
**CASTE-BASED DIVISION OF
LABOUR AMONG MIGRATING
DALIT WOMEN IN BENGAL: THE
MICRO-STUDIES OF COOCH
BEHAR, BIRBHUM AND PURULIA**

A thesis submitted towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M Phil in Women's Studies Course affiliated to Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Law and Management, Jadavpur University

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I hereby declare that this thesis contains literature survey and original research work by the undersigned candidate, as a part of my M Phil in Women's Studies degree during academic session 2019.

All information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct.

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Abstract

Title: Caste-based Division of Labour among Migrating Dalit Women in Bengal: The Micro-Studies of Cooch Behar, Birbhum and Purulia

The research seeks to unearth the organic functionalism marked between gender and caste in the sphere of division of work among the women, largely migrating from rural to urban Bengal. The project would also address the unrefined relationship between women employed as migrating labourers (mostly unorganized) and the prevalent practice of caste following the model of 'purity and pollution' in both rural and urban areas. There will be an attempt to look critically at the possibility of social movements as well. In particular, the political approach of Left-led trade unions toward the women labourers would be revisited in the context of contemporary developments of global capital. West Bengal is an interesting case in point. Owing to the enormous agrarian crisis and the historic burden of Partition, women, largely associated with agricultural works, are intensely migrating. On the other hand, caste, at the same time being historically prevalent in the state, must be problematized as a prime influential agent in defining the socio-economic status of migrating women, despite the continuous defiance of the Bengal Intellectuals, the Left in particular in case of primacy of caste in rural spheres and existence of it in the urban socio-economy. For this, descriptive interviews, thorough case studies are undergone at a micro-level study in three districts viz. Cooch Behar, Birbhum and Purulia, based on the contemporary statistics of gendered migration by the dalits. This would help in foregrounding the stratification of caste based division of labour and multi-dimensional alienations as well. The personal experiences of these lower caste women would tell us the political narratives of working class women particularly those who migrate, who have been excluded throughout the ages of historiography.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Caste as institutional machinery of oppression: A Special case of India

“Caste is not a division of labour; it is a division of labourers.”

– Dr. B. R. Ambedkar [2].

India is a special case to study as in no other civilized society the division of labour is accompanied by an ‘unnatural’ division of labourers into watertight compartments like caste. In fact the system is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour—it is a hierarchy in which the division of labourers is graded one above the other. The other uniqueness in this system is that this division of labour is not spontaneous; it is not based on natural aptitudes. The principle of capacity, choice and competency of personal career are violated in the caste system. It involves an attempt to appoint tasks to individuals on the basis of the social status of the parents. However, this theorization on caste system by Ambedkar has always been considered as pioneering in the chronological developments of Indian history and therefore a lot of attempts have been taken to re-examine the problematic of caste as a system contextualizing Indian political economy such as the works of M N Srinivas, Max Weber, Sharmila Rege, Nivedita Menon, Gopal Guru, Anand Teltumbde and many more. However, this dissertation seeks to trace and reconnect the history of division of labour on the basis of gender and with that of caste, to put the gender-caste matrix upon the complexity of division of labour. It is also interesting to revisit the question, how caste functions within the contemporary Indian socio-polity with its altered appearances, more importantly in the post-independent India when the crudest manifestations

like Untouchability is ‘constitutionally declared as illegal’ (Article 17 of Indian Constitution and made law by Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, IPC).

It has been argued by several scholars that there is a need to re-conceptualize caste. Caste is no more simply a system of ideas and values. It has become a matter of interpretation rather than substantialization. Contemporary changes in Indian society, polity and economy have reshaped caste. The policy of reservations based on caste has kept it alive and vibrant [39]. Protests against caste-based reservations have also contributed to the continuity of caste-based discourses. At times, caste-related outbursts surface, though in everyday life caste is not as visible as a means of social control [39]. Ethno-sociologist like Ronald B. Inden, in ‘Imagining India’, holds the view that castes used to function as political assemblages or “subject-citizenries” from the medieval era. It had its specific schemes and groupings, hence no uniform all-embracing scheme of social gradations. Today, caste is a reality, though of a different kind, for Inden. It is a means of political mobilization, of discrete use for specific goals, reservations in educational institutions and government services. Earlier, caste was more of a socio-cultural relations enacted through ‘jajmani’ system and rules of marriage and commensality [17]. Noted scholar Kanhaya Sharma thinks that the projection of caste as an ideology itself became an ideology of its propagators. This came, no doubt, even before the advent of British rule in India, however, the British granted an added impetus to both caste and feudalism for the reasons best known to them. Writings of James Tod (1990), Herbert Risley (1969), J. H. Hutton (1963) and many others are the clear evidence of the glorification of feudalism and caste as institutions of highest merit and for good of the Indian people. Such a doctored blasphemy helped British in pacifying the agitating souls against their rule and also sealed revelation of the full facts relating to demerits of the caste system. Thus, as Sharma concludes, Caste has engaged people; hence it has acquired a meta-legal approval and therefore, caste has never been a simple ritual-based hierarchy [39] because it has encompassed the entire matrix of socio-economic and political relations. This transcendence of caste-hierarchy beyond the margins of mere rituals paves our vision to look at the most vicious outcome of caste-based power play- in the form of caste-based violence.

To theorize caste-based violence, it is essential to understand ‘what is Caste in caste violence’. Parthasarathi Muthukkaruppan has made two connected arguments related to the mentioned question: **a) Caste is a Relationship**; and, **b) that relationship is necessarily determined by violence**. The centrality of these paired arguments taken up by Muthukkaruppan shows, “the poverty, if not the impossibility, of thinking and talking about caste without referring to the indispensable violence that constitutes the every relationship of caste.” [23] However, it is true that much has been said about caste in the past few decades in the domain of social sciences. Field works by social anthropologists have touched all corners of the

country. Since 1960s, parallel to this, political scientists have identified caste as a vital category to analyze the national elections and study the voting behaviors of what is popularly called as 'vote banks'. It is significant in this context that caste as a relationship has never been articulated [23]. In this context, Louis Dumont's theory of 'caste as a relationship' [11] was probably the first to bring this problematic to the fore. As observed by Ursula Sharma, Dumont pointed out that the research on caste more often identified the system as substantive groups and 'the system is taken as a mere collection of blocks and their arrangement is neglected' [40]. Now, violence as a phenomenon necessarily comes into existence in the context of a relationship. It is also the case that the relationship in certain ways is defined and redefined by violence. It is almost impossible to think about violence in the absence of a relationship where it emerges between the one who inflicts violence and the other who is subjected to the act of violence. This could be a relationship among individuals, communities, institutions, ideas, non-humans etc. even in the case of self-mutilation and suicide. The 'institutional murder' of Rohith Vemula is perhaps the most significant instance of the recent time frame in this context. The point, however, is this peculiarity of violence has been constitutive by the factor of caste in caste-related violence. Talking about Caste without implying any sense of violence, is thus, logically incorrect. Moreover, this incorrectness or impossibility itself makes it possible to understand caste as also a relationship of violence. Caste violence can be configured as consisting of a complex ensemble of relationships among three types of violence. The first one is the explicitly visible and large-scale mass killings, bonded labour and mundane forms of violence meted out on Dalits. This has largely remained physical in its nature although such incidences arise in response to the threats posed to the symbols of caste system. Here is connected the other two types of violence based on caste: Symbolic and Structural. Structural violence is a structural condition by which everything appears to be normal and peaceful. It beholds an essential condition in it which is such that discrimination, exclusion, unwanted inclusion, humiliation etc. are possibilities written into the very structure of conditions. The way violence works in the structure is subtle and is like an invisible grid. It is the symbolic violence that works and makes the structure appear normal and legitimate through the language, representations and discourses those constitute the symbolic spaces. The experience of post-independence India in this regard shows that constitutional measures, meant to end caste oppression, cannot do so as long as the caste-institution i.e. division of people into different caste-groups within a hierarchal order, remains unchanged. Even if through such measures, for argument's sake, the caste-distribution of people employed within each occupation becomes the same as that of the population as a whole, such oppression will still continue in the society. As Prabhat Patnaik identifies, the ending of caste oppression in the economy, requires an obliteration of

caste identity itself, the very ‘Annihilation of Caste’, as Ambedkar put it, in contrast with Gandhi’s belief that caste system could continue without hierarchy through a breaking down of occupational division of labour [25]. For a more contemporary instance of caste-based violence in both structural and symbolic forms, at present in India, ‘reservations’ in favor of Dalits and other Backward Castes are being sought to be undermined by two strategies as denoted by the noted economist Prabhat Patnaik: **a. through a shrinking of the domain of state sector where notions like ‘reservation’ do exist; b. through a demand and its implication for further extensions of such ‘reservations’ to obviously non-‘backward’-caste groups.** Thus, middle and upper castes like Jaths and Rajputs and Patels are resorting to their own brands of identity politics, which would and is necessarily attenuating the existing ‘reservations’, achieved by historical resistances and movements for the genuinely oppressed castes. Thus when the eventual junctures come forth where caste v/s caste clashes become foregrounded, it is interesting to re-think about another very crude form of caste violence that constitutes the very subject of ‘Untouchability’. The untouchable subjects are ordained by the ideologies of caste that acts as an agent in constituting the untouchable subject as an inferior one, a sub-human one– which itself is an invisible form of violence where the agents are not easily identifiable. Here we should re-assert the caste-based relationship with the idea of ideological interpellation proposed by Louis Althusser. The question tries to evoke a bodily response to re-place the ‘Other’ within the relationship of caste-based domination and sub-ordination. As Althusser defined the bodily response, it becomes an imperative due to the ideological ordering in the similar manner in case of caste in an unequal location [1]. This is precisely what has been represented in a Tamil poem by Pratibha Jeyachandran, titled, ‘Question’ [18].

*Seeing my face,
Everyone thinks
Of asking me that Question
When I was young,
I folded my arms together
And told them the truth.
Their faces
At that time
Carried the repulsion
Of having stepped
On shit*

1.2 Complicating Division of Labour in the realm of Gender-Caste Matrix

In the contemporary era, we have witnessed the restructuring of the prevailing socio-economic structures – a process that was marked with greater state repressions, economic inequalities and ideological conservatism, the globalization of the world economy and the entry of foreign capital etc. have created an illusion of prosperity for the middle classes; this unfortunately was achieved on the suffering of many who were dispossessed because of the current development policies or rendered unemployed by the closure of many factories and small manufacturing units. Exacerbating the economic hardships of the people was the growing communal tensions, fostered by Right-winged ideologies and political agendas. These developments had serious implications for women. The rising cost of living and the shrinking employment markets were increasing women's economic burdens, at the same time kept on encoding the ideas of gender identities within the fundamentalist discourse were pushing women back into their homes. All these are followed by an immense intensification of violence against dalit women, particularly, where the interplay of caste-gender complication vehemently works. Violence in this regard is not limited to the physical use of force; it also operates at both the material and normative levels in society to maintain existing caste/gender hierarchies. The violation of even a seemingly simple dress code by a lower caste woman could prove to be potential tinderbox that could ignite a communal violence. A stalemate occurred in Bengal(Cooch Behar) between the kshatriyas and the dalits which I came across (one of the managerial staff narrated the incidence) while my field work days in South Marugunj brick kiln because a dalit woman 'dressed up well' when she went to receive her wages. A sexist remark by the brick kiln manager made all the dalit women strike work. The tension between the two groups was finally mediated through an agreement between the men in the two communities that the women from both the communities would not step into each other's terrain. What the incident also poignantly brings home is the centrality of control over women to a group identity. This is precisely the reason why women become targets of attack in times of intercommunity conflicts. Discussing the use of gender based violence in inter-community rivalries, in the essay 'Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence', Kalpana Kannabiran and Vasanth Kannabiran argue that insofar as masculinity is tied up to the degree of men's power (collectively and individually) exercise over women's sexuality, women from the other group are violated during inter-community conflicts. The aim of such violence is to demoralize the men from the other group [19]. This important understanding of the underlying reasons for violence perpetrated by the upper castes against women from the lower castes has emerged from the experiences of dalit

women. The National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) in its draft declaration on Gender and Racism asserted: *Descent-based discrimination based on caste results in the violent appropriation of and sexual control over dalit women by men of the dominant castes, evident in the systematic rape of dalit women and the perpetuation of forced prostitution in the name of religion through the devadasi system.*

It is further important to take under record when we consider division of labour with caste status and gender location, notion of untouchability mostly in the purity-pollution framework of categorical labour, plays a pivotal role. In the essay ‘Challenging Caste and Gender Ideology’, Veena Poonacha noted that dalit women are already largely associated with the unorganized sector, outside any recognition of formal labour or labour laws hitherto existing. This phenomenon is quite different from the cases of upper caste women who have better access in the formal/organized sectors, Veena adds. This sector-based vulnerability pushes women toward a more lowered social status; makes her labour severely divisional, segregated and alienated and heinously stigmatized [28]. Another path, seldom toured, is explored in some detail in this dissertation which is a deep expedition of the complex interaction between gendered division of labour and her sexuality in the light of caste. This interaction would further help us to identify the agents which function around her caste and gender identity, in order to render her labour with almost no value, both in the realm of market economy and of course the society. As Baburao Bogul underscored in his short story, “Not a single dalit woman is either happy or contented from the heart. She is always worried”¹. Therefore, when the gender normativities frame her labour and her sexuality, both of these materialize the attack exerted upon her. This attack can be forwarded by her employers, her social bondages within and without the family unit and so on. In order to ensure this control over an already determined role of a woman in the production/reproduction process, her caste and gender identities are valorized as the important instruments of the gendered division of labour (mostly scavenging, washing clothes, tanning etc. at the cost of, most of the times, almost NOTHING). As a part of this seizing control over her, a dalit woman’s (more dangerously than the ‘other’ women) sexuality is constructed as transgressive, and they are deemed as promiscuous [42]. In this manner, their sexuality is open to access to the men of all castes (including that of her own, at home). Thus, through the threat of sexual violence, dalit women’s social reproductive labour for within and without the community, is ensured. Here in it becomes significant to mention the pioneering theorization of Brahmanical Patriarchy by

¹A short-story writer, poet and essayist, he is regarded as a pioneer of modern Marathi and Dalit literature. He was among the leading lights of the radical Dalit Panthers group, together with Namdeo Dhasal and Arun Kamble. His best known works, in addition to ‘Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti’, are ‘Maran Swasta Hot Ahe, Sud’ and ‘Ambedkar Bharat’. The line mentioned in the dissertation is taken from the story by Bogul, ‘When I Hid My Caste’, written in 2018.

Uma Chakravarty where she defines caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy as the organizing principles of brahmanical social order and are closely related [8].

With such a complicated backdrop, we should also take a look at the emergence of 'dalit feminism' as a stand point of 'difference' made many Left party-based women's organizations and autonomous women's group significantly contributing towards economic rights and work related issues. Serious debates arose around class v/s patriarchy. As Sharmila Rege adds to it, "both parties (left-led and autonomous wings) did not address the issue of Brahmanism. While for the former, caste was contained in class for the latter, the notion of sisterhood was pivotal" [30]. Such a position universalized the entire discourse of 'violence' and 'dalits' and in fact, 'women' as a category. This generalization was what in reality- the middle class, upper caste women's experiences or dalit male experiences. In this way, the entire question of Dalit women's re-addressing point has become vulnerable in the mainstream politics and feminist thoughts in one hand; the serious intensification of agrarian crisis has further jeopardized dalit women, being an excellent combination of caste and gender locus where they are a large section of participants in the agrarian relation of production.

1.3 The Intensified Agrarian Crisis in the Changing Economic Order and the growing complications of Gendered Migration

An agrarian crisis is currently unfolding in India and indeed in a large number of developing countries- involving a collapse of employment growth, falling export prices and a rising spiral of farm debt. The crisis is directly linked to the contractionary fiscal stance of governments undertaking neoliberal reforms, and to trade liberalization against a background of world recession. This agrarian crisis is likely to be prolonged as long as the present policies of openness to the world market continue to be followed, because the global conditions of trade in primary commodities are extremely unfavorable at present and are likely to continue to be unfavorable, as perceived by Utsa Patnaik [26]. On the one hand, after a brief upsurge in the early 1990s, prices of primary products mainly exported by developing countries have been crashing; on the other hand, contrary to all projections, so have prices of cereals exported by developed countries. Moreover, the trough in food and food grain prices has been exceptionally prolonged. Since the decline began in 1996, these grain prices have remained depressed to levels about half of the level prevailing in the mid-1990s [26]. As a consequence, with the removal of quantitative restrictions and opening up to global trade, not only are those developing country farmers engaged in growing exported cash crops

(such as tea, coffee, rubber and cotton) suffering, but the livelihoods of millions of food grain producers are also being undermined as a result of imports of exceptionally low-priced foreign grain. By liberalizing trade, and by opening up at this juncture, the depression in the global markets is being imported into the Indian economy and into other liberalizing countries. Against this global backdrop, we live in a country where in 14 years even one full hour was not spent to discuss the Swaminathan Report on Agricultural take ups. If we look at the National Crime Records Bureau's reports, there is not a single report of farmer's suicide in two successive financial years of 2017-18 and 2018-19. It has also been further jeopardized by the ultra-right wing political regime since 2014 in India where an agenda of monolithic, homogenizing, singularity of Hindutva has caused more intensified socio-economic discrimination and exploitation of marginalized sections like Dalits, Adivasi and women and others. This section in particular consists largely of the agrarian population of this country with a significant number of women and landless agricultural workers, both being an intersectional domain to each other. In this context, it is important to note the interesting analysis forwarded by Sainath that, "We cannot accept women as farmers"². It is reported a number of times by many scholars and class-based movements that a significantly large amount of agricultural work is done by women who are active participants in agrarian production across the crop-producing states of India. As the Pattas of most of the lands are in the name of the male member of the family and only 8% of total women participating in agriculture hold Patta in their own names³, all the labour contributed by women in the ground of agrarian economy is considered as household works or more academically saying, reproductive labour. Naturally, all women farmers are reported in media as 'House Wives'. Hence while the mainstream media storm ignores the agrarian suicides on a large scale, women-farmer's suicides are more crudely ignored as farmer suicides per se⁴. If we look at the media reports during the last five years, we can identify an increasing number of young girls committing suicides which are being reported as 'Student Suicides'⁵. However, P. Sainath has tried to problematize the phenomenon and brought forward the relation between this increase of 'student suicide' with agrarian crisis; since the girl child of most of the families are considered as a 'non-productive' member of the family, suffering from hunger,

²Sainath, P. (6th January, 2019). Agrarian Crisis Can Be Described As A Civilization Crisis: P Sainath | Off Centre. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fogEOimYPG0>

³Sainath, P. (6th January, 2019). Agrarian Crisis Can Be Described As A Civilization Crisis: P Sainath | Off Centre. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fogEOimYPG0>

⁴30. Yadav, S. (8th December, 2017). Koli, Pandher awarded death penalty in Nithari killings case. The Hindu. Retrieved from: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/koli-pandher-awarded-death-penalty-innithari-killings-case/article21308036.ece>.

⁵Sainath, P. (6th January, 2019). Agrarian Crisis Can Be Described As A Civilization Crisis: P Sainath | Off Centre. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fogEOimYPG0>.

debts and many more livelihood crises due to the growing agricultural downfall, most of the girls are left alone, abandoned and are compelled, for the circumstantial causes, to death. Instances are many more during this ongoing phase; farmers are found shot dead in Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh in order to suppress their economic demands and agitations for a secured agricultural engagement by the state. It is therefore termed by Sainath that 'the last five years is an aggravated assault on the agrarian society as a whole'*****. The immense crisis in agricultural sector, thus rendered, where women (largely from the lower castes) are largely engaged, has resulted in the growth of rural unemployment/joblessness and consequently the lack of alternative possibilities caused the women along with their male counterparts to migrate in search of jobs. Here we need to excavate into the politics of gendered migration and its complexities in the socio-political ends.

Scholastic debates, conferences, symposiums have increasingly mounted their discourse on the concepts "home", "country", "family" etc. and how they belong to a Woman. As we know, it is difficult to identify a home/country/family as something of her own. She is always migrating. Migrating continuously from her father's home to her in-laws, from her husband's community to her "keeper's" during abduction, from her father's "motherland" to the refugee camps during partitions and in almost every possible mobilities taking place in her life. She is always migrating and exerting labour; be it sexual, be it reproductive, be it emotional and be it crude menial- yet it is hardly recognized ever. The relationship between migration and gender, particularly the case of a woman is always problematic. Scholars have suggested that the gender dimensions of population movements has not been enough focused as a consequence of over-emphasis on the stereotypical productive labour which has always exterminated women and also their reproductive labour wielded in the family domains [7]. Men have always dominated the discourses on population movements. It is usually taken for granted that migrants are always men, and if women migrate at all, they do so only as dependents. Women therefore found a place in migration literature only in the context of family and marriage. However, figures found by Weiner in her work, "The Child and the State in India" suggest, women have migrated almost in the same numbers as men where they constituted 46% of the overall transnational migration from the developing countries [43]. They surely migrate as parts of the families or in connection with marriage in a large number. Studies point out that a sizable amount of women also migrate for the purpose of employment. Academic literatures on women, work and migration focuses more on cross-border movements, women have formed a substantial component of internal migration flows in Asia as well. Such internal migration takes place especially from the poor rural hinterlands to the richer urban centres of particularly developing countries in Asia, as stated

by Phizacklea in her book, “One way ticket: Migration and Female Labour” [27]. So, this paradox of inevitability and at the same time no recognition makes the sphere of influence unique when we problematize gender and migration. Sexual violence and Trafficking are two very observable and related facts in this regard. Moreover, as already mentioned, a considerable proportion signifies these internally migrating poor women for employment who are small girls below 14 in India and more particularly in West Bengal. Primary data reported by the ‘Save the Children’ conducted by Scholars Ishita and Deepita Chakraborty, from Kolkata and some neighboring districts during the middle of 2000s suggest a significant number of migrant girl children (many of them between 5 to 9 years of age) come alone, and not as a part of migrating family, to work as whole-time domestic staff in middleclass homes in Kolkata [9]. The large number of newspaper reports on the abuse of migrant girl children domestics in the recent years corroborates the same. The ‘rarest of the rare’ case of serial killings of 16 girls ranging the ages between 5 to 19, as titled by Supreme Court on the Nithari Case in Noida, turned out to be an event where more than 80% girl children were from lower caste, lower class families of Bengal (Pinki Sarkar, Moni Halder) [9].

This dissertation seeks to focus on the intensified debate around the politics of gendered migration, specifically for women from lower caste, whether caste plays a role in the categorization of labour where structural preconditions on gender are visible; or it is a matter of simple choices. It is, however, evident in Nitya Rao and Kumar Rana’s research that women are more vulnerable to sexual harassments in the realm of migration- by the employers, contractors and even by male co-workers [29]. A case study done by Rana and Rao reveals, *‘a setting of Dumka town in Santhal Parganas, Bihar. It is 4 am and Bitia Kisku, a Santhal woman, about 30 years of age, is already up and about in village Ghasipur. The village is about 10 kms away from Dumka. A mother of three young daughters, aged 10, 7 and 3 years, she quickly cleans the house, fetches water and then cooks the food for the day. She has her own food and leaves home by about 6.30 am, walks two kms to the roadhead and then takes a bus to Dumka. She arrives a little after 7 am, on this hot April morning, at the main square of Dumka, Tin Bazar, that is slowly filling up with more women and men like her, come to find work in some construction site, to be able to earn for the next day’s meal. Slowly potential employers come to the square, walk around talking to the labour, and deciding on whom to employ. She is picked up, with a group of other women and men, for working on a house construction. The employer is canny. He pushes his clock back, so that more work can be extracted from the labour. The men often take breaks to chew tobacco and smoke bidis, but the women are not allowed to do so. Even if they stop work to drink water or relieve themselves, they are taunted by the employer. He rebukes them, while simultaneously enticing*

them to provide him some personal services. Sexual abuse is a constant fear gnawing at the women labour' [29].

With the help of the above theorization of Migration and vulnerabilities around the norms of Gender, the dissertation turns to the question why has it taken Bengal as an interesting case of studying Caste in the light of Migration and Women.

1.4 Bengal as an Interesting Case to Study Caste, Gender and Migration: foregrounding the uniqueness of Bengal as a case

This dissertation has chosen Bengal as an area of study on two basic academic considerations, a) Bengal is a special case to study Caste and b) Bengal has a unique history to look at migration of women. For the first consideration, Bengal is a state where caste has always remained in the secondary consideration for the main stream politics. Unlike the other states, which have reflected the caste politics as to be a determining factor of electoral politics, Bengal is an exception to this, acquiring a huge scheduled caste demography. This exceptional phenomenon is backed by a two-fold history. The first fold lies in the pre-independence era by the nationalists/bhadralok myth which became hyper-visible during Swadeshi movement. The formation of Bangiya Jana Sangha led by Manindranath Mandal became a threat for the Hindu Bhadrlok politics of Bengal as they threatened to “launch agitations alongside the lines of Muslim League if its demands were not met” [5]. Moreover the electoral process of colonial Bengal clearly shows that the Hindu Bhadrlok could not come to power in a Bengal where the Muslims were a majority and there was a large dalit population which, in turn, was suspicious of caste Hindu organizations like Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. Since the majority of dalit population resided in Eastern Bengal, a partition plan without an exchange of population was, for the Bhadrlok, one sure way out of this political death of caste in Bengal. Indeed, Sen calls the partition ‘a nationalist resolution of caste question’ [37]. The second fold of historical phase traces post-colonial Bengal which entered into its dreadful agricultural conditions, baggage of an enormously huge famine, and tremendously vulnerable political scenario in post-Naxalbari stage. Bengal shifted its political regime toward left with the victory of Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led left front government in 1977. As observed by G K Lieten, the government commenced the first attempt of a fundamental alteration in the agricultural production relations by distributing land among the poverty-ridden rural Bengal and also introduced to the country, the empowerment of self governance for the first time in rural India, by a three-tiered Panchayat system [22]. Yet, a

dominant tendency to practise politics solely through class hindered both the phenomenon and cultural effects of castes from being visible in the main stream political praxis and also prevented identity politics based on caste to become an influential dynamic in electoral equations [13]. In terms of landholding, as Dayabati Roy points out, no caste can be termed 'dominant' across the length and breadth of the state. Great many of the Jotedars who were in central control of village power structure belonged to diverse caste backgrounds- like Namasudras, Sadgops, Aguris, Kaivartas etc. after the large-scale land reformation by the left. Therefore, Bengal could not witness political cohesion among either upper or lower castes based on their caste locations unlike Jath, Rajput, Reddy movements across India. Naturally Bengal lacks any history of large scale anxiety of working class being segregated based on specifically caste identities, in mainstream discourses. Moreover, with the intervention of neo-liberal framework in agrarian economy and the gradual shrinking in extension of land reform, the extent of landlessness further mounted which left many schedule caste peasants with no lands any more in their hands [34].

For our second consideration on the inimitability of Bengal on the complexity of migration of women can be traced back to the Famine of 1943 and the Partition period. Amongst a large number of starving people who migrated to Kolkata from the rural areas in search of food, many were women and children. Then, "Between August and December 1947, 15 million people crossed the western borders between India and Pakistan in both directions and in roughly equal numbers [10]- Joya Chatterji has shown us the vividly recorded three tiered process of the entire population movement in the name of Partition. In the first wave, the majority of Hindu refugees who crossed over into West Bengal were from the very well to do and educated middle classes. They had assets and skills with which they could easily resettle in the Indian state of West Bengal, mainly around Kolkata. However, in the second tier, the majority of the Hindus in the East, who were peasant cultivators with small plots of land, chose to leave compared to other groups. Generally, they abandoned whatever they possessed in the East only when they were driven out by extreme violence or by intolerable hardship during late 1949-50. Next were the poorest families, the agricultural labourers who migrated in fear of their lives. These people had absolutely no where to go and ended up in the government camps for years. This section of moving mass, being largely out of the touch of education, skill etc, were compelled to make their ways in the informal labour market of the state economy. With this worsened the agrarian scenario. In 1950-51, as identified by Deepita and Ishita Chakraborty in their significant book "Women, Labour and the Economy in India", nearly 66% of the entire land area of West Bengal was used for cultivation while the cultivated area was only around 45% in the entire country [9]. Incidence of share croppers as well as the agricultural labourers was more in West Bengal when compared to the country

as a whole [38]. As Sen and Sengupta argue, in the pre-reform Bengal, population pressure on land was much higher compared to rest of the country. Thus, the two fold crises, viz. in population pressure due to partition and the growing agrarian status as a resultant of it- have given a new gender-complexity as a salient feature in Bengal. While the rural and semi-urban Bengal was going through such a cultural-political-social tumult, the *Bhadramahila* (mostly signified as upper caste, middle class, house wives) with her developing agency in late colonial and post-partition Bengal, was adjusting Her new role and grabbing attention of a generation of film makers, writers etc. [4]. In contrast, poorer women, the domestic maids or the petty traders struggling desperately to survive in post-partition Kolkata (though many more in number than working middle class women), have always been avoided in academic or popular records. Therefore the dissertation significantly marks the study of uprooted, single, migrant women from across borders of Bengal who slaved in city homes, often in receiving in return only food and shelter, reveals a different and much bleaker picture for women and migration in Bengal. Gradually, the Bhadrakalok creed of glorifying ‘the house wife’ also affected the lower classes as well, working women tended to concentrate on paid domestic service since this was seen as an extension of woman’s traditional role in the society [36].

With these prolonged hardships faced by women in the history of Bengal’s migration arena, this dissertation seeks to capture the recent scenario of gendered migration with a contemporary socio-political context and further problematize the role of Caste in the division of labour in the realm of Migration.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Gender and Migration have been a dominant subject in the discourses of feminist academia for quite a long time. Scholars like Shailaja Paik [24], Anupama Rao and Sandhya Acharya [3] have put forth the complexities of migration for women, more significantly those who belong to lower caste. This school has concentrated mostly on the vulnerability of lower caste, and working class women's sexuality in the migrated work places. They have also shown the terrific figures of mounted violence against dalit women during a combined state machinery of neo-liberal financial schema and ultra right-wing political forces. The interplay of purity-pollution politics in the choice of work i.e. the division of work is recorded in Sharmila Rege's works where the testimonies of dalit women have constructed the entire discourse of the politics of narration [31]. Uma Chakravarty from the similar school of thought has pointed how caste-based division of labor causes the further socio-economic and socio-cultural discriminations of young dalit girls and women. Continuing with the similar thought of caste and division of labor, Anupama Rao denotes, how caste determines the division of labour more rigorously in the cases of dalit women because of their triple-layered oppression and most of them are abandoned to manual scavenging , tanning and forced prostitution etc. and are still labeled as 'house wives'. The third school of thought engaging both the above schools has attempted to take a detour to observe the impact of caste-based division of work among migrating dalit women from Kerala and forest workers of the same combination in Chhattisgarh. Ghanshyam Shah, Harsh Mander and Shulekha Thorat reported the scenario of Kerala and Marlene Elias and Bimbika Basnett focused to the latter.

My attempt would be look at the migration of dalit women and how their caste-identity determines their type of labour- citing Bengal. Bengal, is an exceptional ground of fewer discussions on caste, at the same time accommodating a huge number of Dalit populations. I also want to add how the 'land of Left-political assertion' interacts with the political

complexity of caste-gender-migration, with a substantial history of denial about the existence of Caste in the state.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology and Collection of Data

3.1 Encountering Empirical Reflections with Feminist Epistemology

Feminist Methodology claims the assertion of the severe difference between the structured power-relation between men, women and other gender constructions and thus takes gender as a crucial issue in all areas of social life and its analysis. This distinctiveness of feminist methodology compared to all other disciplines, are grounded by four basic concerns: Social significance of gender, Validity of experiences as against method, Rejection of hierarchy in research relationship, Emancipation of woman- as a goal of research. Furthermore, it is often argued, since gender differences structure personal experience and belief, and given male dominance in society in general, conventional social science is primarily an expression of the experience of men presented as if it were human experience [?]. From these ideas emerge the methodological injunctions to explore women's experience, to study gender differences and relations, and to subject conventional social science to critical assessment for male bias. One of the major tasks of feminist research, is to explore the experience of women, in its own terms: 'Feminism insisted that personal experiences couldn't be invalidated or rejected, because if something was felt then it was, and if it was felt it was absolutely real for the woman feeling and experiencing it' [44]. In addition, the experience of women is often treated as providing access to truths about the social world that are not available to men. Thus, Harding declares that in feminist research women's personal experience comes to be taken as a 'significant indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested'[33]. Following on this point, it becomes essential to perceive and academically engage the relationship

between researcher and researched as be a reciprocal one, that 'hierarchical' distinctions of power and knowledge gap between researcher and researched should be broken down. Thus, Oakley criticizes prescriptions for interviewing that proscribe the researcher sharing personal experiences with interviewees or providing aid to them [32]. Similarly Reinharz [32] comments: 'as researchers, we should be interested only in information derived from authentic relations', by which she means relationships where 'genuineness is experienced by both parties'. This leads some feminists to argue for the equal participation of the people studied in the research process. Thus, Reinharz suggests that research subjects should participate in the analysis of data so that it builds on what is meaningful to them as well as on what is significant to the researcher's goal [16]. The standpoint of aiming for women's emancipation in every feminist research and its associated methodology is the political claim that the truth can only be discovered in and through the struggle against women's oppression, as Hardings noted: 'It is only through (...) struggles that one can come to understand oneself and the social world' [41].

This dissertation, acknowledging all of its monetary, time and infrastructural limitations attempts to record some case studies from the field work done among the dalit women who undergo internal migration. The dissertation admits that a thorough case study claims a much more intensive political engagement with the research participants which could not be accomplished in this research project to a large extent. Yet, the dissertation tried to uphold its philosophical underpinnings regarding feminist politics and its implication in the process of producing knowledge from the silenced voices. Following the constructivist paradigm, my methodology claims that truth is relative and it is dependent on one's perspective. As Stake notes, this paradigm "recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity. Here Pluralism, not relativism, is stressed with focus on the circular dynamic tension of subject and object" [21]. One of the advantages of this approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories. Through these stories the participants are able to describe their views of reality and this enables the researcher to better understand the participants' actions [15]. The ethico political traces given to the subjective knowledge of the participants are often criticized as 'anti-science' where a large arena of academics critically appears before feminist methodology. It is important to refer the concept of situated knowledge theorized by Haraway where she identifies that locating the constructed definitions and norms of rationale, truth and objectivity upon the women is "about taking risk in a world where we are permanently mortal, that is, not in final control" [15].

However, quantitatively the research is limited to a very small-scale reach. I could interact with only 20 women from each district of Cooch Behar, Birbhum and Purulia. The districts have been chosen on the most recent empirical research by Partha Dutta in the book 'Dalit women and the quantitative study on the growing rate of migration within Bengal'*****. Surveys and descriptive interviews are undergone in Cooch Behar and Birbhum while in Purulia the entire interaction was spontaneously converted into a Focus Group Discussion. The basic design I made for my descriptive interviews are as follows:

- If the places of migration are of their choices?
- Types of work given at the workplace and if those are determined by their choices/skills.
- If Caste identity affects the possibility of getting a job.
- Experiences of negotiating with employers.
- Workplace experiences, wage disparities, behaviours, vulnerabilities etc.
- Their roles at home.
- Other experiences at social, cultural or political arenas.
- How do they perceive the political powers around them? Do they feel the need to be collectivized as workers/women?

I must mention that following the feminist methodology, I did not allow the structure of questionnaire to become a burden upon my respondents. Therefore, the contexts have broadened and in fact detracted sometimes. I tried to provide a ceaseless flow to the subjective experiences. In Cooch Behar, according to the literature above mentioned, most of the migrations are identified around the Brick kilns in South Marugunj. However, Bahiri is the largest village of Birbhum and the second largest one in West Bengal which is demographically contained by more than 60% dalit and adivasi population. For Purulia, Chhoto Balarnpur was found to be the nearest village to Purulia town resided by only Dalits. I have stayed in both the villages of Birbhum and Purulia almost 10 to 12 days for each. In case of Cooch Behar, South Marugunj being an industrial area, I stayed at Takagachh village which had a demography of religious minorities. I spent almost 10 to 12 hours in South Marugunj kilns and then went to Toofangunj to visit my respondents at their homes as well. Nevertheless, it is true that I am yet to spend enough time with my participants in order to understand them as is needed. Moreover, 2 case studies are done from each district with a very loosely built researcher-participant bonding due to time, financial and

infrastructural lacuna. I believe thus small scale data should not be put into graphs/pie charts and forcibly generalized. Each case was chosen based on their responses and intensity of their personal experiences. All my case studies are landless women, mostly single (except Purulia) as widows or left by husbands. None of them are recorded to have crossed primary education. There was a significant language gap between me and my respondents, more because of the dialects than the ornamentations. Birbhum was an exception as my contact herself belonged to Bahiri and dalit community. Hence the dissertation attempts to include all recorded personal experiences into the district-wise detailed studies. It is also noteworthy that all the interviews and case studies are done in vernacular language and the dissertation undertakes all the ethico political, academic responsibilities of the politics of translation where the subjectivity of the translator (the researcher) is always recognized and never denied. I attempted to visit each district twice. It was taken under consideration from the beginning of this research that the intensity of political enmeshment required by the researcher with the participants will not be reached. It is true that just a two round visit is not enough to comprehend the life stories of the researched, yet the circumstantial frames limited the further attempts. Before going into the narratives, it is important to mention that many scholars have argued in favor of considering daily travelling to workplace as migration, with some special considerations; whereas most of the ethnographers and researchers deny identifying regular travelers as migrants. Defining migration (especially internal migration) is a controversial activity. At one end of the spectrum migration is defined as the movement of people over some distance (or at least from one “migration-defining area” to another) and from one “usual place of residence” to another. At the other end of the spectrum the definition of migration discards the requirements that migration must involve a change of residence and a move across some distance. Peter Kok, in his article ‘The Definition of Migration and Its Application: Making Sense of Recent South Asian Census and Survey Data’, has kept a balance between these two positions. Migration is defined here as the crossing of the boundary of a predefined spatial unit by one or more persons involved where change of residence may or may not happen [20]. The implications of this definition were utilized in the study of South African migration from the Census '96 For women, as argued by Shailaja Paik in her ‘Migration in Modern India: Double Discrimination’, migration is an indispensable phenomenon associated with both reproductive (marriage) and productive labor. She adds that even in the cases of daily commutes where women have travel more than 15 to 20 kilometers, the complexities and vulnerabilities they face and get seasoned with- sharply indicates the presence of regular features of defined Migration. In fact, women are the only labours of reproductive works in the migrated work places as well where their interactions with the nature, intricacies and habits of the migrated place are noteworthy [24].

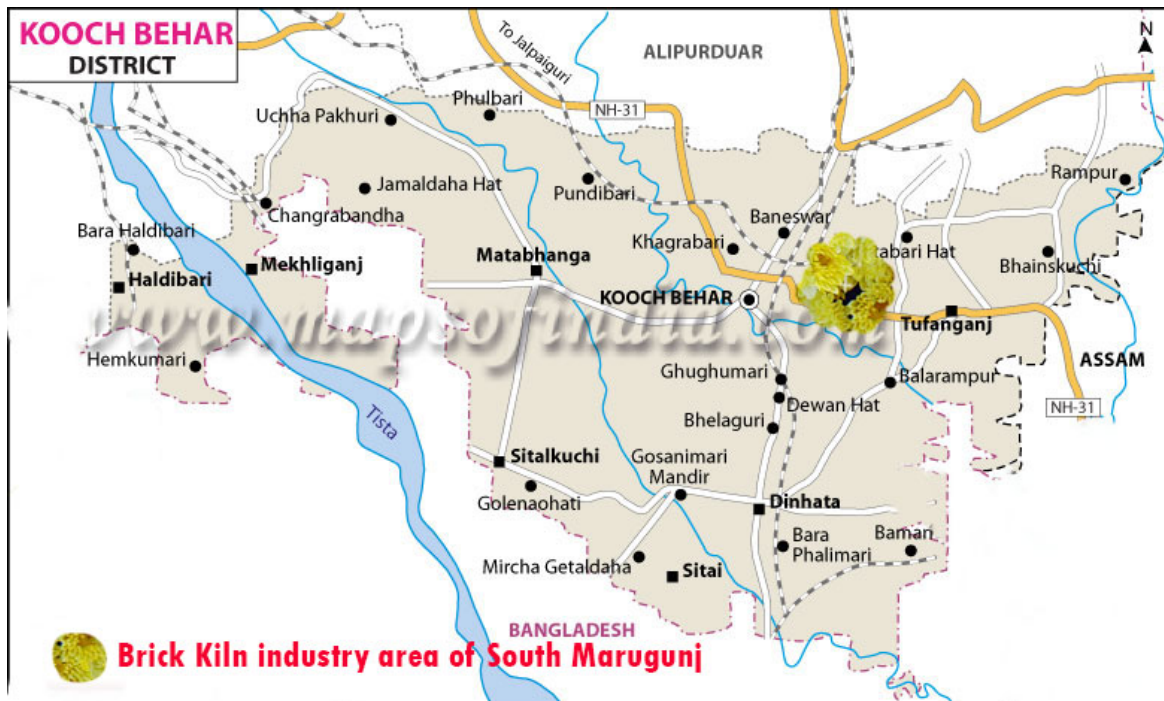


Fig. 3.1 Field Work Location in Cooch Behar

To this view, my field work has also considered the daily commutes by the dalit women from Cooch Behar and Birbhum almost around 40 to 45 kilometers per day as Migration. For Purulia, I encountered the women undergoing seasonal migration where they stay at Asansol/Bishnupur/Ranugunj Brick kilns for 6-7 months.

3.1.1 Cooch Behar

Arnab Roy was my respondent in this district. He lives there and himself is a researcher in the field of history of science and technology. However, Arnab suggested that I find out the brick kilns in the middle of Cooch Behar town and Tufanganj town to get in touch with some migrant women workers. The village I stayed at was nearly 3 km away from the town. Here also a large scale migration was visible; but mostly among Muslim women and also the type of migration was inter-state. I was suggested we go at South Marugunj, exactly 11 km away from both Cooch Behar and Tufanganj towns. Getting off from a local bus, I realised that I have reached to an intense brick industrial area. It was the month of November, last year. I chose the first kiln near me and went inside in search of my participants. I was told that the entire kiln was run by Muslims. However, I walked toward the next one. Here I got to know about the women, mostly from dalit and adivasi communities, migrating to this place for their livelihoods. I entered. Before I could initiate any talk with the women,

the managers checked all my documents and seek assurance that I would never ask them about provident fund/gratuity, etc. It was also verified if I am a journalist or not. Here I met 34 women among whom 20 gave consent to be a part of my research. I visited the kiln for 3 more days and collected their phone numbers, spent some time with them and returned. After a couple of months, I arrived at the same place. I found none of them in that kiln. The manager told that the whole group of dalits and adivasis returned to Takagachh village as they had a disagreement on wages with the kiln owners. They were fired as a group. I had to move forward and look for a whole lot of new people to help my research. After searching almost 7 to 8 kilns, I found a new kiln where almost all the workers were dalit. The women were coming mostly from the villages near the Bangladesh border beside Tufangunj town. They were aged between 28 and 62. None of them acknowledged any sort of discrimination for their caste status. Interestingly, a 27 years old boy appeared to be very vocal about his life, the discrimination he faced, etc. If any one of the women was asked about what is the exact work they do in the kiln, the answer would always be “we run carrying the bricks on our heads”. The system is, each worker would carry 7 bricks at a time, each weighting 8-9 kg. They would run to reach the place where the bricks are gathered and arranged in order, collect a token and come back to take the next lot. Each token is worth 5 rupees. Thus, at the end of the day, the tokens would be counted and paid accordingly. The labour of carrying 60 to 65 kg at a time costs 5 rupees and each brick in the market costs 15 rupees. However, among the 20 women, two were really interesting as cases. I made recordings of their stories, their lives, struggles, etc. within a very short span of time. I transcribed those audio clips and then translated accordingly. I acknowledge the presence of my perceptions, views and political standpoints in the process of translation. The two cases are:

Sarala Katji

Age: 32

Occupation: Worker at brick-kiln

I am here for the last 12-13 years. I lived with my parents and two sisters in Tufangunj. I went to school till class 3. My family is totally poverty-ridden. We were being unable to run the family and decided to take a job in the brick kiln. We travel 11 kilometers to work here. I and my husband both work here. Neither my in-laws nor my parents had any land of their own. I figured out gradually if we both don't take the responsibility together, we would die starving. It has been 8 long years now that I am working here. And didi, don't ask me about the labour I have to give here. If I could live till 80 or 90 years, my life has been decayed

to 50 or 60. We have to work like mad. There is no other option didi, if we want our food, we have to work here. The whole body pains like some poison have been injected in my body. I can't even move sometimes without pain. Yet, I am not allowed to be afraid of this pain. I work here for almost 6 to 7 hours a day without break, beneath the sun. I am under a contract over here. If I don't work, I will not be paid. Men are permanent workers here, but all women are contractual by daily basis wage. All the workers here, we want to finish our work as early as possible before the sun is in the middle of the sky. It is more difficult to work under direct sun. Didi, I carry 7 bricks on my head at a time and run. You don't know how heavy it is. Like I have said didi, I can't stop and think about myself. I have to work. Do you think I am relieved after going home? I have to take care of the cattle of a landlord in my village. After that, I have to finish all my household works till the evening. Starting from dusting till washing clothes and taking care of my in-laws- all are my responsibilities. I feel very weak. Look, Didi, I have to work for my survival. I don't know who says what about me. I have never felt any difference being the lower caste. I am a labouring woman, I have to struggle. We work in the dirt, so people hesitate to touch us, it is quite atural. I can't stop them. I work the whole day long, I smell bad for my sweating. I don't have clean clothes to wear. I am helpless. Therefore, I don't have any time to think if people respect me or not. I seldom go out anywhere out of this kiln and my home. My life, my respect everything is in this brick kiln. I am ready to die here as well. I will keep on struggling for my food until I am alive. What will I do knowing about the world? Didi, will you feed me when I am hungry? What will I get from answering all these to you? It is my fortune; I have to live with it.

Anita Barman

Age: 62

Occupation: Worker at Brick Kiln

I was married off at 13 only. My married life lasted for only 7 years. My husband was a worker at another brick kiln. One day, he started bleeding from his ears and nose while working. He got paralysed and now is bed-ridden. The doctor said that he got a massive stroke. My in-laws accused me as responsible for this. I was unholy for him which resulted in this accident according to them. They threw me out. I had to return to my father and took up work in this kiln. After a few months, they sent my son back to me as well. It has been almost 20 years now that I am associated with this kiln. I belong to a Rajbangshi family; we are very high in status here. People respect us, listen to us. Now, I have become a supervisor of women labourers in the kiln. I am given the duty of counting the coins, paying their wages, etc. I can't tell you all in detail, but there are several calculations and responsibilities which I have

to follow. I have to distribute the profit to many people associated with the kiln. However, my son has grown up now. He also got married. He does not live with me anymore. My parents also passed away. Now I am all alone. I am a regular visitor of Panchayat office, I am given the responsibility to gather at least 20 women and take them to Kolkata on January 19 for the brigade called by the ruling party. My son and my daughter-in-law used to beat me at home. There is no news from my husband also. All in all, I am all doing well with my peaceful life. I have no more poverty right now. People over here, call me the Sardarni. Once the kiln completes its season, I have to give a round-up check to all the reckonings of the bricks made. I am paid five thousand rupees for each round. It takes almost six rounds to complete the whole calculation. So in the end, I earn almost 25 to 30 thousand. I don't take the whole lot of it, but nearly 15-16 thousand is surely given to me. I spend my expenses from this until the next season starts. I am also associated with many outside activities. I join the meetings and processions called by the ruling party. The leaders ask me to come and be a part, so I go. The coming Tuesday is an off day for us, right Manager saheb? We will go for a meeting in Cooch Behar town. You know, we all are very happy here (Gave a look here and there with a smiling face).

3.1.2 Birbhum

Cooch Behar field experience taught me the difficulty of interacting in the workplace. It never provides us with the ample space which is required for an age-old silenced voice to come up and record its journey. However, I tried to rectify it in Birbhum. I could manage to connect with my respondent in Birbhum, who arranged all my interactions at the respective homes of my research participants. She, herself, was a dalit woman, a social activist, a former president of Bahiri GP, Birbhum. She participated not only as a respondent but also as a great interpreter of my interactions. Tripti Khna, my respondent, is witnessing the third generation coming under the light of education in her own family. She is the one, who faced the complex politics of purity-pollution dogma in her village. Her being the President of the Gram Panchayat, in fact, helped very little in her emancipation. Here, the revised form of untouchability was felt. Among the 20 women I interacted with, only 2 were migrant agricultural workers and all other 18 were migrant domestic workers. They were between the ages of 20 to 35. Bahiri is a village demanding a special mention of being the second largest village of West Bengal with almost 23000 populations. Bahiri consists of about 68% dalit and tribal population. The cases which are interacted in my research work from Birbhum, as follows:-

Renuka Middha

Age: 50-55

Occupation: Agricultural Worker

My life? Why talk about that sad story? What shall I start with, Maa (a daughterly address)! I am an agricultural worker, but it is a seasonal occupation. I reaped paddy in the last monsoon (Shrabon, according to Bengali calendar) and harvested in the early autumn (Bhadro). After that, I have spent the entire winter, unemployed. A few days were spent by the saved money from my last earnings and once that got finished I started starving. In the middle of November (Karttik), I joined the Anganwadi work for a while and cooked for the children in the nearby school, that too passed soon and I became jobless again. Anyway, it is not a new thing in my life. I am struggling in this way since I was born in this village, Bahiri. I hardly knew who my parents were as both of them worked for the whole day long and I used to stay with my elder sister at home. I still remember those days of starvation. Maa used to return home in late evenings and we kept on waiting for food for the whole day. We used to feel tremendously hungry. We used to run to the fields, woods, to some rich neighbours for a little food. When I grew a bit older, my mother gave me one basket and told me to beg and collect coals from neighbouring households, cowdung, wasted tree branches, etc. It reminded me of the days when my father used to get beaten, lynched by the Babus of our village (landlords). It was a Congress ruling time, all the Mahajans were leaders. Being a bonded labor, my father was once beaten till he broke his teeth. Maa used to cry all the night nursing him (her voice gets choked while speaking). You know it was a time of celebration at our home to have rice on the menu. A day like this used to come very seldom. We used to dance getting the smell of rice from our yards. But most of the days, we ate the leftovers from the plates of rich people. We were never invited in the festivals, pujas of Brahmin families in Bahiri, still, we used to go and wait for the leftovers to be thrown at any corner. What to do, maa? We were hungry like anything. I felt like puking sometimes; we had to eat from the plates full of saliva, coughs, chewed food bits and pieces. The days were spent like this; nothing to eat, nothing to wear. I used to move without any clothes almost till I was 8 or 9 years old. Winters were tough times, you know. My mother tried to collect some clothes from the Babus, but they don't give it easily, maa. We belong to a very low caste, people hate us for this. Then I was married to a man from our caste. It was arranged. After going to my in-laws' home, I realised the situation is no different here. We again did not have food. My husband was also an agricultural worker. I was only 15 when I got married. We have a son and a daughter. After near about 3 years, he was stuck with a huge amount of debt. He was worried. Then, on an early morning, villagers told me that my husband is lying dead in the field. He committed suicide. I could not even get to know when he got up from my side in the

middle of the night and took such a rigorous decision. I was only 19 or 20 then. I became all alone with my two little kids. I came back to Bahiri and started learning agricultural works from the neighbouring peasant women. I learned reaping, cutting, drying, boiling and many more. I sent my children to a government boarding school. The agricultural work earned me very little money. It was difficult to run their education, my , and other expenses. After a few years, I came to know about domestic work in Kolkata, Behala. I went to the city. I worked there for ten long years at that house. I used to dust, clean clothes, wash utensils there. I don't know what happened; gradually I started to lose my memory. It was really uneasy for me when at times I used to realise that I am failing to remember my village, my family, my children. It was very awkward. I became helpless about what is happening to me. I was having an intuition after a few days that I am being fed something which is affecting my memory. I felt I am sleeping more. I realised I am losing my health, feeling drowsy all the time. I was afraid. On a festive night (Kali puja), I decided to flee from there. I packed my bag and went to hospital. After a lot of harassments, I managed to consult a doctor about my problem. I was told that unknown drugs were being applied to me without my consent which was affecting my health. I became oblivious about what did they do to me when I used to sleep for 12-13 hours. However, I managed to return to Bahiri again. But many bad habits grew in my behaviour. Even till a few years back, I used to talk about meaningless things; I become angry all of a sudden and misbehave with people around me. Till now I take medicine to cure this disease. It is not regular though, whenever I get some money, I always buy some medicines given by the doctors in Kolkata. I still don't know what is so wrong with me. What actually happened to me in Kolkata that made me a sick person? I had to join agriculture again since I had no money left with me. First of all, I was not paid at their house; I was only served with food and shelter in exchange for my works. Those were some Hindi speaking people who were full vegetarians and they used to provide me boiled vegetables and dry roti or cold rice- I could not eat anything. Now my days are being spent by whatever I get from working in other's land and whenever there is no work, I starve for days. Do you think my struggle would ever end Maa? I am born into a low caste and that too as a woman. You must understand, you are educated enough to understand. I think it is better to die. It is way more peaceful than this life long struggle. If a poor like me dies, nothing matters, nobody bothers.

Sheetala Baurri

Age: 38

Occupation: Domestic worker

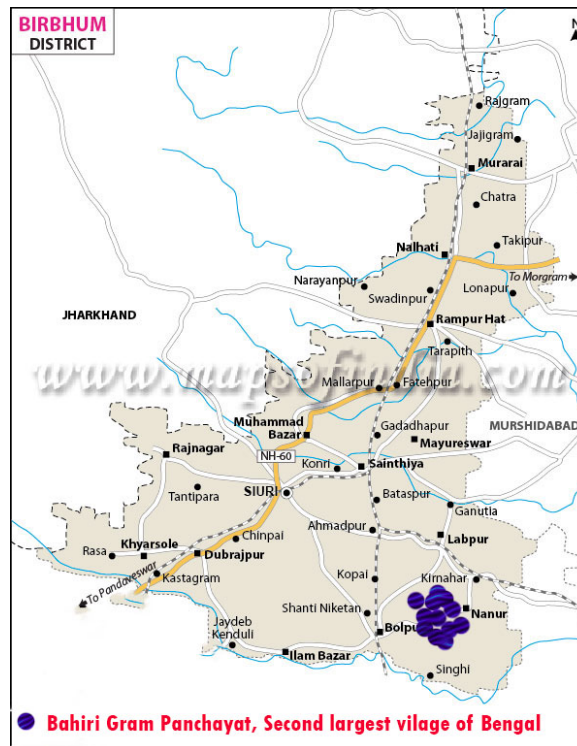


Fig. 3.2 Field Work Location in Birbhum

I was born and grown up in Bahiri. I was married 19 years back in a nearby village. Within five years, my husband left me and my daughter. I don't know where he is. I have heard from people that he got married again. So I came back to Bahiri with my 2 years old daughter. Now I live with my parents and my daughter. The entire responsibility of my family is on me, as my parents are very old. I have taken a job of domestic work in Bolpur. I work as a baby sitter along with all other household works including cooking. You know, I wanted to work in my village only to stay near my child. But being a low caste woman, nobody in this village will be appointing me as a cook or babysitter. As a town, Bolpur is much better. If you want to earn more you have to cook and do babysitting; cleaning jobs are very low paid. Since then I am traveling almost 13-14 kilometers per day, per trip. I wake up early, take the first bus from here and come back almost at 9.30 or 10 in the night. I cook for my family before leaving, prepare tiffin for my daughter and myself. You know something if I don't take my own food with me; I have to starve for the day. My employers gave a condition that if I want to take a meal at their place, I will be paid half of the amount I am getting now. I calculated that would be of no use for me, so it is better to take some food with me every day, whatever is available. My employer and his wife go out for work in a university within 10 in the morning and they return until it is 7 or 8. I stay in their flat for the whole day with the little boy. I don't know anyone there; it is too scary to be home all alone in a strange

place, unlike your own village. Often it takes more than 9 at night for me to get released from there and I miss the last bus. It is riskier to travel alone in Tottos or Jeeps. As a woman I am haunted every day, there is no one to save me. I have told my employers a number of times either release me within 6 in the evening or raise my wage; they simply ignore. I am also not in a state to abruptly leave the job if I don't get another. My whole family, my daughter's schooling, and parents' medical responsibilities- all are on my shoulders. I want my child to get a high education, unlike me. My husband left me as I was from a low caste, uneducated family; he brought someone else in his life. I will give a lot of education to my child so that she becomes self-sufficient and no one would dare to leave her alone or insult her like this. I still remember those days when I was very young as my daughter. I had a neighbouring pal from the Barujje family. The youngest daughter of the family used to play with me in the childhood days. It still haunts me, her mother used to wash all her clothes outside their main gate and then she allowed her to enter into the house. It is all because she was with my dirty touch. I went to school till class 2. The people like us, poor and low caste used to be seated in a separate classroom, quite apart from the classrooms where Brahmins and rich people used to sit. All the tribal, Santhal, Baurri friends of mine were in my class. Teachers avoided taking our classes. In fact, a few years back, I got a job in the Adhikary family in our village. They asked me to take care of their garden and clean their house. I joined. I just left the job in pain, within a few months. They used to treat me like a dog. I used to cry. I was forbidden to touch the door and knock. They told me, they have Balaram and Krishna in their in-house temple which would be polluted if I touch their door. I had to call out from outside in order to ask them to open it. They used to sprinkle Gangajal after I washed their utensils. I was allowed to cut their land crops and pour it into the barn; once the work was done I was outlawed to go even near to their barn. I was served food by throwing it on the floor. I was asked to use a particular plate and glass which were never touched by anyone. All these compelled me to take the risk of migrating so far from home and work. No matter what, I have to bring my daughter up properly. You know, I don't want to live after she is grown up. I have nothing else to live for. A woman is left with nothing when her husband leaves her. I am cursed by many in this village as he left me; I just keep silence and wait for the day when my daughter will be getting a job. I know I will be easily managing a rope and a Kalshi after that to end my life. I am cursed by my birth, I am a woman, and I am a low caste. I have no right to live.

3.1.3 Purulia

Purulia town was the first arrival point. I was connected with all my participants by Dabu Mahato, one of my friends, who works as a sweeper in a college building at North Kolkata.

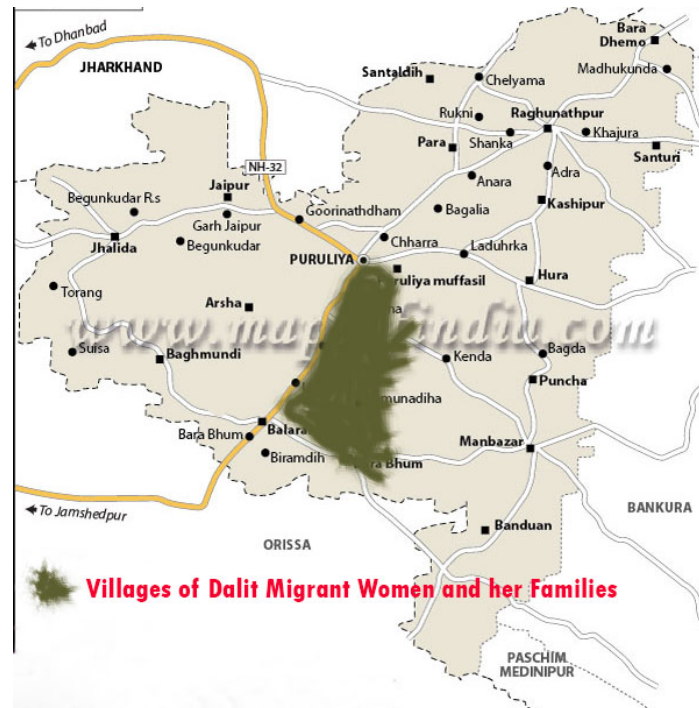


Fig. 3.3 Field Work Location in Purulia

Debu took me to his own village, Chhoto Balarampur. The village was resided by only dalits, situated at the outskirts of the town. It is noteworthy that the hut-shaped houses in this village break the sense of domestic boundary of private and public. These are more open, almost no windows and having a single door. The first woman I met here, was, Phool Kumari Singh Sardar. As soon as Debu introduced me to her, she arranged for a chair with all possible hurry and hesitated to make me seated with her in the same khatiya (a bed made of ropes). It astonished me. I was later on told that, I am wearing clean clothes; I am a clean person so I must not be sitting with them. I was told this by Phool Kumari herself. The entire village is however engaged with migration. They migrate to Bankura, Bishnupur, Asansol to work in the brick kilns. Except the very old and the very young members, the whole family migrates for 6-7 months every year. Chhoto Balarampur is thus featured as a village having seasonal migrations.

Shakuntala Baurri

Age: 27

Brick Kiln Labourer

I was born in Shitalpur. I came to Chhoto Balarampur after my marriage. I was married at the age of 11 only?. It has been almost 7 years that I have joined the work at brick kiln. I travel to Asansol with my husband every year, stay there for six to seven months in a temporary slum. Look sister, we don't have food here. We spend days after days without a piece of food. It is better to be in Asansol, at least we can have food and send money here for other members of our family. I have a son, 13 years old. He does not go to school anymore. What shall I do? I don't stay here for a long time. There is no one to force him or rebuke him and send him to school. Again, it is not only the jobs at the kiln. I have to consider all other household works in our temporary slum as well. I had a dream of giving my child a bit of higher education. It seems impossible now. I can't feed him properly, how can I think of education? I and my husband were discussing to have a talk with our kiln owner and arrange some job for our son as well. He will die starving if he stays here. I try to ask my husband to teach him the works in the kiln. I can't force him, after all he is my man, I can't play with his temperament. He is also a very depressed person. Poverty is the cause of all the problems we face. We don't have proper jobs, proper food, shelter, clothes, we have nothing. My husband often comes home being fully drunk, shows anger on me. So, I am much afraid to force him about anything you know. I try to keep aside some money whenever it is possible, so that it can be invested in some business idea for my son. I don't think I will be alive much longer. You know, I got faint while working in the kiln all of a sudden. The labour kills us, didi. After all I am a woman; there is a limit of labour that I can exhaust. Let's see if I can survive a few more years for my son or not.

I was just about to approach Sabita Mahato and start a conversation with her, a number of more women from around the other huts came up to Sabita's yard. They also started participating in the conversation that me and Sabita were having. In fact, all of them started talking to each other and share their views. It was a very spontaneously created space for the stories of everyday lives to come up. I took a feminist standpoint of not interrupting the space and initiated a recording of a focus group discussion. Here my focus group was consisted of the migrating dalit women of Purulia. Mala Bagdi and Puja Bagdi were talking about the health condition of Mala's father. He needs to undergo an operation for which Mala has borrowed some money from her brick kiln manager. She, therefore, has to now work overtime to repay that. Puja was asking her to take care while working in the sun. They said they start working from 3 in the morning and the over-time working hour lasts till 6 or 7 in the evening. The brick kiln owners are very unhappy with all the women workers since they are weaker than men and can produce less work in the same time. Koni was shouting showing all her dissents in the discourse. Pinki was sharing her experience of sexual

harassments, indecent offers from the managers of Dhanbad brick kiln, where she works with her husband. They were asking me the way to get rid of this life. They were asking me about their fault to be born in a family from 'nichu jaat'. I had nothing to say. They were telling me, nobody bothers to at least inform them about better jobs or facilities. I was asking them about Kanyashree etc. which they are least aware of. Sandhya arrived at the last part of these conversations, looking very tired. Pinki promptly asked her if she was beaten again by her husband. Sandhya kept silence as I was there. I could see some of the black/blue/red scars all over her hands, neck, and face. I approached her with some ointment I had in my bag, she refused. She reminded my 'pure' status and her 'polluted' one. She did not allow me to touch her wounds.

3.2 Analysis

The above field experiences vehemently take up the question of caste and gender in the light of migrant womens' lives. The newer form of untouchability and its practices, many times perpetuated by both upper and lower caste groups, pushes the research into some newer forms of theorization of how untouchability is staying alive with its changed forms. Each of the three districts considers distinct appearances, forms and outcomes of caste-based oppressions. For Cooch Behar, the basic notion of Untouchability is found to be intensively normalized where almost everyone refused the existence of caste-based oppression. Here the dalit women are themselves internalized under this oppressive machinery so vehemently that they pursue the power-play of purity and pollution. They insisted my exclusion from their touch/bodily proximity. It is also noteworthy how labour occupies an important role in the representation of linguistic expression. All the women are recorded to be defining their job role as: *Eet niye dourai* (we run carrying bricks); instead of something like *Eet bowar kaj kori* (our job is to carry bricks). It was evident that all the women working in the kilns in Cooch Behar acknowledge their estrangement from the outer world and its affairs, but the sense of the right to be associated with the wider arena of life is drastically missing. Moreover, the power hierarchy between different sub-castes can be witnessed by the life of Anita Barman, Sardarni. Although Rajbangshi is situated as the outcaste in the four-tier caste system, they hold a higher power position than the other dalit sub castes. Anita's engagement with the political party in power and her position in the kiln largely determines the position of other dalit women belonging to lower sub-castes with respect to her. The inner complexity of caste-gender duo as an exploiting factor is quite explicit in this case. In Birbhum, untouchability and other oppressive outcomes of caste-based oppression are much more visible.

Bahiri clearly shows us how a strong economic position fails to alter the socio-culture oppression caused by caste status. Tripti Khna, the most valued bridge between me and my research participants, is an accurate instance of this. Both of my case studies and the 20 participants I could interact with are lived evidences of the large spectrum of caste-based oppression imposed more rigorously via gender normativities across the boundary between family and society. It is also noteworthy in case of Renuka Middha how the sexuality of a dalit woman is made vulnerable and lingered unregistered, in fact unrecognized. It was shocking how Renuka fails to identify the type of violence she faced in Kolkata.

Moving on to Purulia, a discriminated dalit life, particularly separated and categorized village huts, their social status as a community etc. are felt. The sense of belonging to the 'nichu jaat' or low caste seems to grapple all other consciousness, sense of right and so on. The village Chhoto Balarampur is separated from the connection of Purulia town in such a way that the entire village is rendered as untouchable as a collective community. In fact, the tiny market and poverty-ridden grocery is also run by the dalit men in the village and these are the main source of marketing by the people of Chhoto Balarampur. The complications of seasonal migration upon gender are uniquely visible in this case.

The overall research can conclusively infer that the question of emancipation for these women at the bottom of the huge socio-political hierarchy remains thorny. The complication lies in the lack of aspiration and hope among these toiled mass. I found all my participants to end with a note of depression, a tendency of aspiring death as an emancipating agent from this immense pain of life. This is what pushes us further to question the political task of the class-based movements, their lacunas in figuring out the altered modes of caste-based oppressions and thus failure to find out a suitable way forward to gain a broader social and political aims. It is in this context that the dissertation delves into the attempt or theorizing the newer form of caste-based oppression: taking the crudest form of it- Untouchability.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

4.1 A Critique of a Deconstructive Engagement with the Philosophy of Untouchability: Theorizing Purity-Pollution

To find out the nested points in the philosophical foundations of Untouchability, an analysis of the phenomenology of touch is very essential. The set of practices around untouchability involve not only proscriptions on both groups of people but are often justified through the notions of purity and related concepts. Biologically speaking, touch and contact are asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships respectively as both do not allow the "toucher" and the "touched" to share the same location and plan of action. As Sarukkai denotes in this regard, for the Indian philosophers, touch is not about contact (which is a relationship) but is a quality that inheres in the object. This means that the untouchables manifest the sense of "untouch" within the person. This also stands for that the person is untouchable whether or not she comes in contact with another person. The problematic of the phenomenon of Untouchability, when engaged with the deconstructive move, gets carried into the ontology of the sense. Here the question comes how a discriminatory practice like Untouchability is perceived as hereditary for a specific community by the ontological philosophy behind it. In the ancient Indian philosophy, the proponents of Sankhya and Advaita Vedanta describe the human body in term of a) Gross (Sthula) body and b) Subtle Body (Sukshma) [6]. Based on this thought, the sense organs are not equated with the biological eye, tongue, skin etc. In Ayurveda, the sense organs are merely the "seats of organs and not the subtle organs themselves" [14]. It implies that the sense organs are themselves made of "subtle materials" and the visible skin, for example, is only the seat of the cognitive sense organ corresponding to touch. Since the sense organs are subtle, in death they leave the body and it is gross

material body that decomposes. Sarukkai extends that there are implications of such ideas for understanding Untouchability. For example, continuation of characteristics through the subtle body would be one way of explaining the hereditary continuity of Untouchability [?]. Now, the question comes, WHY IT IS SKIN among all other sensory organs? And thus, among all other senses, WHY TOUCH is opted for defiling a community's accessibility? This can also be read by the classical Indian philosophical traditions. The ancient Indian philosophy denotes that SKIN has an important function- that of encompassing and enclosing. It is intrinsically related to boundaries and surfaces. Glucklich uses these characteristics to make an insightful reading of Religion where he identifies an inherent relationship between Religion and Skin since both of them have been symbolically conceived as the boundary [12]. Thus Glucklich identifies two fundamental metaphors related to the human body: one of the body as a "microcosmic reflection of the world" and other as a "self-enclosed space" in an antagonistic relation with the world. The first conception considers the skin in a spatiocosmological sense. Along with this is the "temporal metaphor of the skin as the map of character and moral disposition" [12]. Such a uniquely fashioned thought surrounded by a deconstruction of body, more of Skin, leads us to further politicize the intricacy of purity-pollution dichotomy which styles the function of Caste in today's Indian sociology. As we can infer from the above mentioned philosophical tradition that skin is a map of character and morality, and how skin embodies certain moral properties in someone's body [35]. Therefore, once Untouchability is inscribed on an individual, then the impossibility of crossing the walls of Untouchability merges with the impossibility of survival without Skin by that individual. All these explain why touch among all other senses should be made the primary sense in any such act of exclusion and proscription. We should mention the universality of Water and its significance in this complexity of purity-pollution politics. In case of water, there is another hidden significance of touch itself [35]. Bathing is to be contact with Water where contact is always more than the physical one. Say, the use of language and invocation of words and chants as part of the bathing process suggests the transcendent contact of the body and words. Since, Untouchability is not about mere physical touching and so is with the contact of body with Water, the phenomenon of Untouchability includes the other spheres inherent in touch, like proscriptions in using Water that manifested the movement like Mahad Satyagraha by Ambedkar. Let us now drive into the most important part of this philosophical demonstration of Untouchability in order to formulate an important criticality to it. The word 'Un-touch-able', if engaged semantically, puts together the debate of agency (who is unable to touch, the toucher or the touched?) and confers that the real site of Untouchability is the person who refuses to touch the untouchable. This inability to touch is a characteristic of the toucher and not the touched. The moment one creates this inability

4.1 A Critique of a Deconstructive Engagement with the Philosophy of Untouchability: Theorizing Purity-

Pollution

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to one's sense of touch, one loses an important aspect of touch. Sarukkai finds the impact of not-touching is on both the Brahmins and the Dalits- both of them cannot fulfill the act of touching but they have different phenomenological experiences of the same. In case of the former, it could be associated with the psychological feelings of revulsion, power, and rejection and so on whereas in the latter, it is associated with feelings of humiliation, shame and so on⁶⁷. The dissertation has critically read the theorization of Caste supplementation by the semiological engagement of Supplementation by Derrida as mentioned in Sarukkai's work: "The Supplementation is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognize that there is a supplement at the source" [35]. The idea of Supplement is pointed to the theorization of Untouchability by Sarukkai in the context of India. The popular understandings of Caste privileges the axial polarity between Brahmins and the Untouchables, also articulated along the pure-impure opposition. Like the speech-writing binary or man/woman, the Brahmin/untouchable binary is not only a constructed opposition but one in which the latter is inferior-ized. This allows us to consider the possibility that the untouchable acts as a supplement to the Brahmin. It is moreover a "dangerous supplement" [?]. The supplementation occurs through the change from "not wanting to be touched" to "refusing to touch"- interestingly, both the imperatives come from the Brahmin community. As biologically, touching is a reversible action, Brahmins and untouchables both exemplify a reversible relationship between each other, for Sarukkai. He calls it the 'Outsourcing' of the practice of untouchability. He exemplifies the practice of Rudali or professional mourners of Rajasthan, a community of women who do the job of mourning when somebody dies. Sarukkai denotes, these are women of lower caste who are 'hired as professional mourners upon the death of upper caste males. Their job is to publicly express grief for the family members who are not permitted to display emotion due to social status' (Sarukkai mentions Wikipedia in this regard). Outsourcings thus vehemently exist in Indian society, for Sarukkai. In the case of the untouchables, the untouchability of the Brahmins is outsourced to the dalits who then carry that burden and Sarukkai concludes by recognizing the deconstructive move of theorizing Supplementation through outsourcing; it is actually a political recognition to the dalits and enables specific political actions [35]. The dissertation critically engages with the pioneering and perhaps the newest form of theorizing Untouchability through the theory of supplementation. Since labour itself is inseparably associated with the Body, the dissertation seeks to open-up the way which questions the limitations of post-structuralist ideology of identifying the origin of any problematic. To try to historically engage with the origin of division of labour in the history of mankind, sanctity of religion on it and the capture over surplus produced by the laboring community by further division of labour through caste- can never be eliminated

from the academic attempts in the crowd of theorizing body. The alienation from the product, labour engaged in production and consequently all other connected socio-cultural forms, are never included in such philosophical engagement where these entire phenomenon are still existing characteristics of any form of caste-based oppression like Untouchability. Moreover, the theory of supplementation further confuses us if Sarukkai tried to portray any symmetry in between two 'enclosed class', as theorized by Ambedkar in an attempt to engage the entire phenomenology of Touch only with an ontological rationale. This dissertation, therefore, in its concluding part, attempts to connect the relation between division of labor based on both gender and caste and, alienation of various kind facade by the dalit women, migrating to exert Her labour.

4.2 Contextualizing Contemporary Socio-Polity to the Question of Emancipation of Dalit Migrating Women

The Post-Mandal commission India has been marked by Caste-based politics both in terms of electoral and movemental developments with all new dynamics of identity-based politics. The dissertation seeks to contextualize the question of dalit women's emancipation in the realm of Migration and labour by a two-fold knot. One is the shifting definition of emancipation of women in the epoch of newly emergent social media sphere and the possibilities of newer political reclamations over there. Second way is unfolded by the pace of contemporary trade union movement and how it caters into the dichotomy of class v/s patriarchy politics. Thus the dissertation would conclude its theorization coming out of the field data which have exposed the existing visibility of division of labour by Caste location along with the gender identity and therefore how it causes further alienation, in its crudest form in case of dalit women and re-define the question of emancipation for them in the future Movemental ground of Class struggle. The dissertation tries to look at the Trade Union movements of the time and the serious challenges it face. It was interesting to know the experience, planning and political standpoint of the All India President of Centre of Indian Trade Unions, K. Hemalata, who is also the first ever woman as an All India President of any pan-Indian Trade Union. The conversation below, recorded in the CITU Office in Delhi, is aimed at finding out the limitations of keeping a balance between class struggle and the struggles against social oppressions like patriarchy, caste etc. and at the question if the contemporary left-led Trade Union movements are being able to take up class based movements which would complement the fights against feudal land relations, Caste, Untouchability etc.

Interview with K Hemalata, President, Central Committee, CITU

Question: It has been a long debate that both the collectives of class-based and gender-based movements have missed the question of caste in their political assertions. The former is alleged to contain caste into class and the later traced the notion of sisterhood. So how do you cater between the two as a trade union activist, who always need to organize a large section of working class women?

K Hemalata: It is true that the trade unions are blamed about not giving much attention to not only caste and gender, but they are allegedly overlooked the issues in unorganized sectors also, including the issues related to social practices and women as well. In case of unorganized sector, the role trade unions in organizing the labourers are not at all like this. Today, more than 60% of the entire trade union membership is coming up from the unorganized sector. For our organization, almost 70% members are from unorganized sectors where the organized sector stands far less. CITU also acquires more than 33% women members within the organization. It is because of our activism since 1979 which consciously attempted to organize women workers, develop their skills, promoting them to leadership position. Yes, we are not satisfied till just this level; but we are growing. Office bearers are there, the all India President is a woman. In a number of states you can find women trade union leaders as office bearers working in CITU. About caste, I have to say we are yet to take up a lot of issues. If you follow our official documents, you will find that we are repeatedly passing resolutions on eliminating and raising our struggle against caste hierarchy. We are intensively emphasizing the need to eradicate the evil system of caste. To take up the agitations, assertions etc. against social oppression from the trade union platforms- are something in which we have not succeeded much. In last few movements, we have taken this very seriously. We are trying to spread consciousness about the danger of this gap between social oppression-based and trade union-based contentions. If the trade unions fail to take up the issues of scheduled caste workers and other lower caste workers, then the caste-identity oriented movements will take the advantage and they will create identity-based splits within the working class. So what we see today, even during the last strikes of 8-9 January and several other strikes called by different organizations on the basis of their agitations like 3 day strikes by BSNL, the SC/ST workers dissociated themselves from these calls. They also hold up the same demands regarding the monopoly of JIO and the worsened condition of BSNL. But they refused to join the strike. Though it is a very small scale example, but we have to admit that the divisions are being resulted. Similarly on many other occasions we have seen that. This is the reason why we feel the necessity to take these issues up

from the trade union platform so that these socially oppressed workers do not any more feel separated. As you were discussing that untouchability is still there, it is absolutely true. There are two glass systems in many tea shops where the people use two separate glasses for dalit and non-dalit customers. The dalit has to wash his/her own glass and keep it which is not at all a mandate for others. Even among the educated middle class employees in big government/nongovernment offices, during lunch period, the dalits are seen to be sitting separately and having their food. So it is very much visible like these instances. In fact occasions are there when an activist from scheduled caste who is capable enough to organize the workers, are often not accepted as the leader by the other upper caste people. They cannot accept that he/she can be made the President or the General Secretary. All these are basically ingrained within the system. Dalits don't get house rent in upper caste localities in fact. These cases are not only recorded from Haryana; all these are quite vividly visible in the so called progressive states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and so on. Unfortunately, we are not being able to take this up with adequate seriousness. With this background, we have taken grave steps to concentrate on this issue of caste within our organization. We can't claim that we have achieved very big success in it.

• *Question: How do you perceive the vulnerability of migrating women labourers in general and also those from scheduled caste in particular?*

K. Hemalata: It is definite the most important task to organize and mobilize the migrant workers, more importantly who are women as they are the most vulnerable section of the working class. They don't get proper wages; they don't have job securities and other protections. They don't even get the welfare benefits in most cases. Most of the migrant workers don't have Aadhar cards, Rations cards; address proofs etc. where women are again more prone to have almost no documents at all. Generally, migrant workers are less paid than the local workers and additionally it is difficult to organize migrant workers to provide any trade union backups. There are language problems, cultural gaps etc. the main problem is that in most of the places of migration, the workers are not allowed to go out anywhere. The contractors bring them, keep them within the factory premise, and provide temporary food/shelter for them. They are not allowed to go outside or talk to anyone outside the factory. As per my experience, the best example for it goes with the Fish Processing Industry. It becomes really difficult to reach them. In many cases it is seen that the Sarpanch (Panchayat Head) and other leaders of Panchayat attempts to create a rift between the local people and the migrant workers who have arrived in a new place. This thing exactly happened in Manesar, in the Maruti industry. These big companies and also the multi-national ones have access with the

governments and the ruling party as well. The ruling party has its own people in every village. Thus the migrant workers become more isolated. Influences are such intense sometimes that the local working class people often refuse to join the strikes called for the same causes of both local and migrant workers. Therefore, what we do these days is that we mobilize the local peasants, agricultural workers and try to spread the consciousness of unity among them.

• *Question: What is your opinion about the Bengal left, being at a position of denial to the existence of caste?*

K. Hemalata: I don't know very much about Bengal left movement. I have mostly been working from the centre. I have attended some movements, campaigns etc. in Bengal. Yes, the problem is there. I think definitely when you organize people according to their class positions and there will be more talk about the class based oppression on them, the issues of social oppressions will be subsumed. I will never say eliminated because such oppressions are continuously being promoted by state, family, traditions, media etc. Therefore, unless you take up the social discrimination based issues along with the class issues, it can never be annihilated. So we have organized several committees in many states to take up such issues under the umbrella of larger class struggles. At national level, we have founded Dalit Shoshan Mukti Manch and trying to coordinate all the voices.

Question: What according to you are the future of caste based movements in the realm of working class India and also the location of women in it- both as organizers and participants?

K. Hemalata: There are so many tremendously efficient women leaders, you cannot imagine. They speak well, they organize well, and they have sacrificed so much in their lives for class struggle. So I think there are very good prospects for women to come up and lead more, participate more, guide more. My own experiences in Anganwadi, they are all women. CITU has succeeded in creating many women trade union leaders in almost all states of our activism. It is not easy for the women, you know. There is one leader from Punjab, who was a Anganwadi worker, her brother-in-law works in a police station. During her struggle, while she fights with her family, she also has to fight with the police. She gets up early in the morning, washes all the dishes, cook, do all other duties in the family and then for the trade union activity she moves all around. In most cases the women have their whole families supporting for either Congress or BJP and they never allow them to hold Laal Jhanda. They still decide their own and fight. They say, "I won't leave my flag as it fights for my dignity, workplace rights and self-respect." There is a lot of potential you know. If the talents of

more hidden women are fetched within the movements, the entire shape of the Trade Union movement of our country will change and with that the whole face of politics of the country will change. It depends on how we become capable to utilize such talents.

The experiences and narrations by the first woman as the all India trade union office bearer Dr. K. Hemalata traces both the lacunas and possibilities of social movements in India in the context of migration, labor, caste and gender. The limitations of trade union movements in including the socially suppressed voices are admitted by Hemalata and she has also kept the leeway open for comprising these voices beneath the umbrella of class-based movements in order to re-define the outline of polity of India.

Taking thread from the above interview, the lived experiences recorded from the field works and the other related literature, the concluding note of the dissertation attempts to re-define the question of emancipation of a unique cross section of working class of India, facing the most vicious toils over epochs, for Her gender-caste-class location- the Dalit women, through the lens of Alienation. To complicate the category academically, I further concentrated on the factor of Migration integrally connected to Dalit women's lives. We have critically examined how both gender and Caste causes an entwined division of labour for Dalit women where works/employment that she gets are never of her choices or skills; but are solely on the basis of her caste and her gender. This division of labour is more complex when she is migrating as her labour is not only categorized at her workplace only, but at her (sometimes temporary in case of seasonal migration) homes in the reproductive spaces of labour exhaustion as well. Here the theorization of Alienation comes in her life; economically, socially, culturally and in fact within the family- sometimes in the form of untouchability, sometimes in the form of imposed sexuality upon her and mostly by her ever forbidden mobility in the socio-political spheres. To understand the connection between division of labour and Alienation, we need to look at the forms of labour she engages herself with, where the productive process is broken up in such a way that work becomes meaningless. Say for example, in the growing market economy where all forms of domestic works are devalued until and unless it is done outside the boundary of home. The question of gender is also very vividly noticeable in the common cases like, when the works like cooking, washing clothes, ironing are done at home, they have no value; as soon as the work is undergone outside the home in a market or in a locality, they hold an exchange value. More importantly, once the work transcends the domestic boundary it becomes a labour of a male in most cases. However, as the division of labour takes place, as an activity in itself, repetitive work on the production line provides no satisfactions [35]. Under economic pressure an individual might spend her whole life doing work which she dislikes. It is undoubtedly a common experience that workers are trapped in lives which they feel are not authentic

expressions of themselves. The alienation of working individual is a direct consequence of capitalist productive relationships⁷². Under capitalism, woman functions as an economic object in relation to a world of economic objects, sometimes in the context of sexuality or as a machine of producing more labourers (motherhood) or as a commonly conceived worker. Her everyday existence as an economic category is a repudiation of her essential humanity both socially and economically. Thus, the working class, the entire community of producers, is separated from the means of production, separated from the products of its labour, separated from each other by Caste, Gender, Religion, Ethnicity and in fact themselves. It is in this light important for the class struggle, the Trade Union movements, the feminist groups to provide enormity on various degrees of alienations faced by Dalit women in particular and re-define their movemental aims, assertion points and trace over the issues of Caste, Gender and Capitalism.

The dissertation, with its limited research on the function of institutionalized Caste and Gender oppression thus further opens up the research areas of impact of division of labour based on the two afore-mentioned phenomenon and various social alienations caused by these. It can be in our thought appetite for future, how these social modes of alienation can be contextualized in the arena of scientific and technological developments by an attempt to identify how gender and caste based division of labour interacts with technology. This can be as well a newer way to re-define the future of social movements of India, focusing on the scopes of class struggle and possibilities of women's emancipation.

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