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7

BEY EKA BEY, BEY DONI CHAR (TWO TIMES ONE IS TWO, TWO TIMES TWO IS FOUR)
Dalit Women's Schooling

Shailaja Paik

You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the other proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.

Shaw's summary of *Pygmalion* (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1992)

In this chapter we will listen to the voices of Dalit girls and women[1] who have struggled against all impediments to intrude into fortresses of knowledge that were under the hegemony of Brahmans. We will pursue some formidable questions about the role of Dalit parents in the lives of these women. I will chart the 'matrix of domination' (Collins 2000: 251), complicating it further by uncovering the interplay of caste, class, and the educational system on the one hand, and patriarchy and matriarchy on the other, attempting to unearth how this matrix of domination results in a renewed oppression of Dalit girls. For Dalits in general, education represents a quest for a liberating modernity. For women, this quest creates spaces where they can contest male domination or at least pursue their own interests and inclinations (Sangari and Vaid 1989: 12).

The findings presented here are based on interviews with 180 women conducted in Pune during 2000–2 and from June–November 2004. Most of the women I interviewed were first-generation learners, the first people from their community to enter schools. The teacher was usually Brahman and the phenomenon of a mixed-class, mixed-caste classroom was a new experience for the girls. Interviewed now, as grown women, they remembered their schooling as a very troublesome process, with the hurdles multiplying and the oppression becoming more complex the farther they went in school. Caste, gender, and class were accompanied by the often insidious play of educational institutions, which tried to suppress these new entrants. Social structures, cultural forces, and the education system operate synchronously to constrain the thoughts and actions of Dalit girls. Despite these impediments, significant numbers of Dalit girls have successfully completed their education at various levels. I will focus first on their problems in gaining admission to educational institutions, then on their experiences in education, and finally on the caste-based discrimination that they faced in school.

ADMISSION TO SCHOOL

Most of my respondents who were first-generation learners stated that their parents put them into the nearest available school for the sake of convenience, regardless of its quality. The parents were happy that they could at least send their children to a school. The exuberance of 'entering' the citadels of schools so long denied to them was a strong motivating force. Kamal Jadhav remembered, 'There was a co-ed school that was a little far away. There was another school only for girls, but that was too far. So we went to this government school in the police quarters. This school was close to our house, and had the added benefit of classes till HSC [Higher Secondary Certificate].'

It was generally necessary to travel a long distance to a town for further studies. This created great difficulty for girls. Shantabai Kamble's autobiography states:

> I passed Class 6. For Class 7, I had to go to Pandharpur or join the technical school with the boys. I had no money to go to Pandharpur and Patil Master doubted how I could cope with the boys. However, after a few months, Kamble Guruji enquired about me and made me join the technical school. I was the only girl in the school. I felt left out. I engaged in all the jobs done by the boys. At the end of the year, I had to go to Pandharpur to appear for the exams. When the results were out, my cousin and I had cleared the exams (Kamble 1986: 36).

Shantabai was the only girl—Dalit or non-Dalit—in this technical school. Such schools focused on agricultural skills that were seen to be male preserves, such as using agricultural implements, ploughing, sowing, reaping, and carpentry, and girls were discouraged from attending. Upper-caste girls generally went to the regular high school in Pandharpur town.

Distance made a great difference in the towns and cities also, as travel on public transport was often both expensive and considered unsafe for girls. Urmila Pawar described her school days as follows:

> Ratnagiri was a very small district and had small schools and colleges in the heart of the jilha [district]. Our school was about twenty minutes away. The school was in the taluka place and most of the parents did not allow girls to travel that far. They were *scared*. My case wouldn't have been different as my mother was all alone after my father passed away. However, my case was different as my father was a teacher and my mother religiously followed his last instructions of sending all of us to school. I could study ahead ....

In most cases, such considerations resulted in town-dwelling Dalit girls' education coming to an end after class 4 or 7.

This was an obstacle that girls faced even in a big city like Pune. Pune's social cartography caused Dalits to be distanced from the major educational and cultural facilities. The heart of the city, Sadashiv Peth, is the 'social polis'—the cultural capital—of Pune, replete with prestigious high schools and colleges, as well as research institutes, medical colleges, music schools, and well-known theatres. It is dominated by middle-class Brahmans and other upper castes. Other, lower communities, who have no space here, live in small, cramped quarters in the surrounding neighbourhoods. As in villages, the lower castes are clustered around a section with superior buildings and facilities that is inhabited by the high castes. The Dalit areas are even more peripheral, right on the margins of the city. Educational space has not been devised with the Dalits in mind. They would have to travel long distances to

get to the better schools, and they lack the time or resources to do this. In effect, they are denied access to the superior educational institutions of the Sadashiv Peth area. Dalits often speak longingly about these schools in the heart of the city.

Though the municipality provides schools free of cost, they are of very low quality, characterized by absent teachers, bad teaching, easy progress from one class to the other, few or no facilities for students or teachers, and poor teaching aids. Dalits send their children to such schools because they lack the money, the time, the influence, or the knowledge to send them to better schools. Although the municipality even provides some educational accessories—bags, shoes, uniforms, books, and meals—free of charge, very few of my informants knew about these facilities and even fewer had availed them.

Along with proximity, parents also preferred to send their children to schools where other Dalit children went. The child was supposed to be 'safe' in the company of these other children. Meera's slum was home to most of her relatives, and all of them went to the same school together. 'We had two schools, but all my cousins went to one school, the nearest one available .... My mother used to work all day, and our great-aunt kept watch on us.' Girls in general, and pubescent girls in particular, were subjected not only to the schools' Foucauldian surveillance, but also to that of their parents and relatives. Hence, proximity of the institution was a requirement.

Another important reason for selecting the nearest school is that many mothers have to rear children in the absence of fathers who earn a living away from home. The uneducated mothers probably do not know much about other institutions; furthermore, they fear for the safety of their daughters if they have to travel long distances on public transport each day. For example, Kamal, whose father was absent most of the time, was still upset that her mother did not send her to high school on the grounds that the school was too far from their home. Her mother was handling all the private and public affairs of the family and did not want any added bother about the daughter's physical safety while travelling. She therefore discouraged Kamal's higher education. Sandhya also remembered her mother's indifferent attitude towards her higher education:

> She was all right when I went to school. But, when the college was far she said that I should not travel by bus that far, as it was *dangerous*. So, I lost the first few months of college due to that. But later on I insisted on going to college and started making small beginnings. I started taking the bus and did it confidently. *She* then allowed me to travel when *she* found it comfortable. However, I pursued my Masters.

We thus find that the mothers acted as matriarchs, dominating and restricting the girls. These girls now had to fight matriarchy plus patriarchy. Sarah Lamb (2003) writes insightfully about the position of the wives when their husbands are away for jobs. Women shoulder all responsibilities of the household in the absence of men. However, the mother's overprotection not only bounded the physical space of the girls but also led to their self-abasement (cf. Steedman 1986: 106). It had a psychological impact on the girls, and it obstructed their fight for further education. The mothers' projection of fears and anxiety led to a growing diffidence among the Dalit girls and restricted their interaction with other groups in society during school and sometimes even during higher education. The triple oppression of caste, class, and gender made the mothers chain their daughters.

Grinding poverty, increased unemployment, and community distress all served to restrict the kind of support and recognition that parents could allocate to their children's education. School-going Dalit girls were highly privileged to go to school, whatever the circumstances and whatever the quality of the school. Kamal Jadhav commented, 'The standard and medium of the school did not matter at all. We could attend school, that was more than enough.' Sarita Bhalerao poignantly remarked:

> We went to the nearest available school and were *privileged to get whatever we could*, compared to our cousins in the village. They remained illiterate and continued with small farming. At least we could study a little and get our children educated. My father could afford to send me to school, as there were no fees and may be if there were, I wouldn't have been there. In those times nobody knew about education or the benefits of education.... If a child was registered in school but did not attend, then the peons used to come and take that child to school.

Draupadi seconded this and added, 'If our parents were to pay fees, only boys would have been sent and girls would have never seen the school gates'. These women are aware of the concession they

procured and also of the gender discrimination they were subjected to. These were exceptional cases: the large majority of Dalit women knew nothing about schools, fee concessions, or any other benefits that were available to them.

EXPERIENCES AT SCHOOL

After Independence, the Government of India allocated considerable resources to make education available to the masses. The Constitution spoke of the duty to provide for the depressed sections of society. The Five-Year plans allocated a good percentage to the education sector. The government framed various policies to open government schools that provided free uniforms, books, bags, meals, milk, and cost-free education. A few of my informants had taken advantage of these schemes. Snehlata said that her school, run by the district authorities, went up to class 7, and that later she went to the Gram Shikshan Sanstha. 'I got a uniform, meals, milk, and books till the class 4 only. We did not have to pay any fees.' Sometimes these facilities provided by the government have proved to be the only way to increase attendance. 'We went to the school just to get the sweet powder,' said Meera. Most of my informants, however, said that they knew nothing of any such facilities. It seems that in most cases they existed only on paper. It is possible that the funding was appropriated in a corrupt way.

Urmila reported that she got free textbooks until class 4, and that after that her parents had to buy them:

> We always bought third- and fourth-hand books, whatever we could get for studies, with whatever we could understand before, after, under, and amidst the graffiti. All this was bought at the cheapest available rates, as my mother didn't give much money. There were all kinds of pictures in the books: animals, humans, trees, glasses, goggles, names of girls and boys, messages of love, poems, criticisms, filthy language ... all kinds of things were written there.

Urmila also remembered how she used old exercise books and text books: 'I used exercise books made of old papers and did not trouble my parents for newer ones,' she said. Champabai mentioned that she did not have exercise books:

> I used a slate till the 7th class. Most children of our caste had only text books. We didn't know exercise books, a pen, or a pencil at all. I scribbled all my homework and even the class room study on one slate. And I remember we used to write everything in just one book; all subjects in one book. My mother bought books very rarely and father didn't pay much attention. He didn't know much about my school or my schooling. He never bothered to enquire about it. This was the case with most of the parents of the lower castes.

This was one reason why some of the girls kept away from school. Another issue was clothing. In some cases, Dalit parents could not afford to buy the necessary uniforms, or they could not replace them when they became worn out. It was common for teachers, peons, and others to comment on the students' lower-caste backgrounds, their poverty, and their threadbare uniforms in a way that reproduced stereotypical images of 'dirty' Dalits. For example, Bharati's teachers and fellow students mocked her mercilessly because she did not dress well for school. 'I used to also feel ashamed of my dress and got a lot of beatings from my teachers. He said *our* clothes were always dirty.' This provides another instance of the way the education system reinforces wider forms of social discrimination.

The prevailing ethos in the schools was that of Brahmanical respectability, and this inevitably affected Dalit girls. The dress code associated with Brahmans, such as their style of draping a sari, and their supposed standards of hygiene were considered to be superior. Kamal stated, 'We liked to dress up like them. We wanted to drape saris like the Brahmans did.' The Dalit girls made minute observations of Brahman life: food habits, vegetarianism, consumption of ghee, and cooking practices. They tried to imitate the 'pure' (nasal toned) Marathi spoken by Brahmans. They preferred to wear the sober colours associated with the dress of the Brahmans, avoiding jazzy colours and 'vulgar' fashions.

The teachers and upper-caste students crippled the identity of the Dalits to such an extent that these women were left with a reinforced sense of their cultural unworthiness, even if they themselves at times did not consider the dominant culture legitimate. This is reflected in the everyday lives of many Dalits, who tend to disparage their own medicinal knowledge, art works, traditions, culture, and crafts, and to imitate 'purer' forms of language, dress, food, occupation, culture, and pedagogy. Some have shed a last name that signifies their Dalit origin and have taken the kind of village name with the suffix 'kar' that is associated with upper castes. For example, some members of the Nagare

family have changed the name to Nagarkar. A few have discarded their traditional drums, singing, and so on. Sandhya's son, who is studying genetics, underscored, 'things can be learned only from the Brahmans. They tell you how to live, how to fight and progress in life'. He said that he would marry only a Brahman girl.

Many Dalit respondents complained that they received very little moral support for or input into their education at home. According to Meera:

> My father was a drunkard and beat up my mother. My mother used to run to her aunt's place along with her children to protect herself from the drunkard husband. It was difficult to attend school. I never studied at home. There was no space at home. Whatever was taught was only at school. I also did not like to study at home because of some comments made. Our relatives used to visit us sometimes. If they ever saw me with a book, they used to ask me what future I had with those books. We were to sell glass, tin, and rags, they said. Why study then? They also told my mother that I should not be educated much and suggested that she stop my schooling. But my mother did not listen to them.

Few uneducated Dalit parents had any understanding of what education entailed. This was a grave handicap to their daughters and sons in their education. In fact, the different values that were inculcated in schools could cause problems for the children at home.

Many Dalits, in common with people in general in India, feel that higher studies or certain professions are fit only for certain castes. This is seen in a number of popular Marathi proverbs. For example, '*Shikshan, vyapaar karava tar Brahmananich/marwadyane, Maharani nahi* ('Education is for the Brahmans; business is to be done only by Marwaris [Banias] and not by a Mahar.') or, '*brahmana ghari ved-purana, kunbya ghari dana, ani mahara ghari gana*' ('Education is the arena of Brahmans, agriculture is for the peasant, and singing and dancing are for the Mahars.'). Some of the parents of the women I interviewed held this attitude about their daughters. Poonam's father, for example, had very low aspirations for her, disrespecting her abilities and her own aspirations, despite her brilliant performance in school. He did not want to spend money on science education for her and demanded that she take up arts or commerce, which was cheaper. He also thought that science and engineering were for men, and not good for girls. 'What are girls going to do with science and engineering?' he asked. In this unique case, Poonam's mother supported her daughter's decision to take up the subject of her choice.

In my observation, lower- and middle-class men of the lower castes generally have very low aspirations. They think that they themselves and their children are mediocre and do not possess the ability or resourcefulness to strive for or attain greater heights. The effect of this is much less pronounced in families in which the second or third generation of getting educated, and mothers are able to groom their daughters for educational success. Manini, Malavika, and her brother were thus under constant pressure to perform better. Both the sisters emphasized that their parents made them study science against their will, as they wanted them to be doctors. When I asked their mother about this, she said:

> There was no doctor or any other professional of that high rank in my house. Most of them were in clerical services or were teachers. [My husband and I] were both earning and we thought that we could afford good education for our children. We had no facilities or choices, but we could bestow them upon our children. Hence we did not take into consideration the children's choices. Also we did not think about their non-English background and how they would have to fight the English world. Those were different times; we acted in a craze and pushed them towards these disciplines.

English represented a particular problem for many Dalit girls, particularly for those whose parents had the means to send them to English-medium schools. These schools were invariably private schools charging high tuition fees, and they were prestigious. Dalits for the most part had no access to such education, but where they did, they struggled due to the lack of any culture of speaking and reading English at home. Most of them suffered from an inferiority complex because of their deficiencies in this respect. Brahmans in particular have long been renowned for their abilities in English, and the Dalit girls inevitably compared themselves to them. Alaka stated:

> Yes, I did find the English language difficult. It was my father who wanted me to study in English medium. I took up English literature as a challenge. There was a good job market for English teachers. My teachers in school and one in college taught English by explaining it in Marathi. Funny, isn't it? I was good at writing, but I couldn't speak. I couldn't clear some interviews as I could

not speak fluently in English. However, I gradually picked it up on my own and today I teach English literature at a junior college.

Another problem for Dalit girls was that they were expected to carry out housework in addition to their studies. When I interviewed Bharati, she was cooking while her parents sat in another room with the door closed. She suffered from defective eyesight but was still made to work very hard. She lowered her voice and told me that at times she had been made to work from a very small age, as she was the eldest. She had to do all the housework and also take care of her siblings. She complained that she was harassed like a step-daughter. Housework was for girls alone; fathers and brothers hardly contributed to it at all. If their mother was ill, these daughters were expected to handle all the household responsibilities. Most of the time it was the mother who expected and made these girls serve the household. Many fathers did not interfere in these 'private' affairs.

Again and again, housework was pinpointed as a major problem for girls in education. They were left exhausted after school and housework, and hence could not complete their homework. Then they were afraid that if they attended school the next day they would be beaten for failing to do their homework. If anything, this problem was more pronounced among the better-off Dalits who had aspirations to join the middle classes, as they sought to impose a particular middle-class notion of female domesticity. Not only were the girls expected to perform mundane domestic tasks, they were also expected to do them well. Many middle-class Dalit parents want their daughters to fit into a 'middle-class' gruhini ('lady') mould. Mothers would, therefore, insist that their daughters engage in housework, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, rolling 'round' chapattis, decorating the home, and learning arts and crafts to please their future husbands. Alaka laughed when she remembered her mother's training: 'She asked us to do housework first and study later. We had to get up early mornings to study and do housework, which was equally important. She wanted us to be equally capable on all fronts.'

Not all parents acted like this. Manini and Malavika were never given any work at home. Swati Waghmare was busy in school and in playing cricket rather than doing housework. Prakshoti Pawar hated her house due to her parents' strictness and rebelled against any housework. These parents took immense interest in their children's

work and inquired about their studies. Dr Harsha talked about her school days:

> My mother taught us initially. Later father took over. He made me sit late in the nights solving arithmetic problems and I remember an incident in class 7. I used to just work out the easy problems, without paying attention to the difficult ones. I did not want any bother. My father sat with me the night before the exams. He started with all the tougher ones and beat me up till I found the logic of solving the problems. The exam went very well and to my surprise I scored full marks in my algebra paper. It was after that beating that I started to look at the root of any problem. This training has gone a long way in making me what I am today. The teachers could not do what my father did.

Informants often complained that teachers did not teach them well. Snehlata said:

> I disliked geometry. It was in the 8th or 9th class when we had some geometric theorems. The teachers just copied them from the books to the board, one after the other, and told us to copy.... Nobody asked how the teacher derived the proof. Nobody dared to ask questions. I did ask once, but, with the response I got then, I never dared to ask anything after that. They did not reply properly, and only insulted us. We learned everything by heart. We just scraped through most of the time.

Jyotsna, who had attended a prestigious high school, added: 'Sometimes, if they were new, they were not able to teach properly. Some were not bothered if the class was understanding their lessons or not. Some of the college teachers were irresponsible. They sometimes did not complete the recommended syllabus for a subject. They also did not know much, could not explain well. So we had to join [extra coaching] classes.'

The teachers—who were commonly from a Brahman or upper-caste background—generally adopted an authoritarian manner, and were minutely sensitive to anything that might be taken as a challenge to their power. No questions could be asked or comments made. If somebody gathered enough courage to ask a question, she or he was trampled in an uncouth manner. This was a monologic form of pedagogy. No dialogue was entertained. Some scholars have argued that teachers may unconsciously treat low-caste children differently from other children or have reduced expectations of them (Khan 1993: 226).

The evidence for the Dalits shows, however, that the teachers often discriminated consciously.

Nonetheless, not all teachers act like this. A significant number of them have played a positive role for Dalits. Ambedkar's Brahman teacher, who gave Ambedkar his last name, is just one example. Poonam Rokade, an engineer, praised her teacher:

> My teacher did help me in mathematics. He spent some extra time on my coaching and did not charge me any fees. The engineering syllabus was tough and I felt like dropping out at times. I repeatedly failed in one particular subject and I couldn't figure out the reason. I thought it was caste discrimination. However, one day I gathered the guts to face the teacher of that subject and asked him the reason for my failure in his subject alone. He was a Maratha.... He was good to me. He explained that my method of writing answers was faulty. I followed his advice and succeeded.

A few teachers took a keen interest and advised the students about their further opportunities. Sandhya Meshram said that when she told her teacher about her social work interests the teacher advised her to pursue a Masters in Social Welfare; Sandhya is happy with that decision. Occasionally teachers were innovative and implemented changes to interest and benefit low-caste students. Such tendencies were nonetheless exceptions rather than the rule. These rare teachers must have constantly faced the pulls and pushes, the tensions of their position in the social ladder and in the classroom, while wanting to bring about the best in their committed Dalit students.

Parents often complained about insecurity for girls attending schools. Instances of abduction, rape, and molestation of girls dampen the enthusiasm of both parents and girl students in pursuing education beyond a certain age; thereafter the girls remain bound to their homes. There have been numerous incidents in colleges and universities in Mumbai and Pune in which girls have been sexually abused. Newspapers are replete with such stories. Publicity by feminists has at least brought this to light, whereas before it was almost completely concealed. In my project, eve-teasing was found to be a particular problem in the slums. The only informant who was prepared to talk about this was Meera, who told me how she was abused by one of her teachers at a private mathematics class:

> When I was in class 7 I used to attend 'Yash' classes [a pseudonym] for maths. We had a teacher who liked me very much. I didn't like him at all. He used to hold me close wherever I was. He bit me on my cheek once. I told my mother .... And my mother complained to the higher authorities and that person was then suspended. After that I did not go to any class.

CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOLS

Some of my Dalit informants denied that they had faced caste discrimination at school. When the majority of their fellow pupils were from a Dalit or lower-caste background this was no doubt the case. Suvarna Kuchekar reported that her Marathi-medium corporation school was a haven for her, as most pupils were of low caste:

> I did not face anything in school as it was a corporation school dominated by backward children. The teachers also even if from the open category [not in jobs reserved for Dalits or other low-caste people] did not trouble as such. My friends also know my caste and are fine with me. They come home and I go there and we are quite close. I have never hidden my caste.

In several cases, those who had attended schools with many high-caste children also denied that they had faced any discrimination. Nonetheless, from the expressions that I saw on their faces, I feel that they may have been blanking out humiliating memories.

Others were more frank. Bharati complained, 'Children teased me a lot. They said that I was from a "dirty caste" and so should stay away from them. They hid my bag and stole my only pen. So I did not like to go to school.' Mrs Kuchekar remembered how a Brahman teacher treated her in the 7th class: 'He was really harsh. He asked me, "What are you going to do with education?" He further continued, "These people will never improve. You will never understand this maths; it is not meant for you."' Monica Tapase said that although she used to obtain higher grades, her teachers encouraged and praised the 'others' (Brahman students), not her. 'In my case,' she said, 'they never acknowledged that I was doing well. I did not like it; however, I continued to study well to prove myself.' Kumud Pawde reported that Dalits were not allowed to touch the drinking utensils at school:

> We had to drink water at the corporation tap, which was very far away. Then I wondered why should I do it, and I started to rebel. However the attendant

abused me badly and took me to the teacher. The teacher lady beat me with a stick. Gadgil Sir taught us English in Class 5. He knew that I was good at English. He always said that 'a Mahar girl was going ahead and you [others] are the stones of the Narmada [river]'. I gradually progressed to class 8.

Sadhana Kharat, a teacher, said that the 'other' girls used to put their skirts tucked in properly so that they would not touch hers when they sat on the benches. 'They had separate groups also and stayed away. I never had friends from the upper castes as such.' School friends tended to be of the same caste. Jyotsna Rokade, Hira Kharat, and others mentioned these impenetrable caste groups. Sudha Bhalerao, who attended a Brahman-dominated college in the heart of Sadashiv Peth, said, 'I preferred friends from my caste as they have a similar background and that caste bond makes the relation stronger. The others keep asking our background, our customs, our caste, gotra, and so on; it becomes difficult to answer boldly.' Once again, Dalit students were humiliated for not having this cultural capital.

Some Dalit girls pretended to be of a higher caste. Meena Mahajan recalled that her name did not reveal that she was a Mahar. She said:

> In school I told my friends that I was a Maratha. I had a terrible complex. I thought that they would not talk to me if I revealed my caste. I saw how their faces fell. Once when I was in Class 10, one teacher loudly asked me, 'You are a Hindu-Mahar, right?' I felt so bad I stood with my head down. I was the only one in that class. Further, I never told anyone my address in Mangalvar Peth. The name itself reveals our Mahar *aali* [ghetto]. I don't tell my caste openly even today. Why tell if it is not required? I declare that I am a Brahman.

In a few cases, Dalit girls deliberately courted high-caste friends. Lalita Randhir, for example, said:

> I have always preferred Brahman friends. My brother always had Brahman friends. They came to our home but my brother never went to their place. He picked up a lot from them. I also liked Brahman friends, because my mentality and the mentality of the other Backward Caste students did not match, I did not like their thinking, behaviour. [I looked down upon them.] In my school and college I had some 'other' friends who liked me, as I was clean.

Thus these Dalit girls (including me once upon a time) thought that Dalits, including Dalit girls, were 'backward' and not good company to keep with. Caste and race are vicious phenomena in that they often cause one to look down on one's own brethren.

Champabai Bhalerao, a first-generation Mahar learner from Mumbai, said that she did not face any caste discrimination at all. She responded, 'I don't remember anything really significant when it comes to caste. My teacher was an Israeli. We were at her house the whole day. The other castes were also there, but there was nothing like caste discrimination. At that time Ambedkar's struggle was going strong and everybody was aware of it. So may be they knew that it would be very harmful if they behaved in that manner'. Champabai's teacher was a foreigner and, therefore, not likely to enforce Indian caste prejudices. In addition, most of the second- and third-generation learners who were in cities did not face caste discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Prakashachya Vatewar (On the road to enlightenment)[2]

The dark has only just turned
The road seems clearer
I agree of course
Religion, customs, traditions,
Still cloud and obscure the view
But to travel this road
One must get used to
Holding poison in
Let the throat turn blue!
We too will then know how to open the third eye.

The statements of the women I interviewed describe in vivid terms an important aspect of the Dalit struggle to enter the middle class. They were pursuing their education determinedly, as they believed it to be the remedy for all ills. These women's experiences raise thorny questions about Dalit patriarchy. Dalit girls are in 'quadruple jeopardy'. They are not only 'doubly bound' (Gay and Tate 1998: 169–84), like African-American women, but 'quadruply bound' by 'outsiders'—caste, class, and the education system—and 'insiders', their parents. However, this is not true in all cases. Some liberal-minded parents allow their daughters freedom, understand their aspirations and their struggle, and support them.

NOTES

1. I shall use the terms 'girls' and 'women' interchangeably. This is because, although the informants I interviewed included a few adult women, they were transported into their girlhood when they reflected on their school life.
2. 'Knowledge is Potent', a poem by Ravindra Pandhare, published in *Asmitadarsha* and translated by Eleanor Zelliot and Veena Deo in the *Journal of South Asian Literature*. vol. 29, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1994), pp. 41–68.

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BODIES IN PAIN
A People's History of 1971

Yasmin Saikia

Eleanor Zelliot's scholarship must be understood as an 'emancipatory' discourse aimed at recognizing and voicing the 'oppressed' to bring about change in practices and institutions that limit human agency and discriminate between human beings. Power and dominance as much as social institutions of caste, class, religion, and gender that limit human freedom and sanction oppression, she has argued, must be questioned and exposed to render reform. Her scholarship has consistently demanded the right of human freedom and dignity.

The effort to understand the oppressed human condition and free the restrictive limitations through research and analysis is an ethical project for Zelliot. To remain indifferent and fail to respond to the urgent human issues in South Asia, Zelliot believes, is the failure of the human spirit to recognize injustice and the pain of others. The point that she has repeatedly made is the responsibility of academics to account for and present the variety of human 'experiences' to generate ethical awareness for overcoming 'graded inequality' (2001).

Zelliot's passionate concern for the 'oppressed' has expanded her analysis to include the women's question. For her, a truly ethical approach to South Asian history and culture is a feminist humanist approach, and she urges radical transformation of the field of inquiry by using

Claiming Power from Below

Dalits and the Subaltern Question in India

Edited by
Manu Bhagavan
and
Anne Feldhaus

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