Mapping Dalit Feminism
Towards an Intersectional Standpoint

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Representing a 'Dalit Woman'

> The concept of 'representation', it seems, is useful precisely because and to the extent that it can serve a mediating function between the two positions, neither foundationalist (privileging 'reality') nor superstructural (privileging 'culture'), not denying the category of the real, or essentialising it as some pre-given metaphysical ground for representation.... Our understanding of the problems of 'real' women cannot lie outside the 'imagined' constructs in and through which 'women' emerge as subjects. Negotiating with these mediations and simulacra we seek to arrive at an understanding of the issues at stake.[1]

The theory of representation is suitable in delineating the contours of hegemonic epistemologies. Dominant representation helps shape knowledge about something/somebody in a particular fashion. Therefore, an analysis of popular representations unveils the complex and implicit ways in which dominant power functions. Critiques of representations both materially and metaphorically appear in feminist and black feminist theorizations.[2] Representational analysis shows that the stereotypes about certain groups operational in society are results of the knowledge created by hegemonic powers. This hegemonic enterprise of representation

also functions by interpellating women to occupy their roles prescribed for them by the social order. These stereotypes not only shape our assumptions about those groups, but are also responsible for dictating the course in which those groups are made to internalize those assumptions as natural and given.

Representations are results of varied layers of mediations and discursive strategies. Therefore, engaging with representation as a domain of analysis reveals the process of representations and its implications. In the process, it also problematizes the position of the representer as a crucial determinant in the production of knowledge. Analysing the problem of representation, I focus specifically on the constituency of Dalit Feminism, that is, 'dalit woman'. How is a dalit woman (recognized as an intersectional category) represented (i.e., in terms of victim/agent/survivor)? What are the purpose and politics of such representations? What can be termed as a dalit feminist representation?

Stuart Hall's theory of representation, where he focuses on the constructionist approach is useful in understanding representation in terms of power relations.[3] It recognizes the 'public, social character of language' and 'acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Things don't *mean:* we *construct* meaning, using representational systems—concepts and signs.'[4] This notion is important in identifying how discourse functions in close relation with the processes of representation in order to promote certain kinds of ideas and practices. The constructionist approach therefore focuses on the politics of representation and recognizes representation as a consequence of discursive formations. The approach claims that it is us, the language users, who give meaning to objects. Herein a hierarchy is also maintained as to who has the right to assign meaning. A discursive approach, to borrow Hall's definition is 'concerned with the *effects and consequences* of representation—its "politics".'[5] Hall, therefore, directly links representation to power. According to him, representation

is a medium or process through which meaning, associations, and values are socially constructed and reified by people in a shared culture. Asymmetries of representation indicate asymmetries of power as well. This perspective then challenges the seemingly given binaries such as self/other, man/woman, culture/nature, and shows them as constructed.

Commenting on the politics of representation as a constructed element and its contribution in shaping a feminist critique, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan maintains,

> [The] central and repeated concern [here] … is the (re)constitution of female subjectivity in the interests of a feminist praxis. If my interest in gender leads primarily to reflections about female subjectivity, my cultural analysis necessarily focuses on representation as the process by which the female subject is constructed in response to a variety of ideological imperatives.[6]

Such analysis not only emphasizes the complexity in the process of representation where the power dynamics gets highlighted, but also the position of the representer in its effect upon the representation. The constructionist approach becomes useful to understand how representations are rooted in and reflective of the dominant power structures in society. I go on to explore how gender is seen through the lens of caste, how caste is seen through the lens of gender, and what a dalit feminist representation looks like. Using a comparative framework to elucidate dalit feminist representation of dalit women vis-à-vis mainstream Indian feminist and dalit representations of dalit women, this chapter highlights issues of sexuality and labour. It also raises the question of who can represent a dalit woman (see also Chapter 4).

My purpose here is not to invoke a value judgment regarding representations and interpretations. What I intend here is to highlight the consequences of representations in creating certain

assumptions. Representation, therefore, is viewed as an epistemic endeavour. I specifically draw on texts that have attracted differing responses from mainstream Indian Feminism and Dalit Politics because Dalit Feminism proclaims itself in contradistinction to them and thus we need to consider the issues that are given primacy, and the consequence of such interpretation. I would also like to emphasize that in their respective politics, all these different and differing perspectives have had immense impact in shaping and enhancing our ideas about caste and gender. However, mainstream Indian Feminism, Dalit Politics and Dalit Feminism are ongoing movements whose constitutions and contours are dynamic and in continuous flux. Hence, exploring different and differing debates may help direct us towards a more potent understanding of caste and gender.

GENDER THROUGH THE LENS OF CASTE

The Dirty Picture (2011)

In terms of mainstream popular representations of dalit woman, the film *The Dirty Picture* is an important contemporary example. Based on the life of Silk Smitha, an actress who dominated the 1980s Tamil film industry as a 'vamp' figure,[7] *The Dirty Picture* portrays Reshma, who aspires to become an actress and becomes popular as a sex symbol in cinema. The film shows the journey of Reshma/Silk (played by Vidya Balan), focusing on how she utilizes the male gaze to her advantage to gain popularity, and, in the process, dismisses public opinion while choosing to live the way she wants. The director, Milan Luthria, has claimed *The Dirty Picture* to be a woman-centric film that challenges the taboos regarding women and sexuality by presenting lust as a part of life and nature.[8] Silk's speech in the film during an award show where she proclaims that she will keep flaunting her body and keep making dirty pictures, is showcased as an attack on patriarchy.[9]

After its release, the film received rave reviews from film critics as well as feminists for its unabashed portrayal of female sexuality and female agency.[10] In an interview, director Milan Luthria said that through the film he wanted to show 'a woman who has guts and glory'.[11] In popular newspaper reviews, the film's praises ranged from being 'free, sexual and female'[12] to 'a seminal work that will be studied in feminist discourses'.[13] According to these reviews, rather than remaining closeted in shame and guilt and suffer from sexual domination, Silk's open articulation of her sexuality and her desires create a new way of looking at women. In these reviewers' opinion, therefore, what seems to make the film feminist is its representation of women's sexual liberation. The factor of *choice* in this representation of female sexuality becomes important in feminist scholarly arguments but in a more complex manner. Highlighting the film's narrative as portraying a lone woman's fight against a male dominated world by challenging the moral codes of society, the popular perspective celebrates the success of the film as a victory of a woman's right over her body, her right to choose an occupation, and live the way she wants.[14] Feminists such as C. S. Venkiteswaran, on the other hand, have defined the film as merely a 'body show' that ultimately victimizes Silk.[15] Annie Zaidi adds that the only lens through which Silk is allowed agency in the film is through sexuality, which she questions.[16] Celebrity feminist and journalist Shobhaa De raises similar concerns when she says that rather than making a statement, the film becomes purely an entertainment 'that manages to stay a hair's breadth away from unadulterated porn'.[17] Such feminist readings of the film, *The Dirty Picture,* therefore complicate the notion of sexual agency.

The idea of sexual agency in *The Dirty Picture* is also problematized by Jenny Rowena through an identification of the caste factor.[18] Rowena argues that in the film, as well as in the reviews of the film, the angle that gets sidelined is Silk's dalit identity. And herein she links Silk the character with Silk Smitha, the Tamil actress on

whom this film is based. Rowena contextualizes the film historically by analysing caste and gender as intersectional. Tracing the origin of Silk's hypersexual figure to the Hindu religious tradition of the devadasi system, Rowena argues that Brahmanism maintains caste purity by contrasting upper-caste and lower-caste women in terms of their sexuality. While the 'protected/controlled' body of the upper-caste woman becomes 'the adored and worshiped site of caste purity', lower-caste women are 'repeatedly portrayed as sexually loose, hyper and "immoral", a process that starts right from the representation of Sita and Shoorpanaka in *Ramayana*'.[19] This imposition of immorality and impurity on the dalit woman's body thus gives an opportunity to exercise sexual control/exploitation by upper-caste men, executed through methods like the devadasi system and public rape of dalit women. Rowena claims that *The Dirty Picture* represents the way in which this legacy is carried forth in cinema, a popular media wherein 'caste differences between women has been … powerfully institutionalized'.[20] In the film, Suryakant's wife and Silk fit perfectly into this brahmanical patriarchal binary wherein the sexual purity of upper-caste women (portrayed through Suryakant's wife) is contrasted with the impurity of dalit women (portrayed through Silk) which is seen to make them sexually accessible to upper-caste men.

By understanding caste and gender as interlinked structures oppressing the dalit women, Rowena offers an intersectional methodology to read *The Dirty Picture.* In her article, 'Mapping the Margins', Crenshaw uses the intersectional methodology to understand how black women's oppression is caused simultaneously by race and gender. In the context of the controversy over 2 Live Crew, a black rap group prosecuted in Florida in 1990 for writing obscene lyrics, Crenshaw mentions that on the one hand, they were critiqued for writing 'misogynistic filth', and on the other hand they were praised for its dealing with 'popular racist stereotypes in a comically extreme form'.[21] Interestingly however, both the so-called feminist and anti-racist arguments remained confined to

white/black binarism. Crenshaw points out that, the reference to 'misogynism' was made in connection to an incident of white women's rape by black men, wherein the lyrics of 2 Live Crew were blamed for endorsing such violent acts. Thus, the *feminist* voice got located in white society. On the other hand, the lyrics' overtly sexual and racist language was praised by the anti-racist camp for challenging those very stereotypes the blacks were relegated to. In such anti-racist/feminist tussle what gets ignored is that the lyrics directly refer to black women. As Crenshaw writes, 'The fact that the objects of these violent sexual images are black women becomes irrelevant in the representation of the threat in terms of the black rapist/white victim dyad.'[22] Moreover, the rhetoric of anti-racism provides an opportunity to defend misogynism. The 'joke' that seemingly challenges the stereotypes about black men, interestingly also highlights the social relations of power within black communities, whereby the black men of 2 Live Crew enjoy the liberty to represent black women through overtly sexual and obscene images. Crenshaw's analysis shows that 2 Live Crew's representation of black women results in 'the reproduction of racial and gender hierarchy' wherein 'the devaluation of women of color' gets linked to 'how women of color are represented in cultural imagery'.[23] The method of representational intersectionality thus becomes useful in including 'both the ways in which these images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, as well as a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color'.[24]

This is reminiscent of Sunder Rajan's observation quoted in the beginning of this chapter where she argues that the study of/in representations reveals the enmeshing of the 'real' and the 'imaginary' in ways that they form and inform each other. Representation is a product of and in turn produces dominant cultures and ideologies. It is in this way that a study of the representation of Silk in the film *The Dirty Picture* becomes important in revealing the

intersection between caste and gender. An intersectional study foregrounds that Silk's sexuality is not a matter of sexual agency (as debated in mainstream feminist reviews and analyses), but a mechanism deployed by brahmanical patriarchy to preserve the differences between the sexualized dalit woman (to be enjoyed outside the domestic) and the chaste upper-caste woman (who fulfils the demands of father/husband/son within the sacred domain of home). As Rowena explains, 'though Silk Smitha's image as a sex goddess grew to mythical proportions, being the embodiment of … a "dirty", worthless, "use-and-throw" woman, who marked the boundaries of caste and gender decency with her lustful body, this might not have actually translated into real power and privilege in her everyday life.'[25] According to Rowena, this false notion of agency stems from the ignoring of difference among women based on caste by mainstream Feminism. Rowena identifies *The Dirty Picture* as reproducing caste and gender hierarchy and the devaluation of dalit women's sexuality. It is this recognition of caste and gender intersection that makes Rowena's reading of *The Dirty Picture* dalit feminist.

Mumbai Dance Bar Ban

The problematic of dalit women's representation is not limited only in creative articulations; it also exists in socio-historical events. To elucidate my point I invoke the debates amongst different groups of activists regarding the Mumbai Dance Bar Ban in 2005. The Maharashtra government proposed the ban in 2005 to end the 'unsavoury' activities reportedly thriving in dance bars that were allegedly corrupting the youth.[26] What ensued was an extended political and legal battle over 'obscenity' in public space.[27] In Maya Pandit's re-articulation, 'the ban was couched in the language of *cleansing the city of sex, sleaze and immorality*'.[28] Feminist groups therefore responded to the issue in terms of the state's suppression of women's sexuality and women's right to

work.[29] As the Statement of Women's Groups in Mumbai on 22 April 2005 reported, 'Instead of creating spaces and conditions that ensure that women are not sexually exploited and their rights are respected, the state has targeted their very livelihood which might have lent their lives independence and autonomy and thereby their freedom.'[30] Women's organizations such as All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), *Manushi*, the Womanist Party of India led by Varsha Kale, all highlighted the 'selective cultural policing' wherein only bar girls are targeted through the ban, whereas film actresses depicting the same songs and dances in cabaret style are celebrated with thundering applause.[31] They argued that for women who were battered, deserted by husband and family, bar dancing provided a means of economic independence.[32]

The Dalit Bahujan Women's Group based in Mumbai, on the other hand, supported the ban. In 'Dance Bar Ban Debate: A MaFuAa Stand Point' published by Dalit Bahujan Mahila Vichar Manch Publication, Pramilani Kunda writes,

> Dalit Bahujan Marxist women from Mumbai … have supported the Maharashtra Government's decision to 'Ban Dance Bars' as first step towards socio-economic cultural reform. However, they strongly oppose the 'moralist perspective' of pro-ban and point out the fact that the 'dance bars' is one of the new forms of 'Sexual Entertainment Industry' that has emerged as inevitable part of 'Market Economy' in present globalization process.[33]

The two issues that emerge here are dalit feminists' opposition to the 'moral' reason for banning bar dancing, and at the same time, the reason for their support for this ban. While the opposition is directed towards the government's view of dance bars as promoting immorality, the support for the ban poses a challenge to mainstream Feminism's proclamation of economic agency. Mainstream Feminism erases caste and sees dalit women only as 'women'. Consequently, the notion of economic independence as

liberating gets imposed on all women irrespective of their caste. Even when caste is mentioned, its complexity vis-à-vis gender and class is not analysed. For example, Maya Pandit views bar dancing as a method to keep alive the tradition of folk dance (in this case, lavani, a dance form of Maharashtra) and thereby resist brahmanical acculturation.[34] However, this claim that bar dancing is a deliberate choice exercised by dalit women to keep their folk tradition alive ignores the fact of poverty and other aspects that force these women into this profession.

A dalit feminist analysis of the position of the bar girls problematizes the issue of agency through choice. The Dalit Bahujan Marxist women contextualize the issue historically by linking bar girls to the devadasi system: an ancient religious practice where dalit girls were married to the deities but lived as prostitutes for brahmin priests. This system brings into existence the 'informal sexual circuits of caste' whereby dalit women are sexually exploited by upper-caste men as a matter of right.[35] The condition of the bar girls, mostly belonging to dalit communities, can be seen as a reproduction of the devadasi system in a new economic setting. Kunda cites this being the reason why 'The DBM [Dalit Bahujan Marxist women] welcomed the Ban on dance bars … to prevent the capitalist process that has increasingly started pulling bahujan women into the 'sex entertainment industry'. It is necessary to prevent women from marginalized class and caste from becoming 'Public Property'.[36] Kunda explains that the commercialization of sex work in dance bars creates scope for public exploitation of women's labour for sexual entertainment. This 'vicious circle' of sexual exploitation is further endorsed by the caste system wherein lower-caste women 'are invariably pushed into this kind of exploitative labour market structure because they have no other option but to sell their body and sexual labour'.[37] According to Meena Gopal, caste- and gender-based hierarchy is created among women in order to regulate their sexuality.[38] The caste discourse that relies primarily on the notions of

impurity and untouchability, presumes the sexual availability of dalit women. Therefore, when dalit women go out for work, they are often given only those kinds of work that are deemed suitable for them due to their identity as 'dalit women'. In this way, dalit women are re-inscribed in a casteist-sexist public space. For the bar dancers, it is therefore not a matter of *choice* of labour. Rather, it is the kind of labour that is made *available* to them due to their lower-caste origin. Sharmila Rege notes that the dance bar ban issue highlights mainstream Feminism's 'failure to recognize the structural violence in terms of caste-ordained linkages between sexuality and labour'.[39] As a result, the particularity of caste that creates a unique situation for dalit women is not taken into consideration by mainstream Feminism.

Jenny Rowena points that 'Dalit feminist and dalitbahujan political positions on the devadasi practice and other matters like sex work, bar dance, etc., emphatically identify them as oppressive traditions that exploit and subjugate lower-caste women and communities'.[40] This recognition differs from mainstream Indian feminist perspectives that view devadasi tradition in terms of dalit women's sexual agency as opposed to the upper-caste women who are claimed to be more strictly controlled than dalit women.[41] In mainstream Feminism, choice (in the spheres of sexuality and labour) is represented as oppositional agency because choice is seen to go against the patriarchal control over women which restricts them to marriage and the domestic sphere. Dalit feminist analyses of *The Dirty Picture* and the Mumbai dance bar ban issue, on the other hand, challenge the mainstream feminist notions of sexual liberation and economic agency in their representations of dalit women. A dalit feminist reading of the representation of Silk and the bar dancers provides a nuanced understanding wherein the issue emerges not merely of economic agency per se (as mainstream feminists claim) but one that recognizes the historical practices of caste- and gender-based discrimination practised through the exploitation of dalit women's sexuality and

work. Placing dalit woman within a historical perspective provides a different view than the universalist terms of *choice/rights* promoted by mainstream feminist perspectives. *Choice*, seen to be agential by mainstream Feminism, is heavily circumscribed in case of dalit women who are forced into casteist and sexist forms of labour (such as bar dancing) and expression of sexuality (such as a hypersexual vamp figure). Their so-called *choices*, therefore, are seen to be enforced by brahmanical patriarchy, and hence are not oppositional at all.

CASTE THROUGH THE LENS OF GENDER

A dalit feminist analysis of the representations of *The Dirty Picture* and the dance bar ban provides an intersectional understanding of dalit woman as a category defined through caste and gender intersection looked at through the lens of caste. I now look at caste through the lens of gender. To explicate this point I draw upon the representations of dalit women in the different accounts of the Khairlanji massacre as well as in literary writings by dalit writers that foreground dalit women.

Khairlanji Massacre (2006)

The notorious massacre of Khairlanji occurred on 29 September 2006 when four members of the dalit Bhotmange family, who were dalits, were killed by Kunbi men, belonging to an OBC category, in the village Khairlanji**.** The women in the family, Surekha and Priyanka, were paraded naked in public and raped repeatedly before being killed, and the two sons were lynched. On 28 September 2008 the District Sessions Court of Bhandara awarded death penalty to six convicts for murder. On 14 July 2010, the Nagpur bench of the High Court commuted the death penalty to rigorous imprisonment of twenty-five years for all the convicts.

The Khairlanji massacre has been represented in three different ways: by the mainstream media as revenge killing in caste terms, by dalit theorists as a caste/class dispute,[42] and by Sabrina Buckwalter as sexual violence. The narrative of revenge killing has been used by the media in referring to the court judgment which viewed the massacre as retaliation in a land dispute.[43] The court traced the origin of the incident back to a land dispute between Siddharth Gajbhaiye, a relative of the Bhotmanges, and Sakru Bunjeswar, a caste Hindu, following which Surekha appeared as a witness in favour of Gajbhaiye. Hence, the media's depiction of the Khairlanji massacre as 'a clear case of wreaking vengeance' is related to caste feud over land.[44]

While the media has highlighted the revenge angle with caste as a muted motivating factor, Anand Teltumbde not only foregrounds caste, but also connects it with class dynamics. He traces the origin of the dispute to seventeen years before the massacre when the economically well-off Bhotmanges defied caste rules by buying five acres of land.[45] Teltumbde argues that the 'upward economic mobility and … the educational achievements of the Bhotmange children' caused 'injury to the caste pride' of the caste Hindus.[46] Hence, the murder of the Bhotmanges, he states was a collective effort to take revenge. Teltumbde's representation of the Khairlanji massacre thus links revenge with caste as it intersects with class. Thus, the media as well as the analysis by Teltumbde represent the Khairlanji massacre in terms of caste dynamics, though the latter traces it further and highlights the economic angle tied to caste.

To understand how the economy is related to caste hierarchy, we need to locate it historically. The material consequences of the caste system are elaborated by Gail Omvedt who writes, 'Caste is a "material reality" with a "material base"; it is not only a form but a *concrete material content*, and it has historically shaped the very basis of Indian society and continues to have crucial economic implications even today.'[47] Understanding caste and

class as two interlinked 'hierarchies operative in Indian society', Uma Chakravarti observes that caste and class relations function 'one according to ritual purity with the brahmana on top and the "untouchables" at the bottom, the other according to the political and economic status with the landlords at the top and the landless labourers at the bottom. The first corresponds to the formal representation of society, the second to reality—together they make for the unique form of inequality that caste represents.'[48] The caste system therefore influences class dynamics in constructing hierarchy in terms of control over resources and consequently the kinds of labour assigned to people of different castes. Thus, as Ambedkar writes, caste is not just a division of labour but also '*a division of labourers*'.[49] The caste norms of obligatory servitude and birth-based hierarchy, through which different kinds of work are assigned to different castes, ensure continued difference in economic position among different castes. In Uma Chakravarti's opinion, class relations are closely linked to the caste system in that 'the upper castes enjoy social power, regardless of their individual circumstances with respect to control over material resources' while the dalits are devoid of any right to ownership.[50] The questions, therefore, of who owns the land and who does not, are deeply linked to the caste system.

The Una agitation of 2016 has seen a resurgence of the caste and class debate in terms of land ownership. Following the incident of flogging of four dalits in Una for carrying cow carcasses, the Una agitation began with the demand to stop relegating dalits to stigmatizing work such as carrying animal carcass. Foregrounding the connection between labour (in terms of livelihood) and caste, the Una agitation argued that the caste system functions by assigning dalits to certain kinds of labour that are deemed *polluted*. Hence, access to such economic sustenance does not ensure equality. Therefore, the core demand of the Una agitation was that dalits should be given five acres of land because it is the only way they can be free from the vicious cycle

of caste-based hereditary professions. Jignesh Mewani, the leader of this movement, said that the Una agitation is 'pitching for an alternative model of development, based on land reforms, where productivity and wealth gains will be made by redistributing land to those who will work on it themselves, land to the tiller'.[51] Since such control over resources is seen to be fundamental to dalits gaining respect and equality, the Una agitation has been called Dalit Pride March. Here we can see how caste and labour (in terms of means of livelihood) are interlinked and why the latter becomes a major argument in anti-caste discourse.

Such caste and class analysis is premised on an inter-categorical relation of hierarchy between the upper and lower castes. Defined as a method to understand and analyse intersections, inter-categorical analysis, as seen in McCall's explanation in the introduction of this book, highlights the relationship of inequality 'among' groups.[52] The inter-categorical approach, therefore, becomes useful in analysing a society based on caste hierarchy that perpetuates unequal class relationships between groups. Understanding how caste relations reflect class dynamics in Khairlanji and the Una agitation respectively, Teltumbde and Mewani provide such an inter-categorical interpretation.

While Teltumbde's intersectional caste and class analysis of Khairlanji represents the rapes/murders exclusively as caste violence against the Bhotmanges, Sabrina Buckwalter makes gender her primary focus by shifting attention to the rapes of the dalit women and foregrounding the erasure of the evidence of Surekha and Priyanka's rapes in the postmortem reports. But this highlighting of the gender angle through the focalization of sexual assault erases caste from the narrative. Gender oppression such as rape (see Chapter 2 with reference to Kalyani Thakur Charal's autobiography *Ami Keno Charal Likhi*) is used by the dominant power to exercise control over community. Buckwalter's concentration on the gendered narrative of Khairlanji, therefore, provides an important insight into the massacre. This representation, however,

views gender as the sole category of oppression and ignores the specific casteist practices such as public gang rape. Public gang rape, as Aloysius, Mangubhai and Lee observe, is a specific phenomenon often executed against dalit women as a means to suppress any display of defiance of untouchability. They further add that, 'While in some instances the perpetrators of violence belong to one homogeneous dominant caste, there are instances where they cut across all dominant caste lines, that is, backward caste and forward caste.'[53] Surekha and Priyanka's gang rapes need to be seen in conjunction with its caste implications. The dominant representations of the Khairlanji massacre either erase caste by focusing exclusively on the gender aspect of the sexual violence, or see the brutality inflicted on the two women only in terms of caste violence wherein gender becomes secondary.[54] Hence, as Sharmila Rege puts it, the violence against dalit women in the Khairlanji massacre gets represented as either 'caste atrocity' or 'sexual atrocity'.[55]

A dalit feminist analysis of the Khairlanji massacre would intervene in the dominant caste/class/revenge narrative through the perspective of gender. It would highlight how brahmanical control over dalit people is enacted through the public rape of dalit women. At this point, it is important to mention that the local media and Teltumbde have represented the rapes and murders as punishment of the Bhotmange family for Surekha's assumed illicit affair with her cousin, Gajbhaiye, and for owning land. Both the accusation of the affair and the later sexual assault as punishment for such alleged sexual aberration are indicative of the sexualization of dalit women; more specifically, the attribution of *impurity* at the sexual level to the dalit woman. In a gendered understanding of the caste system, Anupama Rao argues that caste ideologies 'are embedded in material forms of dispossession … and they are mediated by the regulation of sexuality and gender identity through the rules of kinship and caste purity'.[56] Following Rao's argument, we can see how the material issue of land

ownership translates into sexual violence directed at dalit women. The specificity of gender emerges in the way the punishment is enacted; it is the dalit women who are publicly paraded naked and raped before being murdered. This is an example of brahmanical patriarchy that asserts its sexual control over dalit women's bodies. A dalit feminist reading therefore challenges the way Dalit Politics represents caste as subsuming gender, instead highlighting the particularity of dalit women's caste/gender identity.

With regards to the caste and gender system and ownership of land, another question arises as to who within the Bhotmange family actually owned the land. This question draws attention to dalit women's position within the dalit community with regards to the ownership of land, making the analysis intra-categorical. In their representations of the Khairlanji massacre, both Teltumbde and the Yashada Fact Finding Report 2006 mention in passing that 'they owned 5 acres of land'.[57] This generic reference to 'they' with regards to land ownership represents the Bhotmange family exclusively in terms of their caste identity, and consequently erases gender differences within the dalit community. The importance of a gendered problematic of land ownership within the dalit community has been emphasized in the Udupi march following the Una agitation in 2016. While the Una march, as mentioned earlier, demanded land rights for dalits, in the Udupi march, dalit female activists claimed that land should be given specifically in the names of dalit women to ensure their economic independence not just from the upper castes but also from dalit men.[58] The fact that neither the anti-caste groups nor Teltumbde consider this gender specificity of land ownership in their analysis of the Khairlanji massacre shows how gender gets erased from dominant portrayals of the issue. An intra-categorical analysis therefore intervenes in such caste- and class-specific representations by connecting the 'symbolic economies of gender and sexuality and the material reality of dispossession of dalit women'.[59]

An intersectional analysis of the Khairlanji massacre thus brings out the issues of sexuality and access to economic resources vis-à-vis dalit women. While in *The Dirty Picture* and the dance bar ban issue, the questions of sexuality and labour have been addressed with regards to the problematization of choice and agency with respect to dalit women, in Khairlanji the issue becomes that of violence inflicted on the dalit woman's body to exercise caste control over land. Violence here gets defined in terms of physical violence as well as socio-economic violence implemented through the ownership of labour and land. Dalit Feminism's analysis shows that when caste and gender are seen as intersectional, the issues of sexuality and labour not only problematize the question of agency, but also bring to the forefront the problem of sexist-casteist violence in this context.

While the representation of the Khairlanji massacre by Dalit Politics erases the specificity of dalit women, literary works by dalit writers have often focused exclusively on dalit women but have represented them predominantly as victims.[60] Such dalit writings represent dalit women's victimization in two ways: victimhood in terms of victim/whore dichotomy, and victimization in terms of compromised agency. The first kind of representation is exemplified by texts such as Baburao Bagul's short story, 'Mother', and Limbale's *The Outcaste* (see Chapter 2), while the second kind of representation is evident in texts such as Gautam Ali's 'Bazaar'.

Baburao Bagul's short story 'Mother' shows the consequences caste has on the filial relationship between a son and his mother. Born of dalit parents, Pandu, the son, is a target of regular verbal and physical assault by his classmates and neighbours who taunt him by saying that his widowed mother, because of her relationship with the upper-caste overseer, is a whore. Though initially he vehemently defends his mother, gradually he starts to accept the mother/whore binary. Through the recollection of a series of events such as his mother's absence during the nights and her extravagant lifestyle, Pandu comes to the conclusion that his

mother is indeed a whore. Pandu's 'new found knowledge' of his mother's infidelity makes him see 'her tightly worn expensive sari, the careless confidence, the defiance in her walk' as proof of her 'guilt'.[61] Blaming her for ruining his life, Pandu himself calls her a 'whore' at the climax of the story.[62]

The author of the story, however, shows sympathy towards the mother. The story highlights how as a wife she suffers the suspicion of her husband, as a widow she has to deal with being called 'slut' by the society, and even as a mother she faces the same treatment from her son.[63] The story thus highlights the mother's sad state of being throughout her life. In this representation, the character of the mother remains caught within a victim/whore dichotomy. By focusing on the son and the life he leads due to the social perception of his mother, the story places Pandu as the subject of the narrative. Thus, it is through Pandu's eyes that we see the mother. The eponymous character, that is, the nameless dalit mother, is shown completely devoid of any agency. The only *choice* that the mother seems to make in the story is that of taking the overseer as the lover. This act, too, is heavily circumscribed as the story establishes this choice as a desperate means of putting an end to the constant sexual advances by different men. Choosing the overseer gives her protection from men like Dagdu who always threaten to rape her. Hence, the story fixes the dalit mother in a condition of perpetual victimhood.[64]

In other texts where dalit women are seen to be resisting such victimhood, they are shown in a negative light. In *The Outcaste,* Limbale's mother, Masamai, gets raped by the upper-caste landlord. After the rape, she is seen as 'used', and therefore, is deserted by her husband. Upon realizing that she has been abandoned by her husband, she deliberately chooses to go and live with the upper-caste landlord (who had raped her) as a way of exacting 'revenge' on her husband.[65] Her decision to do this becomes a way to challenge her double victimization, that is, by the landlord who sees her as 'sexually available' and by the husband who abandons

her after her rape. Limbale, however, feels uncomfortable that he is born of a dalit mother, Masamai, and an upper-caste father. He asks, 'Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the foetus?'[66] Even though the textual evidence shows that Masamai got pregnant with Limbale *after* she chose to go and live with the upper-caste landlord, it is interesting that Limbale interprets this relationship in terms of 'rape'. For Limbale, therefore, his mother's sexual choice (which may also be interpreted as a survival technique like the mother in Bagul's 'Mother') is a problem. This representation can be seen in contrast to the mainstream feminist view of sexual choice as agential. When it comes to such dalit representations of dalit women,[67] patriarchal values of morality are internalized. Even though Limbale recognizes his mother's rape by the upper-caste man in terms of brahmanical patriarchy, the fact that he himself views his mother's sexual choice as a problem, manifests the patriarchal standards of morality.

The second type of dalit representation of dalit women, as mentioned earlier, is that of victimhood in terms of compromised agency as exemplified by Gautam Ali's short story, 'Bazaar'. This story centres on a dalit woman married to an upper-caste man. Due to her poor health, the wife decides to employ a young maid. Upon noticing how her husband 'had become chattier, and more homebound' the wife confronts him and he acknowledges that the maid 'has awakened my sleeping lust'.[68] Angered, the wife fires the maid. But the husband cannot control his sexual urge and starts visiting brothels. To avoid the husband's visits to prostitutes, the wife employs a poor dalit girl as a housemaid to fulfil the husband's sexual demands. The story narrates how the wife 'affectionately tidied the maid's dishevelled look with scented soap and shampoo … dressed her in a new form and thus made her presentable'.[69] After the night, the 'dishevelled' maid leaves, the wife once again starts her search for a young maid.

'Bazaar' has been seen by dalit critics as a story of 'sexploitation' where 'underprivileged women … become soft targets for the sexual gratification of the social elite'.[70] The story, however, is much more than that. 'Bazaar' shows two kinds of dalit women: one who is married to an upper-caste man and employed in an urban white-collar job, and another who is poor and comes from a rural area to serve as a maid. Despite her economic affluence the dalit wife subscribes to patriarchy when she employs the dalit girl to fulfil her upper-caste husband's sexual demands. The wife accepts brahmanical patriarchy in her attempt to become the 'ideal wife' and presumably to protect her marriage as well. Moreover, by employing a dalit girl as the maid, she reproduces casteist and sexist assumption of upper-caste men's sexual access to dalit women. The story ultimately evokes sympathy in the readers by highlighting the victimhood of the maid whose voice is never heard, as well as the wife who remains a victim of patriarchy. In this way, the wife exemplifies constrained agency.

Dalit feminist analyses of all these texts reveal the limitations in mainstream Indian feminist and Dalit Politics' representation of dalit women which subsume dalit women under the generic rubric of caste (as seen in Dalit Politics' representation of the Khairlanji massacre) and focus exclusively on the victimization of dalit women (as seen in dalit writings), and define agency through the exercise of choice with no reference to caste-specific constraints (as seen in mainstream feminist representations of *The Dirty Picture* and the Mumbai dance bar ban issue). It is in light of these gaps in mainstream Indian Feminism and Dalit Politics' representations of dalit women that the next section explores the contours of Dalit Feminism's representation.

DALIT FEMINISM'S REPRESENTATION

A dalit feminist representation of dalit women recognizes the specificity of dalit women as a category distinct from both

upper-caste Indian women and dalit men. Through its focus on this specificity, such representation provides a redefinition of the mainstream feminist concept of agency in terms of negotiation rather than free choice. I analyse the documentary *Kakkoos* to explore these points.

Kakkoos (2017), directed by Divya Bharathi, represents the specificity of dalit women's intersectional identity. Literally meaning toilet, *Kakkoos* captures the continuation of manual scavenging despite its legal abolition in 2013. Focusing on the dalit Arundhathiyar community in Tamil Nadu, *Kakkoos* explains how manual scavenging in the modern urban setting perpetuates caste-based stigma and untouchability by relegating dalit people to the job of manual scavengers. On its release, the documentary 'shook' the viewers with its blatant display of dirty toilets and septic tanks.[71] According to Bezwada Wilson, the national convener of the Safai Karmachari Andolan and winner of Ramon Magsaysay Award, 'This documentary is a 360-degree picturisation of the lives of sanitation workers in our country. There is no angle that has not been covered.'[72] The media responded to the documentary positively praising it for exposing the government's 'dirty untruth' that manual scavenging does not exist.[73]

Through a series of disturbing scenes showing septic tanks, garbage bins, dry latrines full of excreta, *Kakkoos* uses a shock element to emphasize the discrimination of dalits in urban sectors. Even though, as the documentary points out, machines have been invented to mechanically clean drains and septic tanks, the state refuses to approve their purchase due to high cost estimations. The documentary hence captures a society where money is valued more than a dalit's life.

However, in its portrayal of the functioning of caste in contemporary society, *Kakkoos* does not represent the dalit community as a single category. Instead, the documentary represents dalit women specifically to highlight gender relations *within* the dalit community through the work of manual scavenging. Interestingly,

though the popular media reviews of the documentary recognize this presence of dalit women, it is only in terms of their role as manual scavengers among other dalits.[74] The director, Divya Bharathi, however, makes her intention to represent dalit women clear as she says, 'We [not only]… need to explain more about caste discrimination, where it comes from and how it manifests itself.… We [also] need to understand how women are being exploited every day while being made to do this work.'[75] The documentary, through its recognition that dalit women's manual scavenging experience is different from that of dalit men, exemplifies an intersectional analysis of caste-class-gender. This analysis of gendered difference within the dalit community makes *Kakkoos* intra-categorical in its intersectional representation.

To understand how labour is gendered in sanitation work, it is important to begin with the definition of manual scavenging. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, defines 'manual scavenger' as:

> A person engaged or employed … by an individual or a local authority or an agency or a contractor, for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrines is disposed of, or on a railway track or in such other spaces or premises.[76]

An 'insanitary latrine' is defined as 'a latrine which requires human excreta to be cleaned or otherwise handled manually, either *in situ*, or in an open drain or pit into which the excreta is discharged or flushed out, before the excreta fully decomposes in such manner as may be prescribed'.[77] This definition is riddled with legal terminological loopholes wherein 'a person engaged or employed to clean excreta with the help of such devices and using such protective gear … shall not be deemed to be a "manual scavenger".'[78] The portrayal of manual scavenging in *Kakkoos,* however, goes beyond this legal definition to include a broad

spectrum of work ranging from cleaning garbage, to drains, railway lines, septic tanks, and dry latrines.

This expanded definition links manual scavenging to stigma and violence. According to Bezwada Wilson, the leader of Safai Karamchari Andolan, 'The mindset of the society is such that, we're of the opinion that no matter how degrading the job is, as long as someone's getting paid, it shouldn't be a matter of concern.'[79] Wilson emphasizes that this kind of mindset of claiming that access to paid labour is progress from untouchability, not only attempts to erase the reality of caste discrimination, but also invisibilizes the stigma attached to certain kinds of labour such as manual scavenging. With reference to stigma and labour, Mary E. John maintains that 'a labour theory of value stands in conflict with a caste structured society wherein public labour represents stigma and humiliation'.[80] The influence of the caste system on the division of labour (in the sense of which person belonging to which caste does what kind of labour) shows that labour cannot be understood merely in terms of its value. Owing to the notion of untouchability that pervades the stratification of labour among different castes, different kinds of work done by different castes get associated with purity or pollution. To invoke Anupama Rao, it is necessary to critique '*labour as exploitation* and *caste as degradation*'.[81] In her discussion on the problems of relating caste with class, Rao, like Ambedkar, sees stigma as the reason due to which dalit labour cannot be valorized as value-producing labour. To explicate her point she refers to Ambedkar's interpretation of caste as a 'body history' where he addresses the dehumanizing practices of untouchability keeping in forefront 'the "difference" of caste, and the specificity of its social experience'.[82] In *Kakkoos*, the manual scavengers argue that due to their caste identity, they are assigned only those kinds of work that are considered *polluted*. As a result, stigma cannot be separated from the body. Moreover, working in unsafe conditions results in failure of their health and, in a lot of cases, death. Manual scavenging therefore has to be understood

in a complex manner vis-à-vis its relation to the body. Mary E. John further adds that this body is always *sexed*. She writes, 'If there is a distinctive quality to the degradations of (male) dalit labour, this quality attains a new register when the labouring body is that of a dalit woman.'[83] According to John, it is the gendered experience of labour that creates the difference between dalit men and dalit women.

Kakkoos points out that from within the numerous kinds of sanitation work dalit women are most often given the work of collecting roadside garbage (which often includes human excreta) and cleaning dry latrines (also defined by the 2013 Act as 'insanitary latrine') used by both men and women. While manual scavenging remains dangerous for all manual scavengers (as we can see through the many septic tank deaths mentioned in the documentary), the specific types of scavenging work given to dalit women exposes them to different kinds of physical and sexual dangers. Dalit women in *Kakkoos* state how they are sexually harassed by upper-caste supervisors who ask them to become their mistresses. *Kakkoos* also shows that working at night and early morning in deserted areas makes dalit women easy prey to sexual assaults. Moreover, they face severe physical consequences as some of them have to undergo hysterectomies due to lifting of heavy bags full of garbage. Manual scavenging work thus exposes dalit women to severe sexual and reproductive violence. This gender-specific experience is what differentiates the condition of dalit women from dalit men employed in manual scavenging. As mentioned earlier, the idea of *difference* becomes crucial in Dalit Feminism to highlight the uniqueness of dalit women's experience in intersectional terms. *Kakkoos* exemplifies this concept through its portrayal of the difference in dalit women's gendered experience of caste-based labour.

This difference in the experience of labour between dalit men and dalit women is visible not only in the public space, but also in the domestic sphere. In *Kakkoos*, dalit women narrate that after

they return from work, their children do not want to touch them because of the stink and dirt. The nature of work that dalit women are involved in thus affects their interpersonal relationships within the family with its accompanying psychological consequences. The experience of woman as a mother has unique psychological implications that men do not experience. The absence of any stigmatizing experience within the family for male manual scavengers shows that this problem is experienced only by dalit women and also highlights the patriarchal setting of the family.

Kakkoos thus shows that violence perpetuated through caste-based labour, such as manual scavenging, is gendered. And here violence is understood in terms of its physical as well as emotional consequences. While the physical violence affects dalit women through experiences of sexual harassment and the destruction of reproductive abilities, the emotional violence permeates the domestic sphere due to gendered roles within the family. Manual scavenging therefore needs to be viewed as creating different situations for dalit men and women. In its representation of dalit women, *Kakkoos* achieves this understanding through its intra-categorical intersectional representation that focuses on gender specificity within casteist labour.

CONCLUSION

Dalit feminist representation recognizes the intersectionality of caste and gender in creating specific situations for dalit women, and problematizes the notion of agency and victimhood. The dalit feminist lens shows that 'agency', as understood in mainstream Indian Feminism, is not similarly applicable to dalit women. Prominent dalit representations of dalit women, on the other hand, continue to inform the identities of dalit women in terms of victimhood. What we see of 'dalit women' are the results of representations, which in turn create specific ideas and stereotypes about them. To recall Hall, representation reveals the complex

relation between power and knowledge. Dalit women's representations highlight how, most often, dalit women are co-opted within the categories 'women' and 'dalit' to promote anti-patriarchal and anti-caste fronts respectively. Representations of dalit women, in this way, are often stereotyped. But does this mean that dalit women are only represented, or representable, as victims? Let us turn to the exploration of the concept of agency in Dalit Feminism in its myriad ways of understanding (Chapter 4).

NOTES

1 Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* (1993): 9–10.
2 Disch and Hawkesworth, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory.* (2016): 781.
3 Hall, 'The Work of Representation' (1997) lists three approaches to representation: reflective or mimetic, intentional and constructionist. He defines the reflective approach to representation being similar as mimesis or mirroring wherein language claims to refer to an object as it is. This imitative quality of language claims authenticity of representation and rests, as Hall claims, completely on the representer. By naming a rose 'a rose', it is the representer who claims the authority over representation because the represented, viz. the rose, cannot speak for itself/verify whether it is a rose or not. He defines the intentional approach as that where 'it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through the language' (25). This kind of approach holds that representation is completely controlled and imposed by the representer. Consequently, it leaves the reader/spectator without any freedom to interpret the object of representation. Hall negates both approaches on the grounds that both the approaches presume supreme authority—reflective approach in claiming to be authentically representing an object, and intentional approach in claiming an imposed representation to be the truest. Hall argues that language operates in a dialectical model—through the speaker and the reader/listener. Imposing hierarchy between speaker and listener therefore is seen as futile by Hall.
4 Ibid.: 25.
5 Ibid.: 6.
6 Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*: 5.
7 Banan, 'Get the (Dirty) Picture' (2012); Visvanathan, '*The Dirty Picture:* Free, Sexual and Female' (2011).

8 Raina, 'Lust Is Part of Our Lives: *The Dirty Picture* (2011).
9 Visvanathan, '*The Dirty Picture*'.
10 Kamath, '*The Dirty Picture*—Only Surface Level Dirty' (2011); Malani, '*The Dirty Picture*: Movie Review' (2011); FnF Correspondent, 'A Feminist's Delight,' (2011).
11 Raina, 'Lust Is Part of Our Lives'.
12 Visvanathan, '*The Dirty Picture*'.
13 FnF Correspondent, 'A Feminist's Delight'.
14 Banan, 'Get the (Dirty) Picture' (2012).
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 De, 'Dirty? Or Filthy?Or "Thanda"? You decide' (2011).
18 See Rowena's article 'The 'Dirt' in *The Dirty Picture*' (2012) published in two parts: Part 1 and 2.
19 Ibid.: part 1 (2).
20 Ibid.: part 1 (2).
21 Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color' (1991): 1284.
22 Ibid.: .1291.
23 Ibid.: 1282.
24 Ibid.: 1283.
25 Rowena, 'The 'Dirt' in *The Dirty Picture*', part 2: 2.
26 India TV, 'History of Dance Bars in Mumbai' (2015).
27 Agnes, 'Hypocritical Morality: Mumbai's Ban on Bar Dancers' (2005).
28 Pandit, 'Gendered Subaltern Sexuality and the State' (2013): 34.
29 Agnes, 'Hypocritical Morality'.
30 Kapoor, Statement of Women's Groups in Mumbai and from all over India (2005).
31 AIDWA, 'A Note on Dance Bar Ban' (2005).
32 Agnes, 'Hypocritical Morality.
33 Kunda, 'Dance Bars Ban Debate': 1.
34 Pandit, 'Gendered Subaltern Sexuality and the State': 36.
35 Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (2010): 235.
36 Kunda, 'Dance Bars Ban Debate': 5–6.
37 Ibid.: 2.
38 Gopal, 'Caste, Sexuality and Labour: The Troubled Connection' (2012): 225.
39 Rege, *Against the Madness of Manu* (2013): 16.
40 Rowena, 'The 'Dirt' in *The Dirty Picture*': Part 2 (3).
41 Nair, 'The Devadasi, Dharma, and the State' (2008): 544–51.
42 Teltumbde, 'Khairlanji and Its Aftermath' (2007): 1024–25; see also Teltumbde, *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid* (2010): 92–96.

43 *Deccan Herald*, 'Khairlanji Case' (2010).
44 *The Hindu*, 'Khairlanji: The Crime' (2010).
45 Teltumbde, *The Persistence of Caste*: 92–96.
46 Teltumbde, 'Khairlanji and Its Aftermath: Exploding Some Myths' (2007): 234.
47 Omvedt, 'Caste, Class and Land in India' (1982): 14.
48 Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*: 12.
49 Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (2015): 233.
50 Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*: 13.
51 *The Hindu*, 'Material Issues' (2016).
52 McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality' (2005): 1773.
53 G. Aloysius, Mangubhai and Lee, 'Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India' (2006): 9. They narrate an event where dominant caste perpetrators gang raped 15-year-old Kiran Rani from Kanpur district, Uttar Pradesh in 2001. When the lower caste dalit girl's family approached the police, the Station Officer said, 'However much I try to help you people, the Thakurs of Tilakpur have made all this [gang rape] their business and habit. They will not be stopped.' Ibid.: 17.
54 The opposite spectrum of argument gets highlighted in the Bhanwari Devi gang rape in 1992 which led to the Vishakha judgment (1997) on women's sexual harassment at the workplace (see Introduction, n 3). The mainstream feminist focus on gender erased the caste identity of Bhanwari Devi. A dalit feminist analysis would reveal that in a casteist society ruled by norms of Brahmanism, Bhanwari's prevention of child marriage was seen as a daring act. Her public rape, therefore, served as a means to assert the caste supremacy of the upper-caste rapists and also the emasculation of her husband, who despite being present at the scene, could not protect his wife. The Bhanwari Devi case, therefore, becomes the classic example of mainstream feminist appropriation as 'sexual atrocity' at the cost of caste. See Rowena, 'The Sexual Harassment Discourse' (2017), and Geetha, 'Sexual Harassment and Elusive Justice' (2017b).
55 Rege, *Against the Madness of Manu*: 20.
56 Rao, *Gender and Caste*: 6.
57 Teltumbde, 'Khairlanji and Its Aftermath': 1024; Yashada, 'Organised Killings of Dalits in Khairlanji Village' (2006): 2.
58 Ananya, 'Chalo Udupi' (2016).
59 Rao, *Gender and Caste*: 5.
60 For example, short stories such as Abimani's 'Ailment', A. Vincent Raj's 'Clutching the End of My Saree', Madduri Nageshbabu's 'Pariah Mother', Waman Nimbalkar's 'Mother', C. Ayyappan's 'Madness', Manoranjan Barman's 'Shabori', and so on). Whether it is a portrayal of dalit women as manual scavengers ('Ailment'), or foregrounding internal patriarchy ('Madness'), or representing a dalit woman as a mother ('Mother', 'Pariah

Mother', 'Shabori', 'Clutching the End of My Saree'), victimhood remains *the* parameter for dalit women's representation in most dalit men's literary works.

61 Bagul, 'Mother' (1992b): 213.
62 Ibid.: 216.
63 Ibid.: 212.
64 In her brilliant reading of Bagul's short story, Susie Tharu points at the 'impossibility' of the mother in becoming a subject. She notes that when it comes to the portrayals of widows as central characters, there is a stark contrast between those belonging to upper and lower castes. Thus, Tharu reads, an upper-caste twenty-first century widow, modern and economically well-off, is seen as struggling with the puritanical values of her predecessors, while, for the lower-caste widow mother, the issues are more materialistic, raw and violent. Tharu argues that in feminist discourse, identification of caste/class based division is important as 'agency' is not a linear process—it functions differently for different groups of women. See Tharu, 'The Impossible Subject' (1996): 1314–15. Tharu's argument, therefore, falls in line with my claim that 'agency' needs to be re-configured in the lines of caste (a concept that I elaborate in Chapter 4).
65 Limbale, *The Outcaste* (2003): 36.
66 Ibid.: 37.
67 The term 'dalit representation' here refers specifically to those representations that foreground Dalit Politics and not dalit feminist politics.
68 Ali, 'Bazaar' (2012): 60–61.
69 Ibid.: 63.
70 Singh and Acharya, *Survival and Other Stories* (2012): xxxvi.
71 Rajendran, 'Staple Your Eyes If You Must' (2017).
72 Govindarajan, '*Kakkoos*: Documentary Reveals the Brutal Reality of Manual Scavenging' (2017).
73 Kolappan, 'The Camera Exposes a Dirty Untruth' (2017).
74 Kolappan, 'The Camera Exposes a Dirty Untruth' (2017); Rajendran, 'Staple Your Eyes If You Must'.
75 Govindarajan, '*Kakkoos*: Documentary Reveals the Brutal Reality'.
76 Malhotra, 'The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013' (2013): 2–3.
77 Ibid.: 2.
78 Ibid.: 3.
79 Srivastava, 'Untouchability and Article 19 Cannot Co-Exist' (2017).
80 John, 'The Problem of Women's Labour: Some Autobiographical Perspectives' (2013): 183.
81 Rao, 'Stigma and Labour' (2012): 23.
82 Ibid.: 24.
83 John, 'The Problem of Women's Labour: 183.