift in thinking also meant that society could be manipulated if one can reflect upon its specific "characteristics", "constants" and "variables". It is this understanding reflected in the idea of 'society' as a totality that was appropriated by the emancipatory politics, for emancipatory purposes. Thus, the liberal as also Marxist preoccupation with the idea of society as totality, through which, it believed links to the local could be made. Marxism thus thought that these "laws of governing" of the society could be found out through analysis of this totality called society, which then could be manipulated and mastered by emancipatory politics for emancipatory purposes. It is in this mode of thinking about the society, that emancipatory politics gave 'totality' or society a founding function in organisation of politics.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) in their analysis do away with the conception of 'society' as a founding totality of its partial processes. They argue that social itself has no essence but is discursively produced. They thus do away with any essentialist approach to society and social relations. It is discursive structure that constitutes and organises society and social relations. This discursive structural formation is seen by them as ensemble of differential positions in a Saussurean sense. The differential elements in the language (structure) enter into an articulatory relation with each other in a practice of articulation. It is in the articulatory relation that elements become moments from which discourses emerge. Laclau and Mouffe call this structured totality or unity,

resulting from the practice of articulation as discourse[8].

They further argue that this transformation of elements into moments[9] is never complete. In every discursive situation there exists a 'surplus of meaning' (elements in language) which subverts the very discourse it constitutes. This they call as field of discursivity (p111). This (however) means that ultimate fixity of meaning is impossible, that is the transition from elements to moments is never complete. Thus discursive formation for them is never a sutured totality (p107). But, they argue, that there is a partial fixation of meaning at any given point of time. Every discourse is an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences to construct a centre. These privileged discursive points of this partial fixation is what they call as nodal points (p112).

The nodal points gives meaning and coherence to any communication which in itself has an impermanent content. Thus for them, "practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning ; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity" (p113). In other words, Discourse is an attempt to fix a centre to a circumscribed field, but this very operation adds something to the field and throws it open. From this we suggest that for Laclau and Mouffe, 'Social' refers to an articulation existing at an imaginary level.

As opposed to a view of subject as a unity and homogenous ensemble of its positions, they use the category 'subject' in the sense of subject positions within a discursive structure. Thus, the subject for them is not the origin of social relations even in a limited way since any experience of the subject depends on precise discursive conditions that makes experience possible. Since every subject position is a discursive position, various subject positions remain dispersed in regards to each other. Thus there is no predetermined relation of one subject position to the another. The subject is discursively constituted and has a pre-discursive background. But this does not mean that nothing can be said about the concept of subject. We can show subject's position in discursive practices and also the relation of one subject position to another. Thus in spite of dispersion, which makes the stability or fixity of any subject position impossible, there exists nodal points which give a partial fixity to the subject position. 'Man' is one such nodal points through which social practices have been articulated. In the similar vein they talk about the subject of feminism. At one level they reject the notion of a preconstituted category 'women'. On the other hand they also maintain that the category 'woman' is produced in the field of dispersion of subject positions. They argue that "Once female sex has come to connote a feminine gender with specific characteristics, this **'imaginary signification'** produces concrete effects in the diverse social practices" (emphasis mine) (p118). In other words they give the category gender an imaginary dimension partially fixed through what they call as nodal point. This theoretical manoeuvring then allows them to use the category women whilst at the same time criticize the idea of an original antagonism between men and women, constitutive of sexual division, without denying that in the various forms of construction of femininity, there is an effect of sexual division (p118). In this way, Laclau and Mouffe are able to overcome the critique of the subject, and at the same time are able to work with the notion of the subject, by giving it an imaginary existence.

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8   Discursive structure, for them has a material character. They use discourse to overcome the usual dichotomous opposition of 'thought' i.e 'ideas' and the 'real world'. They argue that although there exists a world external to the thought, it constitutes as specific objects through a discursive field.

9   They call the differential positions articulated in a discourse as moments while those differential positions not articulated within a discourse as elements (p105). For Laclau and Mouffe, elements are not self substituting atoms; nor do they derive their identity from a pre-existing whole; nor are pure dispersion. In this way, Laclau and Mouffe overcome the essentialism of elements as well as the essentialism of the whole.

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In our view, following important consequences follow from the analysis developed by Laclau and Mouffe for the purpose of our thesis:

> a)the practice of articulation, which consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning allows us to retain and work with the notion of a meaningful agency, while not granting it any foundational status in articulation of any subject position, given the fact that the field of discursivity always subverts any discursive articulation.
> b)By making all practices discursive, Laclau and Mouffe make room for intelligible articulation in every moment of practice. This overcomes the dichotomy between theory and practice; i.e nondiscursive blind practice on one side and a theory trying to make it intelligible from outside. Thus Laclau and Mouffe find discourse everywhere.
> c) Since all practices are discursive, emancipatory theories need not find their way to practice as if from outside, through consciousness of the actors[10].
> d) In the similar vein, Laclau and Mouffe uncover the false pretension of emancipatory theories. Theories are just one effort to master the discursive territory which all practices traverse. It is not that people struggle for their material interests and theories enlighten them from a neutral vantage point. Theories themselves are implicated in the struggle. They too contest to gain access to the imagined centre of the field of articulations. However, that to which they struggle for is an imaginary centre. This makes their struggle a game. It also means that vanguardist positioning of the theory is a structural impossibility.
> e)Theories will not be judged by how much of the social totality they illuminate because no such totality exists, but by what effect they produced in the unsaturated terrain of discursive practices.

We believe that Laclau and Mouffe's analysis overcomes the critique of the subject without suggesting the death of the subject. As we have argued earlier, strategic essentialism, not leading to exclusionary practices is only possible if we consider the strategically articulating user of the category "women" as destabilised subject. We feel that Laclau and Mouffe's framework allows us to consider the strategically articulating user of the category 'women' as a destabilised subject.

In this subsection, we have looked at the feminist emancipatory trajectory, the accompanying tensions of exclusion and inclusion in the usage of the category 'woman', the search for a common bond for the struggle and the articulation of difference. We have argued in this subsection that this tension can be overcome, by treating the category 'woman' as an imaginary category. By treating the category 'woman' as an imaginary category we allow for the different articulations around the category 'woman'. This means that **struggles and contestations over meaning of the category 'woman' are over this 'imaginary woman'**. Indeed, in the final instance, we argue that, it is because this 'imaginary woman' is taken as a 'real woman' that struggles over representation over the category 'woman' have divisive and sectarian effects in the feminist politics.

In the following subsection of this chapter, we will examine the implications of treating the category 'woman' as an imaginary category, on feminist practice. In particular we will explore its implications on notion of emancipation. To do so we will bring in different threads of all our prior discussion together by examining the notions of power, empowerment and emancipation to argue for and women's 'emancipations'.

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10   In this connection, Truong (1989) too,"questions the political authority of theory in the classical definition of its functions and their convergence (i.e to provide explanation and prescribe practices)"(p13).

2.5   Power, Empowerment, Emancipation and emancipations:

The concept of power can be most commonly associated with the capability to achieve something. Classical Marxists have always associated power with asymmetry i.e in a field of domination and subordination. Power is thought to be unidimensional and unidirectional, i.e its flow is always thought to be from dominant to dominated. Power operates through ideological distortions. In this perspective, Power works to distort knowledge in the interest of the dominant. This discourse thus regards power in a negative sense, that is power to repress. In this discourse, power operates in a centralised and linear way. The notion of 'emancipation' works with the notion of 'what ought to be', i.e an ideal state to be reached.

All emancipatory theories have a normative framework. Classical emancipatory theories, like Marxism, have notions of equality and symmetry in their normative framework. Within this framework, then empowerment means working towards this symmetrical relation. Thus within this framework, notions of empowerment works towards redistribution of power i.e attaining of certain equilibrium and symmetry. In other words, within this discourse, 'empowerment' means either giving 'more power' to dominated or taking of the power of the dominant so as to attain this symmetry. Whether the notion of power is instantiated in the rhetoric of repression or instantiated within the framework of empowerment, i.e attaining of symmetry, power can operate only within an asymmetric relationship. The normative framework of these theories assumes that at the level of symmetry, there will be equal power for everyone,i.e power will be a zero sum game.

In our view, this normative framework in itself offers us a negative notion of power since in an ideal condition it is assumed that power is either dissolved or neutralised. Such an understanding of power, then cannot handle a radical notion of 'difference' since, every difference is in final instance subsumed under the notion of symmetry. Thus, here difference is granted only within an identity. In our view, this logic of identity actually suppresses and denies difference, since all difference is in the final instance bought into ultimate unity and neutralised. Thus such notion of power cannot give a primordial status to the logic of difference. A radical notion of difference means understanding difference as irreducible particularity of entities in other words difference as indivisible and inexhaustible. In the context of our discussion on the category 'woman' in subsection two, we have seen the dangers of exclusion and suppression which accompany any attempt to reduce difference into unity and identity, In the light of this we think that emancipatory practice needs to work with a radical notion of difference articulated above. Needless to say, such a perspective then needs a radically different notion of power as also of emancipation.

To develop such a perspective, we will discuss the perspectives on power provided by Gramsci and Foucault, both of whom have in our opinion, contributed towards the above task that we set for ourselves. As we have discussed in the first section, Gramsci uses the concept of hegemony to discuss the operation of power. Instead of one contradiction, Gramsci argues that there are multiple contradictions and antagonisms in the society. He uses the concept of hegemony to show how power operates through these plurality of antagonisms and multiple social agents. Gramsci using the concept of hegemony shows that power operates through the consent of the oppressed through a whole range of the ideological field of culture. The conception of hegemony makes power dependent upon a mutual recognition; i.e consent cannot always be a fabricated notion. In other words, power does not work through crude coercion. It needs an agreement between social agents. Further, by arguing that hegemony works through culture, Gramsci opens up a struggle for **cultural stakes**. This, leads to the following consequences:

> a)this formulation then argues for localisation of struggle since, struggle has to be fought on concrete terrain of cultural representations.

b)hegemony calls for localisation of theory as no meta theory can tell us how to conduct localised struggles over cultural representations. Gramsci thus develops a new understanding of an intellectual and the role he/she plays in the construction of any struggle.

c)hegemony refers to a notion of dispersed power instead of centralised power, since 'culture' in itself is vast complex terrain, likened to a system of symbols which enable us to give meaning to our life.

In our view, the above consequences viz, localisation of theory, localisation of struggle and dispersion of power shows that Gramsci attempts to give 'difference' some centrality within his overall perspective of struggle. However, this radicality of Gramsci too has its limits, in so far as he too argues for a vanguard party of proletariat, who alone will be able to lead the revolution. Thus, although Gramsci gives a centrality to difference within his overall struggle perspective, he too, in the final instance, does not grant these struggles an autonomous existence as he argues that they be subsumed under the economic logic through which these different struggles retain there coherence. Thus although Gramsci works with a dispersed notion of power, he too, in the final instance gives the working of power some kind of a centralised status through the notion of 'revolution' to be lead by proletariat. Gramsci's normative framework too provides us with a logic of symmetry which in actuality suppresses the difference, in so far as the class identity in last instance subsumes all other identities in this moment of symmetry.

Foucault, a more recent thinker of our century, radicalises the notion of power and goes far beyond the insights provided by Gramsci. Foucault too through his analysis argues for localisation of struggle, localisation of theory and a dispersed notion of power. For Foucault, power operates in a dispersed fashion through discourses. Discourses are an effect of power. However, inspite of these above similarities, there are important differences between their analysis. In our view, a crucial shift occurs when Foucault changes his locus of criticism from culture to discourse. Gramsci works with dispersed notion of power, through the concept of culture and remains within the framework of ideology. Thus he cannot make a crucial shift to discourse and its relation to power. Through this shift Foucault is truly able to radicalise the concept of power. Gramsci builds up a power-culture network. Thus for Gramsci, power works by consent. For Foucault, Power works by 'truth'. He argues "power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here and there, never in anybody's hands never appropriated as commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation" (p98,1980a). Foucault thus presents us with a notion of power as isolated dispersion effects which cannot be bought under unity.

One of the criticisms made against Foucault notion of power is that, since, power is radically dispersed, it cannot hope to be organised. Such a notion of power thus cannot explain how power gets to be **organised**; how it becomes a locus for domination; how it has an effect of domination. His argument that power acts in highly dispersed fashion, does not allow him to **demonstrate** the micro-macro effect of power. Here we turn to Laclau and Mouffe, who, in our opinion, while retaining the insights of Foucault, are still able to account the micro-macro effects of power. They in their theorisation combine the radicality of Foucault with that of Gramsci and are yet able to overcome some of the pitfalls and weaknesses in their formulations. Laclau and Mouffe are thus able to build up a perspective of emancipatory practice which brings radical notion of power and a radical notion of difference together. They do this developing on Gramsci's notion of hegemony and Foucault's use of discourse.

Laclau and Mouffe(1985) develop the Gramscian notion of hegemony further. They argue that in Marxist political practice, the class identities maintains a hegemonic identity over all other subject identities. They bring in the notion of 'hegemony' to show how this hegemonic identity is maintained. They trace the genealogy of

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the concept of hegemony in the Marxist discourse and argue that the Marxist discourse offers two conceptions of hegemony--viz, democratic and authoritarian. They argue that the logic of hegemony demands that working class which aspires hegemonic status, abandon its class ghetto and transform itself into the articulator of multiplicity of antagonisms and demands, stretching beyond itself. This, they call as democratic practice of hegemony. In the Gramscian formulation of hegemony, democratic practice of hegemony takes place through practice of articulation, in so far as Gramsci argued that the working class can become a leading class to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses. In this sense, class hegemony is a contingent result of hegemonic articulations not guaranteed by any law in history. This formulation recognises that diverse social elements have a merely relational identity, hegemony being achieved through articulatory practices.

As we have seen in the subsection II, for Laclau and Mouffe, the 'structured totality' resulting from the practice of articulation is discourse. Here Laclau and Mouffe depart from Foucault, while maintaining the essence of Foucault's radicality. From this notion of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe argue that there can be no distinction between the discursive practices and nondiscursive practices. They critique Foucault for making such a distinction (1985,p107) They thus connect the emergence of hegemony with discourse through articulatory practices, that is "a field where the 'elements' have not crystallised into moments" (1985,p134). They argue, "it is because hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social, that it can take place only in a field dominated by articulatory practices" (1985,p134). It is in this condition for the emergence of hegemony, that Laclau and Mouffe find the possibility for a radical democratic practice of hegemony, that goes beyond Gramscian formulation of democratic practice of hegemony. They call this notion of radical democratic practice of hegemony as 'Radical Democracy', which then stands for radical emancipatory practice. Mouffe (1988), uses Gramsci's principle of 'expansive hegemony' and argues that an expansive hegemony links demands by different groups with all other democratic struggles to establish a chain of equivalence. She states

> "the wider the chain of equivalence, the wider the democratization of society and the wider the collective wills to be built on that basis. Then it would be unthinkable for workers to fight for their rights only and not, at the same time, for the rights of gays and women. **It is important to reiterate that what makes a struggle democratic is not where it comes from but the way it is articulated with the other democratic struggles.** Yet such an expansive hegemony must respect the autonomy and specificity of the demands of different groups. It is not just a matter of saying that all those demands are implicit in the demands of the working class; that once the working class comes to power, racial, sexual, and gender contradictions will disappear". (emphasis mine) (Mouffe,1988,p103).

The above formulation by Laclau and Mouffe achieve the following results from the point of view of our discussion on power, empowerment, and emancipation:

> a)Power works through discourses. It does not work in a linear and centralised way. There is thus a dispersion of power and multiplication of political spaces. Power can never be a zero sum game.
> b)Power emanates in discursive articulations and thus there cannot be a priori understanding of power as liberatory or repressive.
> c)In this understanding of power, empowerment ceases to be a simple redistribution of power or taking of the power from the oppressor. The notion of empowerment as 'power' leading us to symmetry is given up.
> d)The concept of radical democracy is able to provide a normative framework which enables an emancipatory practice. At the same time, it has a radical notion of difference at the core of its practice.
> e)The normative framework of radical democracy grants difference a primordial status in its

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practice. It understands difference as irreducible, where each plurality of identity finds within itself a principle for its own validity.
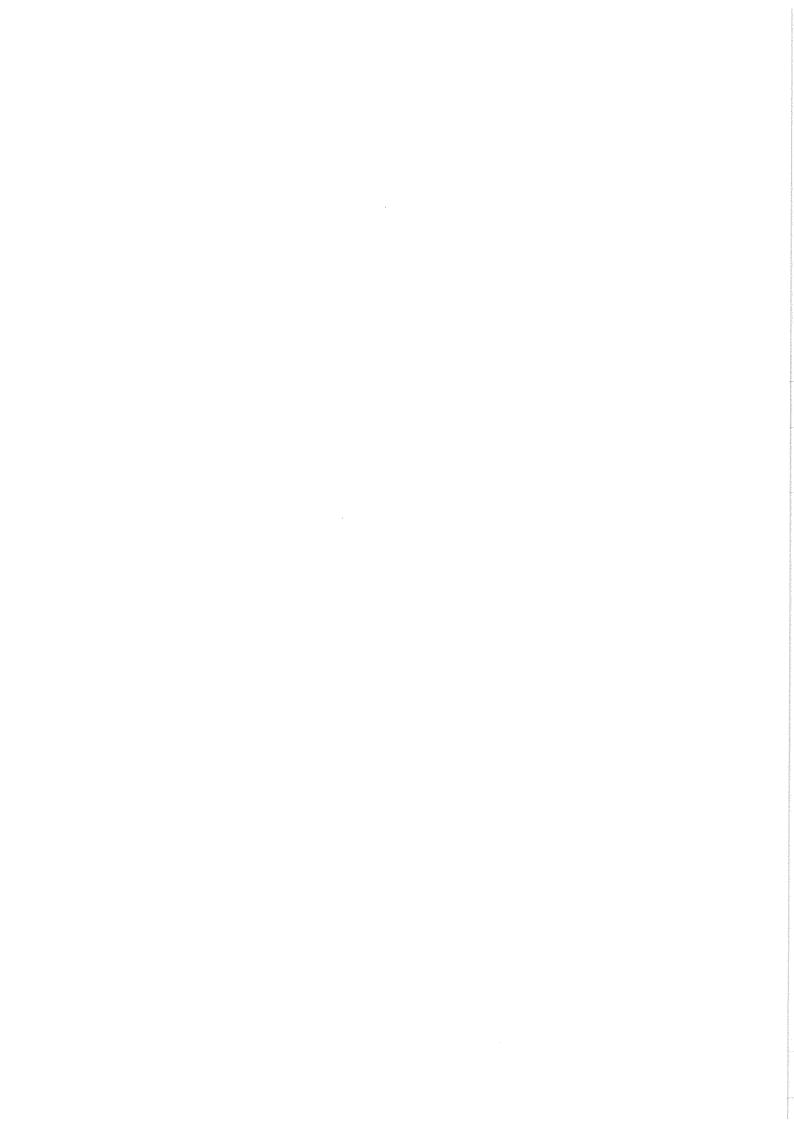
All this then means that the notion of emancipation undergoes a radical change. We can no more talk of an "Emancipation". Instead, we have to talk of the different forms of "emancipations". This position thus argues that there can be no 'one' privileged struggle, no single origin to all forms of domination. It argues against any creation of hierarchy of struggles, in other words, it argues for a radical notion of emancipation which has politics of difference at its core.

The radical notion of emancipation, having politics of difference at its core thus assumes important implications for a feminist practice. The category 'woman' acting as an imaginary is articulated as fragmentary wholes through practices of articulation. The 'imaginary woman' acts as a horizon to these fragmentary wholes'. This does not mean that we can predetermine the direction in which this imaginary would operate. In other words, the 'fragmentary wholes' around the category 'woman' are discursively organised through practices of articulation. It is in articulation that the discursively organised category 'woman' gets its character. Feminism would thus exist in multiple forms depending upon the way in which the antagonism around the category 'woman' is discursively constituted. This would mean a plural practice of feminism, i.e plurality of discursive forms of constructing an antagonism around women's subordination. In other words, we could now think of different forms of women's emancipations instead of women's 'Emancipation'.

2.6   Conclusion:

Our attempt in this chapter was to develop a conceptual framework which will give politics of difference a central place in feminist practice. In the process we have displaced the foundationalist role of theories of emancipation (here feminist theories) on emancipatory practice. Instead we argue that as NSMs, women's movement and feminist emancipatory practice can be understood as a discursive practice, i.e we make a room for intelligible articulation in every moment of practice. In this way we overcome the dichotomy between theory and practice. This makes any vanguardist positioning of theory a structural impossibility. However, theories still contest to gain an access to the imagined centre of the field of articulations. This makes their struggle a game since what they struggle for is an imaginary centre. Feminist theories struggle and contest the meaning of the imaginary centre 'woman'. We argue that **it is because this 'imaginary woman' is taken as a 'real woman' that struggles over representation over the category 'woman' have divisive and sectarian effects in the feminist politics.**

We argue that understanding the category 'woman' as an imaginary could open up a possibility of plural practice of feminism. By treating the category woman as an imaginary, we allow for different articulations around the category 'woman'. These different articulations could be taken as plurality of different forms of constructing an antagonism around women's subordination. These different articulations could on one hand be a basis for localised plural emancipatory struggles around the discursively organised category 'woman' and on the other could lead us to a coalition politics thus creating a chain of equivalence by linking different democratic struggles. In other words, it could lead to a plural practice of feminism, without suppressing the difference.

3. THE 'WOMAN' OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA : A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

3.1   'India' as a discourse of nationalism and politicisation of women's question:

A three hundred rupees fine was levied for the insult to the national flag while it was a fifty rupee fine for molesting a dalit woman. This is in early 1970s. A comparison between these two court decisions is symbolic of the ironical relation 'nationalism' has with the different groups, classes, castes in the country, namely, the dalits, women, adivasis, peasants and all those who are socially and economically disadvantaged. Nehru, India's first late prime minister recounts in his memoirs of freedom struggle :

> "Often as I wandered from meeting to meeting..... a great roar of welcome would greet me: Bharat Mata Ki Jai -- Victory to Mother India! I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this Bharat Mata, Mother India, whose victory they wanted? My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me. I persisted in my questioning. At last a vigorous Jat, wedded to the soil of immemorial generations would say that it was the dharti, the good earth of India, what they meant. What earth? Their particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or in the whole of India? And so question about answer went on, till they would ask me impatiently to tell them all about it. I would endeavour to do so and explain that India was all this that they had thought, but it was so much more...... what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. Bharat Mata, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people (pp48-49).

The above utterance shows the wide gap existing around the perception of 'what is India', between Nehru and common rural masses, i.e 'peasantry'. While for peasants in the meeting, India was symbolic of the soil on which they lived, Nehru constructed India as an "imagined community"[11] of millions of people; people related to each other through this imaginary construct called 'India' irrespective of their class, caste, ethnicity, gender, religion etc. The above utterance gets its importance from the fact that it was uttered by Nehru, the political architect and the first Prime Minister of India. The views expressed by Nehru are thus representative of the Indian national congress[12] and the 'Indian' Government which came on power on the eve of Independence in August 1947. We thus treat nationalism as a discourse which attempted to build up a specific construction of India.

On the eve of independence, however, India as a political construct and an 'imaginary community' of people was being challenged from various sides. Other movements, were challenging the nationalist ideal. These were the movements by low castes, adivasis, dalits[13], peasants etc, who defined themselves in ways contradictory and even in opposition to those of the national movement. The coherent narrative that the nationalists had sought to build up around this imagined community, 'India' was challenged by the counter narratives of these movements. India thus remained fragmented from inside. This fragmentation continues too date.

The creation of an 'imagined community' by the nationalists had to be accompanied by a sense of history for this community. Thus the past was selectively reconstituted so as to shape a nationalist consciousness. This was

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11   This term has been borrowed from Anderson Benedict, from his book 'Imagined communities'.

12   Indian national congress led the freedom struggle of 'India'.

13   Dalit means "downtrodden" and refers to ex-untouchables, i.e lowest in Hindu caste heirarchy.

also accompanied by the phase of Hindu revivalism and an attempt to construct an 'Hindu' identity centred around figures of Rama and Krishna. Puranic mythologies, and vedas were recalled in the process and a myth of Hindu golden age was recreated by the nationalists. This Hindu golden age was transformed into Aryan golden age wherein men were free, brave, vigorous, fearless, noble and deeply spiritual; and the women were learned, free, and highly cultured, preferring spiritual upliftment to the pursuit of mere riches. Women's question acquired a new dimension in the nationalist discourse since, nation's identity laid in culture and specifically in its womanhood. Thus a selective construction of past also established contexts for particular constructions of womanhood based on high caste women. Indian women became a combination of the spiritual Maitreyi, the learned Gargi, the suffering Sita, the faithful Savitri and the heroic Lakshmibai (Chakravarty, U,1989,p46). It is within this framework of "transformed womanhood" that women took part in the independence movement, and organised themselves politically. In other words, the nationalist discourse brought women out of their homes and was symbolic of a women's movement during those times. However, this is a story of the discourse of Nationalism and its implications for women's movement.

There were movements of low castes, peasants and adivasis who built up counternarratives to the nationalist narrative. Jyotiba Phule, is taken to be the founding father of not only dalit and anticaste movement in India but as also the founder of the women's movement in Maharashtra. He took as his goal the liberation of the shudras (peasant castes) and atishudras (untouchables or dalits) from the slavery of brahmanism. To him, Indian National Congress was only a propaganda organ of the brahmans. He asked the question : How could India, so divided by caste and language, with its people so enthraled in superstition, be considered nation? (quoted in Omvedt, 1993,p14). His writings were focused on liberation of the dalits, the peasantry and the women. Phule's liberatory theory reversed the Aryan theory and gave a version of history in which aggression, violence and conquest played a major role. His works drew on non-Aryan identity and regional, adivasi and peasant heroes as opposed to the nationalist narrative which fed on the Aryan identity (Omvedt, 1993,p14-15). Phule's movement challenged the caste hierarchy, and in the process also challenged women's enslavement, since women were considered as atishudras (in par with dalits), within the caste hierarchy and denied any rights. The Satyashodhak Samaj, an organisation established by Phule founded the first school for girls and untouchables, as also organised marriages without priests, widow remarriage etc. Phule's anti-caste movement developed an image of womanhood based on the identities and symbols of low caste dalits and peasants. Within this alternative framework women resisted their oppression and developed a new self identity.

The Indian communists movement, although an alternative movement to Nationalist movement, understood the dalit movement as agents of British and ignored the question of caste dominance as also women's subordination by stating that the main contradiction was imperialism. They called for a socialist version of independence, viz, the independence of workers and peasants. However, taking off from classical marxist position, they argued that socialism could only be built on the basis of capitalist industrialisation. Labour meant factory based wage labour not to be confused with peasant toil and production. Thus the 'proletariat' was to be the vanguard class who led a transition to socialism. From this it followed that socialism could follow only after necessary stages of national independence and industrialization were achieved (Omvedt,1993,p16). In this way the communists thus remained within the framework of discourse of 'nationalism' in its politics. Nehru's imagined community of 'people' was challenged only to be replaced by the 'people', qualified by class. The dimensions of caste, gender, language, ethnicity were ignored from the communist discourse on independence.

The overall communist response can be best summed up by quoting the response of a communist leader, Tara Reddy, on one of the militant struggles, famous as "Warli uprising in Thana", where the major questions involved in the uprising were bonded labour and sexual exploitation of the women by the landlords. Reddy

states: "Warli women and girls participated in the struggle in a big way along with their men. There was not much difference in the level of political consciousness between men and women. But at that time woman's issue as a separate issue was not discussed. The question did not arise because the primary issue was that of exploitation of adivasis. Women's problem was not separated from the general exploitation. Class issue was the main issue and women participated as part of a class. Women's issues and class issues became one at that level of exploitation" (Quoted in Saldhana, I, 1986,p WS48). This is an example of a typical communist response which seeks to subsume the questions of identity around categories ethnicity (here, for example, it was an adivasi struggle) and gender under the category class. However, within this limited left led framework, lower class women, adivasi women, peasant women fought against their exploitation and in some cases forced the party to take cognisance of gender issues. For example, life stories of women in Telangana communist led movement give us an important glimpse into women's participation in to these struggles and what these struggles meant to these women (See Stree Shakti Sanghatana, 1989)

Apart from the above stated movements, there were also other movements on the eve of independence of 'India, which like Phule challenged the nationalist construct "India" . These were the movements by adivasis in different parts of the country as also the separatist movements of the adivasis in the north-east which later developed into full fledged revolts against the state of 'India'.

Today 'India' is caught in the crossfire of communalism, caste riots, adivasi movements, anti caste movements, separatist movements in the north-east India, which has a vast adivasi population, as also in kashmir, Punjab etc. The Hindu revivalist seeds within the discourse on nationalism has been built upon, co-opted and led by the Hindu fundamentalist forces today. If BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party)[14] is trying to build up a narrative of 'a Hindu nation', there are also other counter narratives, whether from the rightist or leftist, reactionary or progressive forces, in the form of either religious movements fighting for nationality status in the states of Punjab and Kashmir, or as in Assam and the entire northeastern states predominantly made of adivasi belt for a separate identity. The southern states of 'India' are in constant struggle with the northern Delhi based domination and resist the attempts of New Delhi to impose Hindi as a national language. Language has been one of the major issue of conflict, and different states formed on linguistic basis have still not resolved the 'border question' amongst themselves.

The communist party has undergone many splits to date. The politics of these groups centres around 'capture of state power', whether through parliamentary means or by means of armed revolution. Communist parties have undergone innumerable number of splits on the issue of 'the correct line' and 'correct revolutionary' politics to achieve the goal of capture of state power. Each party faction has accused the other of being a 'revisionist', 'reformist' and even 'reactionary'. Its most revolutionary faction, 'Naxalites', formed in early seventies too has already undergone innumerable splits and has few pockets of influence in the country. The orientation of the national communist parties towards the women's question has changed in a minuscule way. The major communist parties, today have a women's wing as a mass organisation of its party front. Some of the naxalite factions and independent regional communist parties, apart from having women's organisation have also taken up gender issues in practice.

The dalit movements have built up on the legacy of Phule and Ambedkar; however it too remains fragmented with many factions within it. The adivasi movements, either fighting for right to self determination or fighting for independence form 'India' face a brutal repression from the state of India. Farmers movements fighting for

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14   BJP is a Hindu communalist party in India.

fair price of their commodities have lately gained popular support in different parts of the country. However they too remain fragmented in their orientation and there are clear splits within their leadership. Further, the disillusionment of the left has led many to form urban as also rural nonparty mass organisations and voluntary organisations leading localised struggles of the poor on various issues and committed to a building of local leadership.

Women, in all these movements have participated and even led these movements in some cases. Women's groups formed by the mass organisations involved in these movements have taken up specifically gender issues in various degrees, viz domestic violence, property rights, land rights, inheritance rights etc. The democratic content in Gandhian discourse of nationalism has been built upon by some and women's organisations (eg SEWA) and relief homes have been built around it. Many of the autonomous women's groups were formed by women activists who left communist parties as a reaction to sexism within the leftist movement. These groups have vociferously taken up the issues of violence against women and have theorised on the women's oppression in the Indian context. While individual women in mass organisations or parties have identified themselves as feminists it is these autonomous women's groups which are primarily identified as feminist groups. The above existence of different groups and women's involvement into various mass movements, viz, low caste, dalit, farmers, adivasis etc in rural and urban areas, show that there exists different perceptions on women's oppression and the ways to overcome them. This has also meant different articulations around the category 'woman'.

The above discussion, in the first place shows that India is an 'imaginary' political construct, created through the discourse of nationalism. However, this construct has been challenged from all sides. As a result we see a fragmentation within the political processes and the political options presented too. The context in itself creates this fragmentation. In this fragmented context, we ask "is it possible to have 'a' feminism in 'India'?". Indeed the different fragmented contexts of struggle suggest to us that **there can be no 'one' feminism in the 'Indian' context**. Similarly the different fragmented contexts suggest that there can be no 'one' way of understanding and locating 'women's oppression. This means that the context, itself suggests a need for a plural expression of feminism around women's multiple oppressions, viz, class, caste, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference etc. In some ways, the diverse responses to the women's oppression and existence of diverse groups reflects this plural reality of women's oppression. However, it appears that these different perceptions have not led to a celebration of the plural practice of feminism. Instead it has lead to divisiveness and sectarian tendencies within the movement. Allegations of being a 'Bourgeois feminists' or 'radical feminist', 'marxist feminists' and 'socialist feminists' are hurled to denounce the other. In some ways, it points to the general malaise existing in the present mainstream Indian politics, which is being engulfed more and more by politics of hatred, intolerance, and violence towards the other as is reflected in the rise of communalism, and regional chauvinism.

3.2   Effects of feminist discourses:

The RSSS (Rani Sati Sarva Sangha) an organisation campaigning for the celebration of 'Sati'[15] practice decides to take a procession of men and women in defence of 'Sati' dharma[16]. The procession has many women who chanted the slogan emphasising women's militancy "hum Bharat ki nari hain, phool nahin, chingari hain" (we the women of India, are not flowers but fiery sparks). The procession also used the language of rights, stating that they should have the right, as Hindus and as women to commit, worship and propagate Sati

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15   'Sati' practice is an ancient practice of widow immolation followed in some parts of India.

16   'Dharma' means religious duty.

(Radha Kumar, 1993,p174). The same slogan hailing women's power was also chanted by the crowd of women performing the Kar Seva[17] in Ayodhya. Vijaya Raje Scindia a Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) member of parliament (MP) publicly defended Sati and stated that it is the fundamental right of all Hindu women to commit Sati if they want to.

The Rashtrasevika Samiti, a women's wing of the RSS[18], publishes a woman's journal called 'Jagriti'. In that, they critique Indian men for obstructing women's entry into politics. They stress the need to construct a new image of Indian women. They state "In order to attain the comprehensive development of women it is extremely important for them to be economically independent. So in order to ensure economic independence, they need reservation in employment and they need women judges to conduct all cases related to such issues" (Sarkar Tanika, 1991,p2062). Similarly the BJP mahila morcha[19] define the image of woman as Matri shakti (mother's power) whose strength is seen in sacrifice and tears (Kapur R etal,1993,pp WS39-42).

The above articulations around the category 'woman' give us a glimpse of the symbolic constructions of the category 'woman' by the communalist forces, viz, BJP, RSS, RSSS. These articulations have constituted the identity of Hindu woman as a powerful and economically independent women as opposed to traditional identity of docile, dependent and passive Hindu woman. Further the symbols used by these articulations, i.e woman's power or mother's power and economically independent woman have been the symbols of the feminist movement in India. The above examples also show the appropriation of the militant feminist slogan "Hum Bharat ki Nari hain, Phul Nahin Chingari Hain" (We the women of India are not flowers but are fiery sparks) by the communalist forces. In short we see that feminist discourses have been easily appropriated by communalist.

Similar appropriations have been made by Rashtra Sevika Sangh (RSSS) which puts a lot of emphasis on physical courage, strength, and a trained hardened female body as opposed to a traditional image of the Hindu woman who is to be looked after and defended by men in her life, viz, the father in the childhood, the husband after her marriage and her son in her old age. The samiti publication puts this principle as "Swasangrakashankaham nari ki samaj me adhik pratishtha hoti hai" (a woman who is able to defend herself gets more status in the society) (Sarkar T, 1991,p2061). The samiti women are trained and taught self defence so as to be competent enough to encounter daily forms of sexual violence. Further the physical training programme in Rashtra Sevika Sangha builds up the body and mental strength of women which then enables the women to fight against their gender oppression in domestic and public spaces. Similarly they also bring out in their issue a construction of woman as one who is a responsible and fearless woman citizen and knowing her civic rights and duties; a woman who will be able to face up to offensive behaviour in the world outside (Sarkar T 1991,p2061).

The above examples show that the Rashtra Sevika Sangha has been trying to build up a new empowering self image of the Hindu woman. The discourse on new Hindu woman in fact uses some of the symbols of the feminist movement in India. For example, the feminist groups have also stressed a new empowering self image of woman that would question domestic violence or any sexual violence on the female body. These groups

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17   Kar Seva is an offering of oneself for the duty towards God. The term was used by BJP to initiate people into coming to Ayodhya to perform their duty towards 'Rama' a Hindu Puranic King assumed to have a status of God.

18   RSS is a Hindu fundamentalist mass organisation having close linkages with BJP.

19   Mahila Morcha stands for a woman's front

emphasised self defence training and some of the feminist groups have also organised such workshops. Indeed the new Hindu woman shown on the coverpage of Jagriti has much in common with the new woman that the feminist movement in India is trying to build up. Sarkar T (1991) notes that the Jagriti coverpage shows two helpless women against a black background, crouching in a helpless posture. Then out of this dark background, a young "grim faced woman" steps out on a radiant part of the cover with uplifted head. The body shows no 'sindur' or 'veil' or even a 'bindi'[20].She wears chappals and her whole stance is aggressive (p2062).

The above discussion on the constructions of new woman by the feminist movement and its subsequent usage by the communalist forces is not to say that the objectives and meaning behind both the discourses are identical. Indeed the following statements by BJP mahila morcha bring out their differences with the feminist movement in India quite sharply. They argue

"We conceptually differ from what is termed as the women's liberation movement in the west. We require a sort of readjustment in the social and economic set up. No fundamental change in values is desirable. Women in India ever had a pride of place within the household, and the society. That has only to be re-established and re-affirmed".

Thus the above statements indeed argues against any kind of direct confrontation with the patriarchal power structures and values. Instead what is argued for is 'readjustment'. Thus we do not suggest that the two discourses are identical. However what we do suggest is that essentially speaking, **no discourse in itself is either progressive or reactionary.** Thus the discourses on new woman or on women's power or empowered self image are by themselves neither progressive nor reactionary. The meaning of any discourse is fixed and given an emancipatory tone or otherwise in articulation. Hence we find similar usage of symbols and even language in the discourses of feminist movement and the Communalist movement in India.

Similar to the above, we also see the appropriation of feminist discourses by commercial companies and media to further their products. We quote some examples on this.

An advertisement for the sale of Duncan tea, appears on the T.V. It says "There was a time, not long ago, when intelligence for women was assumed to mean knowing a little embroidery, some cooking and enough simple arithmetic to handle household accounts. Happily, it doesn't mean the same today".

Advertisements for home appliances like refrigerator, mixer etc show contrasting images of tired and shabby looking working woman as against 'smiling' and refreshed looking working women who argue how the usage of the same have reduced their double burden of housework. These advertisements argue that these gadgets would lead to women's liberation.

Both the above advertisements use the discourse of 'new woman' to sell their products. Indeed here too we find the appropriation of the feminist discourse of new woman by advertisers of the commercial products who in fact promote and give a new meaning to the concept of 'housewife'. The feminist articulation on double burden of work is used for a totally different i.e commercial purpose. similarly we see the usage of feminist discourse on sexual liberation for the sponsorship of commercially soled condoms. For example advertisements of the condom, 'Kamasutra' are flashed with men and women shown in tight passionate embrace emphasising sexual

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20   Sindur stands for red vermilion on the parting of the hair of a married woman. It is symbolic of a married woman amongst many Hindu communities. A Bindi stands for a vermilion on the forehead. It is symbolic of good fortune and married women are supposed to wear red vermilion on their foreheads. A forehead without a vermilion is considered as an unfortunate one because it stands for widowhood.

pleasure involved in its use. These advertisements uses the discourse of sexual liberation for its sponsorship of its product. This is in direct contrast with the advertisements for govt sponsored cheaply priced condoms which emphasised the use of condoms for family planning.

The above examples, show the appropriation of articulations around 'woman' created by emancipatory projects by other projects which in fact seek to objectify women. Further the above discussion has shown the appropriation of discourse of emancipation, liberation, equality, right to choice, economic independence and new woman by projects which have very little to do with the origin of those discourses. These examples also show that discourses get their meaning in articulations. Indeed, it is for this reason that **discourses can be easily appropriated.**

3.3   Campaign against Rape:[21]

The issue of rape is considered to be one of the most grotesque forms of male violence. It has also been a major issue, raised within women's movement in India as also internationally. In India this agitation began largely in 1980s, with campaigns against police rape, when a young adivasi girl called Mathura was raped by police constables in a police station. The policemen were acquitted by the sessions court, convicted on an appeal at the high court, and later acquitted by the supreme court on the grounds that Mathura was a woman with a loose character and thus could not be raped.

In protest against this shocking judgement, an open letter was sent by four senior lawyers against it to the supreme court of India where they demanded a reopening of the case. A forum against rape (FAR) was formed (now calling itself Forum Against Oppression of Women, FAOW) in Bombay, following this letter which wrote to different groups in India to hold demonstrations against the judgement on International women's day; march 8th. Responding to this letter, there were several demonstrations, exhibitions, street plays, in protest against the judgement and asking for a retrial, on march 8th in various parts of India, viz, Bombay, Delhi, Nagpur, Pune, Ahmedabad, Banglore, Hyderabad etc.

In Bombay and Delhi, joint action commitees of feminist groups and socialist and communist party fronts, mainly students, were formed to coordinate the campaign. However, this coordinated action through various parts of India could not be maintained over time. Coordination among the city groups were retained more at formal level than at the coordinated joint action level, when the differences between the groups around the analysis of women's oppression and violence on women began to grow.

For many groups the question of violence on women was articulated more in terms of a social issue, i.e as a crime and a violation of women's honour. For example in 1981, NFIW (National Federation of Indian women), the Communist Party of India's (CPI) women's front, stated : "Today, it has become an urgent task of the government to take effective steps to save the honour and life of women and not drag it into politics" (Vimala Farooqui quoted in Gandhi etal, 1991,p 88). Similarly violence is more of a class issue for many left parties. Thus issues of rape are looked at more in those terms. The socialist parties did not look at violence from class point of view only, but still looked at rape in terms of anguish and dishonour caused to women and their family. For example, Pramila Dandavate speaks of rape in Parliament as : "Like the glass vessel breaking to pieces when it falls, a woman's life is irretrievably shattered after she is raped" (quoted in Gandhi etal, 1991,p 46). The All India Women's Congress looked at issues of rape as individual acts of violence and sought

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21   The forthcoming information has been adapted primarily from Radha Kumar (1993).

psychological explanations for them. The feminist groups by and large looked at rape as an expression of patriarchal power. They rejected the psychological analysis of individual acts of violence on one hand, while on the other the economistic arguments of the left (Gandhi et al, p88).

The distrust groups had with each other was also reflected in the way groups participated in the campaign. For example, NFIW a member of 'Joint Action Committee Against Rape and Sexual Harassment' in Delhi, held a dharna (sit-down demonstration) outside the Supreme Court to demand a review of the Mathura case on March 17th, without informing the joint action committee about their plans. Similarly, at the same time, AIWC, the Bombay FAR, and the NFIW filed separate petitions in the supreme court asking for a review.

In June, Maya Tyagi, a 23 year old woman was arrested, stripped naked, raped and paraded through the streets of Baghpat (Haryana) by the police. The incidents aroused much furore from women's organisations and political parties. Ten women MPs conducted judicial inquiry in to the incident. The Lok Dal (a peasants and workers party), staged a noisy demonstration against the incident during their visit. The issue was debated in the Lok Sabha. CPI, Lok Dal organised protest demonstrations around this incident in Baghpat. A "dharna" (demonstration), to protest against this incident was also held by thirty organisations, mainly party based, including All India Congress Committee in Delhi, where 23 people were arrested for violating prohibitory orders while marching to Prime minister's house.

Around the same time, another rape incident by the police, took place in Dabwali, Haryana. Local protests were held and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) demanded the resignation of Haryana Government for failing to protect the "lives, property, and honour" of the residents of Dabwali. The Delhi unit of BJP launched a one week campaign against the 'increasing number of dacoities, robberies, and attacks on women in the city'. Finally, Raj Narain, a leader of Janata (S) party, resigned from the leadership of party on the grounds that he was going to launch a struggle to protect the dignity and honour of women. He went on a hunger strike, demanding government action over the issue.

After all these demonstrations and protests, the Government of India accepted the general demand that the rape law be changed, and came up with the bill modifying the rape law in which the burden of proof was put on the accused, instead of raped woman in custodial rape cases.

The bill raised controversies among various groups, as in 'socialist feminist' conference in Bombay in 1980s, after the introduction of the bill in the parliament. There was a debate amongst groups, with one side claiming that the clause on burden of proof over the accused be extended to all rape cases, while the other side claiming that such a clause will be abused by the government to implicate male activists in the rape cases. Opinions over the issue were divided and accusations of being antifeminist and bourgeois idealists were hurled against each other by the opposite groups. There were a lot of differences amongst feminists of different groups. There was voting to decide on the issue. Thus many did not vote as a group or organisations but as individuals. For example, in Bombay Forum Against Rape, some members voted one way, while others, another, and still some abstained from the voting. Finally after two rounds of voting, the anti-extentionist won the debate by a narrow margin of votes.

Following these months of agitations and demands for changes in rape law, by feminist groups, voluntary groups, left party groups, and rightist groups (for reasons totally opposed to feminist cause), the government passed a bill on rape, whose main highlight was inclusion of the clause which put the burden of proof on the accused in the cases of custodial rapes.

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The above campaign against rape show us different understandings of rape by different voluntary groups, parties, and feminists. Some look at the issue of rape from the point of view of woman's honour and dignity, while some articulate the issue in terms of women's chastity and purity. Still some articulate the issue in terms of 'criminality'. There are some who articulate the act of rape in terms of individual psychological aberrations. Communist women articulate the issue of rape in terms of class. It is also clear that some (feminist groups) articulate the issue in terms of women's right and self determination.

We see in the above examples, that groups with as diverse view as above have been able to come together even if, for a short period in a coalition joint campaign against rape.The question that thus remains to be seen is : how has such a coalition been possible?. It is generally stated that such coalitions are possible because people decide to come to a minimum agreement on certain issues or because people decide to forget about their differences or disagreements for the sake of a wider goal. The above coalition attempts show that neither is the case.

Although different groups did come together on the common goal of changing the rape law, this goal in itself did not help sustain the alliance. Indeed the campaign shows the open distrust shown by different groups towards each other which in turn affected the strength of the alliance and the effect it created. This means a minimum agreement on certain issues or a commonly stated goal **is not enough** to sustain coalition attempts in a manner of sustained solidarity. Even beyond any minimum agreement on certain issues and a proposed common goal, there exists a certain logic that makes such attempts a concrete reality. It is the logic underlying articulations that makes such attempts a possibility.

3.4   The category 'woman' in feminist theorising in India:

Feminists in India are theorising on women's oppression and the possible ways to overcome them. In this subsection we will discuss these various feminist theorisations. We discuss these theorisations, because they bring out the diversity of articulations existing around the category 'woman' in the Indian context. Further, the different theorisations are themselves representative of different strands of feminism within the Indian context. The articulation of the category 'woman' by these different feminists shows their own circumlocation, i.e the varied contexts of struggle in which these feminists are rooted. As such their views reflect the views existing in the multiple contexts of struggles within the women's movements in India. The overall discussion presented could thus be understood as in a more general representative sense than only as the perceptions of individual feminist authors.

This discussion becomes important because these different articulations around the meaning of the category 'woman' becomes the point of struggle and contestation. The different articulations around category 'woman' have had a divisive and sectarian effect on movement politics. It is from the perspective of understanding these processes underlying the divisive tendencies within women's movement, so as to contribute towards overcoming them, that we discuss these theorisations.

Gail Omvedt, American by birth, but active in grassroot level organising in India, for many years, has been theorising on questions of women's oppression for a long time. Through time, she has made significant shifts in her analysis. The reasons of this shift can also be located in the shifts she makes in her political involvements. In the seventies, she worked with the Lal Nishan Party a regional left party working mainly in urban and some rural parts of Maharashtra. Later she has worked with Mahila Mukti, a women's group in Maharashtra. Presently she is working with Shetkari Sanghatana, one of the biggest and strongest farmers

organisation in India, also having an active women's group. She states that she started working with this organisation because she felt that "in the women's movement we were losing all battles". Responding to her own involvement with this organisation, she states "Relating to this organization is very controversial. I have faced attacks for being bourgeois, feminist, even CIA. Now I am attacked by feminists for being close to Shetkari Sanghatana. People are not looking at what thousands of women are getting out of it, how it is changing their consciousness" (Omvedt quoted in Bhasin, K etal 1989,p6). While this personal account by Omvedt may help us to locate her own shifts in analysis of women's oppression and ways to overcome them, they also point to the tendencies within movement politics, i.e to defame and denounce the other who differs with one's own politics.

Omvedt in 1978 argues, that poor rural working women, belonging to the category of agricultural labourers and poor peasants, form the bases of women's movement in India. She substantiates her claim by using two inter-related concepts, viz, work participation by women and the changing mode of production. She states

"the crucial fact that women in much of India are major productive workers among poor peasants and agricultural labourers obviously has been a cause of their major role in rural militancy and thus the process of bringing their own specific problems forward. However, this by itself is not enough...... What has been changing instead is the nature of the rural class structure itself, and thus the type of rural mobilizations and agitations as well as the significance and degree of women's participation. To understand this we need to consider the changing **mode of production** in Indian agriculture. Capitalist relations are replacing feudal relations in the countryside. As a result, the issue is no longer simply "peasant revolt" but rather poor peasant and agricultural labourer revolt. This is affecting women because they are the dominant productive workers among the rural poor. It is the rising **revolt of the rural poor** (agricultural labourers and poor peasants) in the last decade in India that is leading, unevenly, to the development of genuine mass based movements for women's equality and liberation" (p7-8).

In the above, Omvedt articulates the category of women in terms of women belonging to agricultural labourers and poor peasant class, who then form the bases for the women's liberation movements. Thus her articulation of the category women is symbolic of women, who are involved in some physical work or labour. Although Omvedt herself has changed her analysis over the last 15 years, the above articulation by Omvedt still remains fairly representative of the view held by wide section of women activists, viz, those working in some of the far left Naxalite groups and Marxist non party formations or mass organisations, working with the agricultural labourers and poor peasantry.

In her more recent theorisations (1993) she argues that especially after 1985, "the emergence of new women's organisations linked to mass organisations of the new social movements unleashed a new dynamic" (p200). She also states that, at its base, much of the new activity is among rural women and that it was the Chandwad women's conference of Shetkari Sanghatana in 1986 that signalled the opening of the new period (p200). She states that Chandwad heralded the birth of a new international women's decade, a decade of rural women" (p204-205). She then states that similar new feminist trends were coming up elsewhere in the country with the formations of women's organisations linked to new movements or mass organisations. She thus argues that a

"new perspective was emerging in the women's movement, which posed challenges to traditional Marxism" and "traditional feminism" in ways that went beyond simple posing of "class and caste" or "class" and "gender". Notions such as the "feminine principle" and "stri shakti", which were increasingly being debated, had some profound implications...... The notion of stri shakti similarly implied not so much a separate women's movement as the

leading role of women in various popular movements" (p226).

Omvedt argues that these slogans were a significant departure from the tendency of both Urban feminists and party women to depict women as primarily victims (p226).

Omvedt's above analysis shows that her recent articulation of the category 'woman' goes beyond the class/caste dimension and centres around the symbol of 'women's power' (stri shakti) weaved around 'rural women'. The view held by Omvedt also can be called as fairly representative of the wide section of women's activist either directly or indirectly affiliated with the rural mass organisations and in particular farmers organisations. Omvedt's views are in some ways sharply different from some of the other feminists. Omvedt herself acknowledges this difference and in fact critiques the women's movement for not being able to give an organised articulation to what she calls as 'new' perspective. She states that movement is still dominated by "traditional Marxists" connected with the parties and "traditional feminists" in the urban-based organisations, who are most alienated from the new developments (p227). These statements thus reflect the sharp and even polarised differences existing between different women's groups in India.

Vandana Shiva, a physicist by profession grew dischanted with the practice of science and started questioning nuclear physics when she realised how dangerously it could be misappropriated. This realisation led her to women and Chipko movement in India (Bhasin K,1989,p6). Her writings have received a world wide recognition and today she remains India's one of most vocal eco feminist. Shiva (1988) argues that Science and development are not universal categories of progress but special projects of modern western patriarchy (p xiv). She points to the survival threats, the destruction of the eco diversity, the death of nature and its effects on marginalisation of women who face survival threats as they depend on nature for sustenance. She elaborates "violence against nature and women is built into the very model of perceiving both, and forms the basis of the current development paradigm" (p xvi). For her, the new relationship of men's domination and mastery over nature are also associated with new patterns of domination and mastery over women and their exclusion from participation as partners in both science and development (p xvii).

Shiva argues that Indian women as victims of this violence have risen to protect nature and preserve their survival and sustenance and in the process challenged the most fundamental categories of western patriarchy, viz, its concepts of nature and women and of science and development (ppxvii-xviii). She argues that these struggles are rooted in a preservation and recovery of feminine principle in which nature is considered as 'prakriti' a living and creative process, the feminine principle from which all life arises. She further states that in the process women are creating "a feminist ideology that transcends gender and a political practice which is humanly inclusive; .... they are challenging the dominant concept of power as violence with the alternative concept of non-violence as power"(p xviii).

The above formulations by Shiva have been discussed and critiqued widely in and outside India. Shiva's assertions are held to be quite controversial among many feminists. It has been argued that Shiva treats Indian philosophical tradition in a monolithic and homogenous way, that she does not take into account the low caste and the adivasi traditions in to account in her analysis. She is also critiqued for positing women as a unitary category undifferentiated by race, class and ethnicity etc (Agarwal B 1990,p4/5). Further Shiva has also been critiqued for the connection's she makes between women body or biology and oppression of women and nature, an assertion which brings her closer to some strands of radical feminism. Nevertheless, in spite of all these critiques, there exists a fairly wide following of this ecofeminist perspective in India amongst various activist groups. Shiva's articulation of the category "woman" is in terms of "woman's power" resting in the recovery

of **feminine principle** by Indian women.

Here, it may be pointed that although both Omvedt and Shiva articulate the category 'woman' in terms of women's power, there are important differences in their ways of articulation. Shiva's analysis takes off from the feminine principle and women's power is a derivative of this principle. In this sense, the notion of women's power is intricately linked with the ecofeminist perspective. Omvedt analysis takes off from the concrete contexts of struggle in rural areas. Her own experience with the dynamism of women in the farmers movement and other mass movements leads her to articulate the notion of "women's power". In this sense, Omvedt's articulation of women's power is rooted much more in the ground level reality rather than on abstract notions of feminine principle as in Shiva's.

Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah are both members of Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW), an autonomous women's group located in Bombay. Both of them have had their own fleeting encounter with the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist groups in late seventies and early eighties respectively. Today, they identify themselves with the strand of socialist feminism within India. Their articulation of the category 'woman' show in some ways the hybrid character of the socialist feminist trend within India.

They in their book (1991) differentiate between three waves of Indian women's movement. In their book, they document the third wave of this movement. They document or give descriptions of what they see as the movement's three main issues: violence, health, and work as political, emotional and intellectual experiences. They also document legal rights and campaigns and reforms around them (p16). They state

> "The third phase of IWM was a collective, emotional and militant response against sexual violence on women. It emerged spontaneously, like a voice unfettered by fear, theoretical constraints or strategic considerations. It was far from the usual politically calculated, mechanical protest against state...... Violence against women encompasses the issues of rape, dowry murder, wife battering, sexual harassment and portrayal of women in the media. The grossness of sexual atrocities and the visual humiliation of women are still live issues within the movement" (pp32-33).

The authors through specific examples also show how gender interacts with class and ethnicity to produce specific forms of violences on different women.

In their discussion around health issues, they draw on the importance of a woman's relation with her body. In the process they draw out linkages between questions of sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth, contraception. They also critique the government family programme and the drive by government to sterilise women through injectable contraceptives. Lastly, they draw our attention to campaigns against amniocentesis and discuss the politics of reproduction, women's right to control their fertility and issues of sexuality implicit in all these discussions.

In their discussion on work, they argue that the core of any discrimination that women face in the area of work lies in sex based division of labour (SDL)(p203). They critique the trade unions with predominantly female membership, viz, SEWA or Chikodi Taluka union, Nipani for evading the challenge of SDL by saying that they want to emphasise the identity of women as workers" (p212). The authors question this and ask " Can women realise their identity as workers until they discover their biology based, exploitative and imposed identity as housewives?"(p212). They give examples of struggles in organised sector which centres around struggles for better conditions and facilities at the work place, for permanency or question of promotion (pp186-188). They

discuss struggles around demands for creche facilities, maternal benefits, facilities such as subsidised canteens, shorter working hours overtime payments, Transport, separate toilets etc (pp190-191). Lastly they also discuss the problem of sexual harassment faced by the women workers (p193) as also problems of sexuality arising for women involved in organising in unions (p201).

In their discussion on legal campaigns too they discuss campaigns against violence, rape, dowry, sati, indecency, and campaigns for change in family laws.

The above discussion shows the focal points around which the authors weave their discussion around women. The authors in their narration, have focused on 'women's body' in their articulation of issues. For example, discussions around issues of violence and health have extensive focus on women's body. Legal campaigns also deal with issues related to women's body. Their discussions around women and work also discuss the physical hardship involved in the work done by the women, the hazards involved in the same etc. They also centre their discussion on questions of sexuality etc. Also the authors have used class, gender and (at times caste and ethnicity) as their axis through which to analyse the above issues. In summary, it can be stated that the author's articulation around the category 'woman' symbolises 'woman's body', weaved around categories of class, gender, and at times, caste and ethnicity. This shows that despite the authors own materialistic orientation towards women's oppression, as socialist feminists, expressed through the categories of gender, class, and at times, ethnicity and caste, their analysis remains preoccupied with 'women's body', which brings them closer to the assertions of some strands of radical feminism. In this sense, their analysis shows the hybrid character of socialist feminism in India. Lastly, the views of the authors can also be stated to be representative of many women activists in urban based autonomous women's groups within India.

Gabriele Dietrich is a German by birth, but has taken Indian citizenship today after seventeen years of stay and fourteen years of activism in India. Dietrich growing up in secular, postwar Germany, found in religion and the church an option from the nihilism of her family she encountered in her youth. While she accepts that she suffers from institutionalised religion in her daily life, she also acknowledges that it is through a traditional religious institution that she first got an access to questions of faith and spirituality which later on had a liberating effect on her (1992,p vii). This background of hers perhaps explains her position towards religion and her emphasis on humanist values in her theorisations. She works with "Pennurimai Iyakkam" a women's organisation working with slum women of Madurai.

Dietrich (1992) explores interconnections between women, secularism and religion and discusses issue of sexuality, work, ecology, culture and development. She also reflects on interlinkages between dalit movements and women's movement.

One of the main concerns articulated by Dietrich is the rising communalism in India. In her articulation of this concern, she states

> " what unites all of us is the struggle against communalism and religious chauvinism which is one of the acutest dangers in our national political process as a whole..... Overcoming the barriers of caste and creed, affirming humanist-feminist values within and outside religions has to happen in our day to day work with women at the local level, where unity is often more difficult to build. My contention is that despite being sharpened by alienations of caste, class and patriarchy, religion, like art, is also a field in which the human capacity for transcendence and transformation is expressed in a symbolic way and that, therefore, religious resources need to be explored and transformed from a woman-centred perspective" (pviii).

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She argues that, the debate about religious and cultural identities is another important step to safeguard the pluralistic democratic content of our many faceted culture" (p12). Whilst acknowledging the difficulties involved in building anticommunalist alliance, she concludes optimistically

"There are no easy answers, but indications are that the perspectives on secularism, religious reform and a pluralistic humanist culture are deepening within women's movement. If the challenge is taken up, women will be able to make the most crucial contribution towards building a truly humanist secular state" (p34).

This assertion of Dietrich on one hand are extremely meaningful in the light of rising communalism in India, however on the other, not without problems either. As Dietrich herself admits, her articulation of religion remains extremely problematic to the Dalits and who would contest them, who feel that they have to confront Hinduism as a whole (p vii). It also remains problematic to many other subaltern groups like adivasis, as also to resolution of certain questions of women which needs a direct confrontation with the patriarchal religion and cannot be resolved within the framework of religion.

Her orientation towards the issues of sexuality or women and work, culture and ecology, has an humanist essence to it whether she approaches these issues from Marxist perspective or not. For example, in her conclusion to discussion on sexuality, she states "It has become clear by now that discussions on sexuality in a feminist perspective are not discussions about "free sex" but about power relationships and violation of human dignity......The present pattern is that women are treated as property and that men are not answerable in their sexual behaviour. We are striving for a situation where no human being will be owned by another, but where everybody will be answerable in mutual responsibility and compassion" (p51).

In summary it can be said that Dietrich articulates the category woman around the 'wholeness of human being' i.e in all its dimensions, viz, material, experiential, spiritual etc. She articulates this woman through lenses of class, caste and religion. This is clear from her general orientation towards developing a perspective of development and struggle around the wholesomeness of being, which is clearly reflected in the way in which she articulates some of her concerns. The secular views held by Dietrich are shared by many women activists in the struggle, who feel that the rising communalism and violence (from the rightist as well as some far left forces) in India should be treated as the most acute problem, having deeply negative implications for (all) women's emancipation.

Ilina Sen has been actively associated with women's and mine worker's movement and most recently with the Chhattisgarh Shramik Sangh in Madhya Pradesh.

Sen (1990) has edited a collection of essays on women's participation in mass movements. In this book, she problematises the nature of women's movement in India. She asks "Given the diversity of cultures and the complexities of caste and class among women in India, can we actually speak of an overarching women's movement in the country? Or is it that there are a number of fragmented campaigns which do not add up to a movement? How many of these campaigns are urban, middle class and how many rural? Equally, how do we define a 'women's movement: is it one in which only women participate? Or one which raises only women-specific issues? How then do we look at women's participation in 'broader' mass movements?"(p3). Sen thus draws our attention to the unresolved vital questions of the nature of women's movement in India.

It is Sen's contention that the last two decades has seen important mass movements in which women have participated in large numbers and also contributed a special women's view point. She argues that "An

understanding of the nature of these women's struggles thus becomes important if we are to gain a perspective on the women's movement that is more truly representative of the aspirations of the generality of Indian women than most currently available feminist theory" (p4).

Sen's above assertion brings back the tension ridden unresolved question of who is the true representative of the aspirations of the Indian women, in the context of women's movements in India to the fore. Indeed, through this assertion, Sen puts herself into the middle of this debate, as she critiques the 'urban' based feminist groups for being alienated from the lives of Indian women. She states

> "the last two decades have seen a conscious articulation of women's issues among many urban and educated middle class.....Many women from educated backgrounds have come together in groups in a realization of their strength and potential and have lobbied and protested against the blatant forms of discrimination they face in our society ..... Structurally, such groups are closer to the feminist groups of the West, and this has facilitated their integration into international feminist circuits. However, such groups have often remained circumstantially distant from the actual lives of poor women, even when they have made conscious efforts to articulate their needs. This has meant that they have, by and large, remained isolated from the mainstream of political processes in the country" (p1-2).

In the same vein, she critiques the urban based groups for considering 'violence' alone to be the women's issue. She argues that "women relate to a totality of existential conditions, and to poor, toiling women, issues of daily survival and strategies related to this are of as much importance and are as real as issues of family violence " (p14).

Ilina Sen's arguments, in the first place shows the existing divisions between women's groups in India. They show the urban/rural divide on one hand and mass movements/autonomous women's groups divide on the other. Sen's own articulation remains partial to women involved in mass movements in rural areas in particular. In other words, her articulation around the category is that of an "activist woman" (not in the sense of a political activist) but rather in a more general or broader sense of "resisting woman" in 'rural' areas in particular. Lastly, Sen's perspective could be taken as a representative of the perspective held by many feminists active in mass movements in rural areas.

To recapitulate, feminists in India articulate different categories of 'women'. Further, the above articulation arises from the specific circumlocation of the above feminists. Omvedt's and Ilina Sen's articulation remains partial towards the 'rural women' in mass movements. Both in fact criticise the 'urban' based women's groups. Omvedt calls these groups as "traditional feminists" and Sen calls these groups as "closer to feminist groups of the west". The perspective of Gandhi and Shah remains close to perspective of many urban based women's groups, who, although socialist feminists, remain in many ways, closer to radical feminists in their overall orientation and practice. Further, as we saw above, their hierarchy of women's issues viz, violence, health, work and 'other general issues' is challenged by Sen and Omvedt as also Shiva. Vandana Shiva's perspective argues that women have a special relationship with the nature and thus stresses women's role in sustainable development. Shiva thus articulates the women's issues in terms of environmental degradation etc. The above discussion also brings us to the tensions around the question of what could be considered as 'legitimate' women's issues in the Indian context. Lastly, we also saw the problematic implications of Dietrich's articulation of humanist woman with religious orientation to some sections of Indian society. The above discussion shows the tensions accompanying differently articulated category 'woman'. However, we contend that, inspite of the tensions and the divisive effects that these different articulations may have on feminist practice, the fact that their articulation centres around 'woman', could create conditions to achieve positive effects instead of divisive

effects. We will look into the implications of the same in our conclusion to this chapter.

3.5   Conclusion

Feminists have articulated the category 'woman' in different ways. We also saw the tensions accompanying these articulations, whether through claims of who truly represents Indian women or through the question of what are legitimate feminists issues. However, we would argue that these difference in the articulation need not lead to divisive tendencies. As we have seen in this chapter, the fragmentation in the Indian context, itself shows that **there cannot be 'a' feminist practice.** The context in itself argues for a diverse and multiple responses. Thus the different articulations around the category 'woman' could be treated as valid **contextual articulations** in themselves. This does not mean that there cannot be a linkage between different articulations. Indeed these different articulations around the category woman presuppose an 'imaginary woman'. The different articulations in feminist theorising can be understood as **fragmentary wholes** of this imaginary. Indeed it is this condition, that allows the appropriation of discourses around 'woman' created by feminist emancipatory projects by reactionary forces or projects which seek to objectify women, examples of which we have seen in this chapter. However, it is the same condition, that **could** allow a linkage between these different articulations. The campaign against rape saw diverse articulations around the issue of rape. However, we also saw that despite these different articulations, coalitions were made possible for short periods. We also saw that, even beyond any minimum agreement on certain issues, there exists reasons as to why the coalitions sustain or collapse or whether linkages between various articulations could be made possible or not. In other words, coming to an agreement on minimum issues or the common goal is a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition. In other words, it is **the way the articulation is done,** is what makes solidarity or exclusion possible. This brings us to the question of ethics of articulation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The primary concern addressed in this research paper is the divisive, sectarian and vanguardist tendencies within women's movement in India. The context of women's movement in India shows a diversity of groups and organisational practices. However, there has been a history of intolerance to this difference in the organisational practices. One of the major points of this tension has been the articulation of the category 'woman' around which feminist political practices are organised.

Our empirical findings in chapter 3 shows that the category 'woman' has been articulated by feminists in India in different ways. Thus the meaning of the category woman has been a point of struggle and contestation. The 'acting woman' in each articulation has included and excluded certain subject positions. Thus tensions have accompanied these articulations, and so also the claims of who truly represents Indian women or what are the legitimate feminists issues. These issues in turn have lead to divisiveness, sectarianism and vanguardist positioning by different groups. To date these issues remain unresolved, and so also the scars and the painful memories of individuals resulting from the confrontationist encounters on these issues in different meetings and joint forums. These in turn have affected fostering of solidarity and building of coalition alliance between different groups. We would argue that there are bound to be differences in articulations of the category 'woman'. However, in our view, inspite of these differences, an agreement over 'procedures' to be followed in any process of alliance building could be reached upon by groups involved in such coalitions, which in turn could lead to sustaining of such alliances. We refer to these 'procedures' as ethics of articulation in our thesis.

From our empirical findings and conceptual framework, we would argue the following:

In the first place the Indian context is in itself a fragmented context. 'India' is a fragile union, questioned and attacked from different sides, from the time of its inception i.e its independence to date. In other words, 'India' remains a fragile unity, an imaginary political construct, fragmented over issues of region (articulated whether as north/south or rural/urban or adivasi/nonadivasi) and religion, language, ethnicity, caste, class, and gender amongst other issues. The context itself suggests a fragmentation of interests. In other words, there cannot be 'a feminist practice' around the 'interests of a woman'. This means the context itself argues for a plural expression of feminism. The different articulations around the category 'woman' could be treated as an expression of this plural reality. As such each articulation around 'woman' could be treated as a 'valid contextual articulation' in itself.

In our conceptual framework, we have argued that the category 'woman' is in itself an 'imaginary' category. This does not mean that the concrete woman does not exist. The imaginary 'woman' gets a force of reality in discourse and in articulation. It is in articulation that the imaginary 'woman' gets its meaning. In other words the very practice of articulation fixes a certain meaning to the category 'woman'. Thus on one hand the fixation of meaning of the category 'woman' becomes the inevitable process of any articulation, without which no coherent meaning is possible, and on the other it leads to a recognition that every such fixation can only be a partial fixation, as no articulation or discourse can ever hope to catch the 'whole' meaning of the category 'woman' since no such 'woman' exists. This means that different articulations around the category 'woman' can be treated as 'fragmentary wholes' of the 'imaginary' woman.

We have argued earlier that it is because the imaginary 'woman' is taken as a real woman, that intolerance to differences takes its effects through sectarian and divisive tendencies which makes any coalition process an impossibility. Instead as stated above, we suggest that the different articulations around the category 'woman'

be treated as fragmentary wholes of this imaginary. We suggest that as fragmentary wholes, these articulations could be treated as **'contingent relational knowledge'** that each contextual position can offer. This would thus mean doing away with the search for metanarratives or totalising narratives that sought to explain social totality. This assertion has important implications for feminist theorising. Feminist theorising could now take a turn to historically specific and contextual generalisations rather than build up totalising narratives of women's complex social reality.

This concept of 'contingent relational knowledge' affirms the surplus of meaning and contingency of meaning in every articulation. It challenges the possibility of ever having a complete knowledge on one hand and affirms the ambiguous character of every articulation on the other. It also affirms the ambiguity in every subject, i.e moments of coherence and incoherence within every subject. It affirms the experience of a contingent self rather than a stable static self. It suggests a plenitude of meaning in life to the poverty of constricted living. We would argue that it is this ambiguous character of every articulation that could become a bases for our political practice that goes beyond the duality posed by the logic of identity / difference.

Treating articulations as 'contingent relational knowledges' leads to an 'openness' that could become a condition for a dialogue between different articulations. Concretely speaking it means that it could create a possibility of a dialogue between different articulations around 'woman'.
As Patricia Hill Collins (1990) states:

> "Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is unfinished. Each group becomes better able to consider other groups' standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups' partial perspectives ..... Partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard..... Dialogue is critical to the success of this epistemological approach" (p236).

We believe that dialogue is important to any feminist practice which recognises differences between women. This assertion does not mean a denial of power relations existing between different people in dialogue nor does it mean that people in dialogue should be motivated by higher ideals of community which requires a transcendentalism of self. Here, we would differentiate our perspective from the perspective offered by Seyla Benhabib who builds up on the 'ideal speech situation' offered by Habermas and argues for a communicative ethics which bases itself on what she calls as "the standpoint of the concrete other". Benhabib (1986) argues:

> "The standpoint of the "concrete other,".... requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity, and effective emotional constitution. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from what constitutes our commonality and seek to understand the distinctiveness of the other. We seek to comprehend the needs of the other, their motivations, what they search for, and what they desire. Our relation to the other is governed by the norm of complementary reciprocity : each is entitled to expect and to assume from the other forms of behaviour through which the other feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs, talents, and capacities. Our differences in this case complement rather than exclude one another..... Such relations require in various ways that I do, and that you expect me to do in the face of your needs, more than would be required of me as a right bearing person. In treating you in accordance with the norms of solidarity, friendship, love and care, I confirm not only your humanity but your human individuality. The moral categories that accompany such interactions are those of responsibility, bonding and sharing" (p341).

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Our objection to Benhabib's above assertion would be similar to the critique of the same made by Iris Young. Young (1990) argues that "Such an ideal of shared subjectivity or the transparency of subjects to one another, denies difference in the sense of the basic asymmetry of subjects" (p309). More importantly she points out to the undesirable political implications of such ideal of shared subjectivity. Young argues that such a proposition "denies difference in the concrete sense of making it difficult for people to respect those with whom they do not identify" (p311). In other words, transcendental perspectives have at its core a fear for difference. It always seeks identity through reconciliation of differences. The normative framework of such perspectives do not have a place for a radical notion of difference as in final terms, all difference is seeked to be obliterated and subsumed under the higher goals of community and identity. It thus remains within the identity/difference duality. In other words it makes identity a necessity and a necessary character of being as it gives a superiority to the logic of identity to the logic of difference in the final instance.

In reverse to the above, we would plead for a concept of a dialogue as a relation which embodies an openness to the nonidentical and 'unassimilated otherness'[22]. We use the concept of dialogue to argue for a communicative ethics which would enable a coexistence of the different identities. Connolly (1993) suggests the building of such ethical sensibilities in the works of Michel Foucault. He argues that Foucault's ethical sensibilities calls for "Explorations of new possibilities in social relations ..... that enable a larger variety of identities to coexist in relations of "studied" indifference on some occasions, alliance on others, and agnostic respect during periods of rivalry and contestation" (p368). Such is the ethics of communication that we would plead for in our conception of 'dialogue'. We would differentiate these ethics from the ethics that advocate a mere tolerance towards difference. An ethics which advocates mere tolerance towards difference undermines the imaginivity and creativity that difference brings in our lives.

Building up such a political culture into the feminist politics would mean in a way going beyond simple duality of identity/difference. It would also mean going beyond a simplistic understanding of right versus wrong. It would mean living our politics in a space between identity/difference. For example how would one look at the assertion by Dietrich who argues for a secular perspective and explorations and transformation of religious resources from a woman centred perspective to bring in religious reforms so as to build up a "truly humanist state"? As we have stated earlier in our paper, her assertion, when seen from the perspective of the rising communalism in India attains an important meaning in Indian Politics. However as we have also noted her assertion could be problematic when seen from the perspectives of dalits and other subaltern groups like adivasis who have been subjugated by the mainstream Hindu religion and thus needs to confront and struggle against the entire Hindu religion as such. Further, it is not that the dalits and adivasis will not have to face the brunt of communalist politics. Indeed, like most vulnerable groups, they face and bear the highest costs in communal riots and violence. Thus there is an ambiguity in the political consequences of Dietrich's assertion. It is this fundamental ambiguous character of any political stance that we would like to affirm against any dogmatic and simplistic positioning through assertions of 'right' and 'wrong'.

It could be argued that the above political perspective could be dangerous to adopt and that it could easily fall into the trap of relativism of values, thus proposing that all political struggles are progressive in character. We do not agree with this pessimistic view of our position. A leap into an unknown, that which is beyond our set given values and certainties could create new insecurities but also new challenges. It would challenge us to create a space for a more nuanced and a finer political practice rather than an essentialist and separatist practice. It would mean recognising the ambiguity and the limits of every discursive practice. It does not mean a

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22   I borrow this word from Iris Young ;1990,p320.

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withdrawal from politics but bringing in an 'imaginary' dimension into the realm of politics.

The articulation of the category 'woman' need not become a point of sectarian politics. Instead the category 'woman' acting as an 'imaginary' could allow us to use our imagination in a dynamic and creative sense. 'Imagination' bridges the gap between false and truth, fiction and reality. It means abandoning ourselves into a realm of freedom on the bridge between sanity and madness, a space where imagination and creativity takes its inspiration from. Standing on this bridge, we could make the category 'woman' work in ever new ways. We could learn to look at the category 'woman' through a kaleidoscope of multiple intermixed hybrid[23] realities, class, caste and ethnicity, urban and rural, adivasi, and non adivasi etc.

Implications of the study on feminist political practice: 'women' and 'coalition politics'

We would agree that proposing the notion that all political struggles are progressive, would indeed be a very dangerous position to adopt in the present Indian political situation which is charged with communalist and fundamentalist politics. Instead we suggest that the feminist political practice could be based on coalition politics which recognises difference and based on an understanding of what we want to achieve. As Yuval Davis N states (1993):

> "all feminist (and other forms of democratic) politics should be viewed as a form of coalition politics in which the differences among women would be recognised and given a voice, without fixating the boundaries of this coalition in terms of 'who' we are but in terms of what we want to achieve" (10).

Such an understanding would allow us to form alliances with progressive and democratic forces on the bases of shared and agreed political goal rather than on discourses or articulations around the category 'woman' which in themselves can be stated to be neither progressive nor reactionary. This we have already exemplified through our discussion on the appropriation of feminist and progressive discourses by the fundamentalist and reactionary forces. Thus we do not form alliances with the BJP or the RSSS just because they also use the discourses of women's power or the discourses on women's rights and equality. The basis to form an alliance should be commonly stated goals over concrete issues.

Although the above assertion help us make a move from a open ended relativist politics to contextualised politics based on commonly shared goals, it does not in our opinion, necessarily sustain such politics of alliance over long periods. We have seen in the campaign against rape that groups having different understandings on rape were able to come together and form an alliance for a short period to demand for the change in rape law and opening of trial after some shocking court judgements and incidents of rape. However, as we saw, the alliance could not sustain itself for very long and the distrust of members in each other was reflected in individual groups organising their 'own' action, whether through filing of separate petitions or holding separate demonstrations over the issue, inspite of forming a joint action committee. This makes us assert that even beyond a minimum agreement on certain issues (here it was the change in rape law) there are other reasons which make formation of alliances a possibility.

In the above example, there was a question of the distrust that groups had of each other because of differences in the analysis of rape. We feel that there are bound to be differences in analysis and perspectives put forward
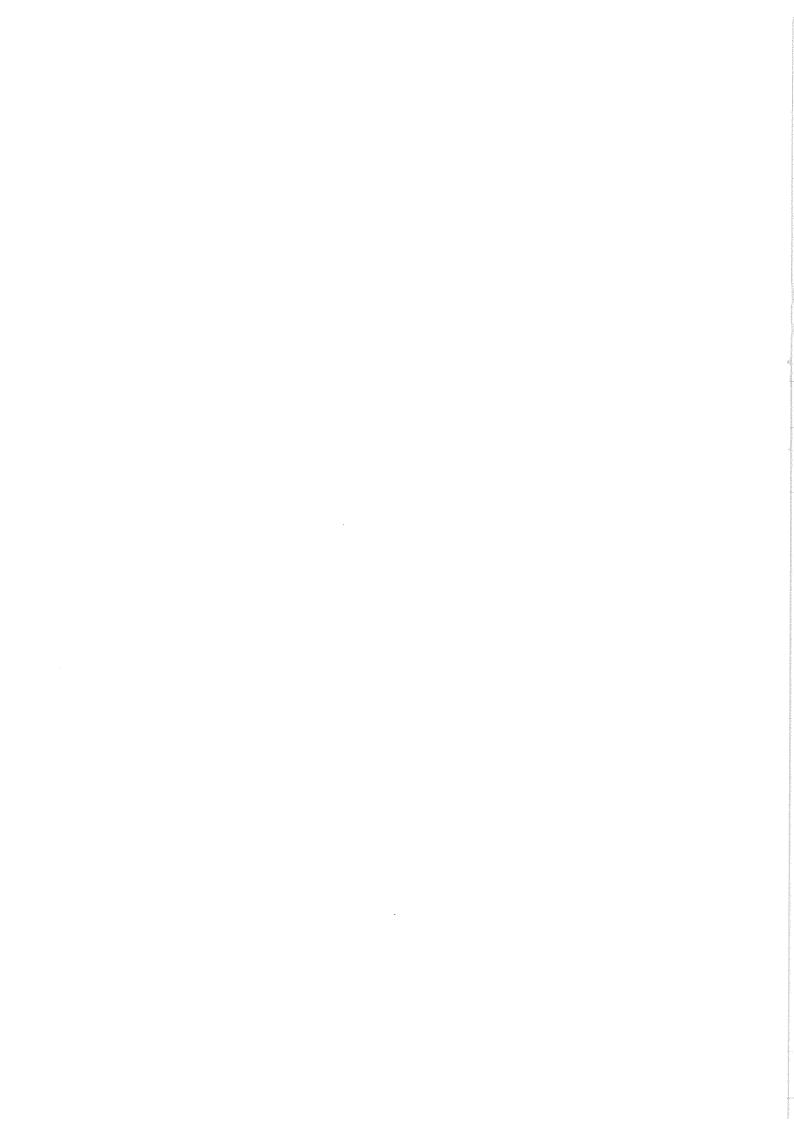
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23   I borrow the concept of hybridity from Pieterse J N (1994). Pieterse refers to hybridization as a cross category process (p.12). He calls hybridization as an age of boundary crossing (p.20).

on every issue. The point is how do we work together and form alliances and move towards a commonly stated goal inspite of these differences. It is here that we feel that the above discussed ethics of communication and articulation, having a concept of dialogue as relation which embodies an openness to the non identical and unassimilated otherness becomes relevant. The point is to convert the mutual distrust existing between groups in such alliances into what Connolly (1993) states as an 'agnostic respect' for each other which could lead to sustaining of such alliances till the common goal is reached. Indeed the movement or the process of moving towards common goals in itself becomes as important as the goal itself. This we feel is quite important since in our experience alliances often break up because certain groups feel sidelined, hurt or used in the process of alliance building by the other groups.

Similarly, the initial process of coming to an understanding and an agreement on, what is the common goal, by the different groups so as to form an alliance is also as equally important as the later processes to reach towards those goals. For example, we draw attention to the controversy among various groups in the socialist feminist conference in Bombay in 1980s on our discussion on campaign against rape. We saw that accusations of being antifeminist and bourgeois idealists were hurled against each other by the opposite groups on the question of extending the clause of burden of proof over the accused to all rape cases. It is true that most rape cases do not lead to conviction of accused because of the very nature of the clause which puts the burden of proof over the rape victim. However, the fear that if the burden of proof is transferred to the culprit, such a clause might be abused by the government to implicate male activists in rape cases is also a real fear, and a real possibility.

Although we strongly agree with the position that rape law should be extended to all rape cases, we also recognise the possible ambiguous outcomes of such demand. **It is the recognition of this ambiguity in every political stance, that we would plead for, even while arguing and advocating our own political stance.** Recognition of ambiguity does not mean that we do not live our politics. However, it does mean living our politics with a heightened sensibility to indeterminacy, instability and transience (Pieterse, 1992,p26). This means living our politics without immediately coming to a judgement on our opponent as someone who is fundamentally wrong and therefore needs to be annihilated, whether physically (as many far left groups do in India) or mentally and emotionally. Perhaps only a recognition of such ambiguity could lead us to overcome a immediate need to accuse the other of either being an 'antifeminist' or 'bourgeois idealist' as in the above case. Recognition of ambiguity could teach us to live our politics by going beyond the judgements of 'right' and 'wrong' by developing an agnostic respect for our opponent. Connolly (1993) defines 'Agnostic respect' as "a social relation of respect for the opponent against whom you define yourself even while you resist its imperatives and strive to delimit its spaces of hegemony" (p381). In this way, after Connolly, we would plead that an element of care could be built up into contestation and contestation into care (p382). These are some of the ethics of articulation that we would plead, for the sustaining of the processes of coalition politics.

Lastly, the 'contingent relational knowledge' could on one hand be a basis for localised plural emancipatory struggles around the different discursively organised category 'woman'. while on the other could lead us to a coalition politics based on commonly stated goals and ethics of dialogue, thus creating a chain of equivalence by linking different democratic struggles. In other words, it could lead to a plural practice of feminism, without suppressing the difference. Such feminist political practice would have politics of difference at its core.

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