

Between Her Legs Hindutva and Dalit Women

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To write about that gross social disorder which goes by the popular name of Hinduism, from the perspective of a Dalit feminist, is to write on an old enemy, the undeniable oppressor. On a normal day, I would have thought of cognizant and carefully constructed sociological theories, I would have theorized, particularized, contextualized, or to put it the way I see it, presented a reader with an overdose of multi-syllable words that beleaguer understanding. On such an academic-yet-normal day, I would have attempted a clinical depersonalization and completed an article with a multitude of crawling footnotes in crazily small fonts. But today has been different: I woke up and what I got to read were highly distressing interviews with a section of Dalit women in Gujarat who continue to toil as manual scavengers, and carry on their heads what is so evasively called night-soil.

Shit. Yes, I have even said that word now.

It sparked a deluge of emotions, but what I am left with right now is just the awful silence of betrayal. And a bare rawness of expression that wants to scream and shout. It rendered the last of my beliefs hopeless, it exposed that India: so eloquently advertised as India Shining, is in fact an India Stinking.

Today, while India continues to stink and rot, Manu-dharma dictates our daily life (Hindutva has been thrown out of power, though not out of presence) and as designed by the caste system, at the lowest strata of this maniac hierarchy are my sisters, the Dalit women: voiceless and victimized. The Hindutva enclave that chooses to call itself the Sangh Parivar was founded to foster the political and fascist aspirations of the Aryan upper-caste male—who heads this crude-yet-critical hierarchy—and is the striking

anti-thesis of the Dalit women. Hindutva and Dalit women are nothing but contradictory factions, diametrically opposed groups of the maximum oppressor and the most oppressed. And between these extremes there exists a series of elastic hierarchies and segregated oppressions, each so specific and yet so inter-connected.

Before I begin to write of these anti-theses, before we attune our understandings to explore this couple of extremes, we can take a look into the reactionary family of the Sangh Parivar, in order to understand how casteist and feudal arrogance occur and are always coupled with male domination.

Welcome now, to the world of women who are stuck in the patriarchy of the Parivar.

The Flimsy Parivar

The Sangh Parivar, as if to incorporate its dissent over birth control, has expanded its family to such proportions that one might possibly avert keeping count. A modest estimate would peg the number of members to a dozen-and-a-half, but let us leave that to the analysts. Because it would not be possible to reprint here the genealogy and origin of how women came to be inducted (indirectly so, in the beginning at least) into the Sangh, here is a concise version: Women were denied membership in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the oldest and core organization of the seven-decade-old Sangh Parivar. It was only in 1936, eleven years after the formation of the RSS was the Rashtriyasevika Samiti born. Women from the families of the RSS members were enrolled in this organization that is modelled as a *dharmapatni* or wife to the male controlling body, the RSS. The Rashtriyasevika Samiti since its days of inception has been exclusivist and maintained a low profile. Like the RSS, its membership comes from upper/middle-level oppressor castes with middle-class income backgrounds.

Now, about its dogma of existence.

Matrishakti (mother power) is the vainglorious term 'bestowed' on the organization, highlighting that what matters is not womanhood but motherhood: it is no celebration of femininity;

instead it is a capitalization of the womb. Matrishakti or these unabashed sets of womb-bearers have their individualized shakhas, their *bouddhik* (brainstorming) sessions and weapons training: swordplay and such like. Women here are taught that they are different and not equal, an indoctrination that is so entire and consuming that it allows the least space for what contemporary feminist theories aim at. The Samiti, being the *dharmapatni* or wife it was meant to be, sticks faithfully to ‘Guruji’ Golwalkar’s dictum—‘Disparity is an indivisible part of nature, we should live with it. Harmony and not equality should be the organizing principle of society’—a devious statement that is at once anti-Dalit and anti-women. Or as is the case: entirely anti-Dalit women. Understand the temerity of this regressive Sangh when it says that we should live with disparity. And the reason that Golwalkar professes? Because disparity is a part of nature. Part of whose nature, Mr. Golwalkar: yours, the oppressor caste Aryan males’, or is this the bunch of thoughts that was transferred to you? And could any khaki short-sporting swyamsevak come forth to answer as to why we should live with it?

The Sangh Parivar’s ideology is nothing new; there is nothing ground-breaking or earth-shattering in all the saffron claptrap that is so ceremoniously written and ritually propagandized. It is a repeated rendering of the *Manusmriti*: in its entirety, or sometimes, in bits and parts. The evidence is for all to see: in the casteism that is the nerve-centre, in the obsession over women’s sexualities; in the stress on divinely ordained disparity, in the imposition of a you-we-all-should-live-with-it code. Not always is Manu acknowledged though; two-thousand-year old traditions have fallen out of copyright but, devastatingly, not out of practice. Golwalkar—famous for his theory that present day Bihar and Orissa were part of the Arctic region where the Aryans originated and that while the region shifted but not the Aryans—said of Manu that he was the greatest law-maker of mankind, not only for his time, but for all the times to come. The metamorphosis from the *Manusmriti* has been swift: only it has been moulded a little here and there, possibly to enact it in a post-colonial world, to carefully preserve all the self-indulgent inequalities in an era of egalitarianism.

When the Sangh Parivar so blatantly derecognizes the democratic need for equality, we understand not only its fascist mindset, but also its fundamental craving to preserve the coziness of hierarchy. Viewed in this manner, it becomes clear why the Parivar doesn't stress on the need for corrective discrimination to the historically disadvantaged and subjugated sections of society. It is exactly this kind of brainwashing that Brahmin and neo-Brahmin women of the Sangh learn, and this prevents them from challenging the manipulation of their sexualities and from contesting existing power-relationships within their own limited circles. To understand the fundamentalist essence of the Sangh Parivar, we need to look at their aspects on topics pertaining to gender in the light of John Stratton Hawley's argument that 'fundamentalist perspectives on gender cast a uniquely revealing light on the nature of fundamentalism as a whole'.¹ Sample this excerpt from *Our Women*, a Hindutva tract that liberally quotes Swami Vivekananda on women: 'Chastity is the life of a nation. Do you not find in history that the first death-sign of a nation has been unchastity? When that has entered, the end of a race is in sight.'² The Sangh not only makes it mandatory for women to remain chaste, but also links their unchastity with the ruin of a nation, the end of race. So, the intention does not merely end with the attempt to bulldoze women into chastity. It goes further into blackmail. And to buttress this strangulating male-domination, history is also roped in.

For the Samiti, history is a hand-me-down. Women here, like the oppressed caste male members of the Sangh, are taught that their 'low' and 'pitiable' status is because of the invasions that took place on the nation. This most eloquent conspiracy, the pathetic externalization of the problem is the attempts of importing imagined *videshis* (foreigners) to absolve the bigotry of the *swadeshi* (Indian) caste and patriarchal structures. This externalization makes it easier for them to portray Muslim men in very derogatory shades and it ensures that they become the objects of hate for the Hindus.

Endogamy

The same people who say in the open: 'Hindu girls beware of Muslim men' in order to 'protect their women' from 'other' men and

the ensuing possibility of inter-religious marriages, have no different stands when it comes to caste. Only caste is talked about in a closeted manner in the privacy of the saffron homes. Given the Parivar's deliberate silence on caste, another angle in which we can understand the stand of the Sangh on caste 'purity' is by learning its stand on racial purity. Golwalkar exalted the Nazi anti-Semitism and wrote:

'To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic races, the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.'³

Substitute race by religion, and race by caste, and you will know the lesson that Golwalkar wanted everyone to learn, on the importance and pride and purity of maintaining exclusivity and homogeneity. There are many, many stories that have been propagated by the Sangh decrying Hindu-Muslim unions, more specifically, Hindu women marrying Muslim men. In this attempt, Muslim men have been depicted not only as ultra-masculine, but also as agents acting on petro-dollars, and as seducers of kafir women. The Sangh Parivar is vocal on this inter-mixing in marriages (and consequently progeny) only when it comes to Muslims, who are easily portrayed as foreigners; it is silent when it comes to caste.

In the perverted Parivar lobby, what applies for Muslim men and Hindu women, will it not apply for Dalit men and Brahmin women too? What would be the silent diktat on inter-caste marriages? Will this not be applied to castes too, especially because caste-identities in India are as concrete as religious identities? To consolidate the larger Hindu identity, the Parivar indulges in the projection of Muslim men as the Other. For the firmer (and banally secret) construction of jati and caste identities, there goes on the projection of you-know-who as the Other.

Was it not the very same Hindu nationalism that fiercely opposed early attempts to legalize inter-caste marriages on the grounds that it would spoil the honour of families and lead to a mushrooming of half-castes? Is this also not one of the major reasons why an almost maniac obsession over the chastity of Hindu women is maintained? It was this burgeoning importance accorded to the chastity of women that could ensure the continuation of the caste system for over 2000 years. Listen to this same concept packaged in the words of the Sangh Parivar. In *Hindu Rashtra: Interpretations-Misinterpretations*, Shriram Sathe writes 'One is often astonished at the continuing stability of Hindu homes in spite of the most trying circumstances over the last one thousand years of endless struggle, first against the Islamic and later against the British invaders. But one cannot understand *the secret of this immortality of the Hindu home unless one realizes the vital role of women in the entire Hindu social structure.*'⁴ Along with stressing on the fundamentalist concept of home-is-where-the-woman-is, side by side, the author also places the 'vital role' of women in the entire Hindu social structure and holds them responsible for the secret of immortality of the Hindu home. This is the precise reason why the Sangh Parivar, with its view to safeguard the Hindu social structure (read caste system), lavishes enormous importance to the chastity of women and the purity of homes.

Dr. Ambedkar also hinted at the crucial role of women in the Hindu caste system when he said that 'women are the gateways to the caste-system' and that the closed nature of the caste system is maintained through the sexual exploitation of women. This was why he said that the annihilation of untouchability was more an issue for women than for men. It was in this context that he defined the absence of inter-marriage to be the one characteristic that can be called the essence of castes.

Endogamy, the system of marriage within the caste/sub-caste/gotra has been the preserver of the caste system. On the other hand, exogamy (inter-caste marriage) destroys the very foundations of this caste structure. What is the Sangh's stand here? How many times has this been debated in shakas? How many times has it been condemned in the bouddhik sessions? Why is there a political

silence on inter-caste marriages? The nearest the Sangh has ever got to tackling the caste problem is by saying, 'Let us *forget* caste'. Note the keyword: 'forget'; as though it were temporary amnesia. And, above all, a cheap-trashy-temporary forgetting, unlike what Ambedkar said: Annihilate caste. If the Sangh Parivar chooses to refute the view that it is casteist, let it release its white paper on inter-caste marriages within the members of the Parivar. Inter-caste, as in Dalit-Upper Caste, Dalit-Backward Caste. Not the ludicrous story of a Tamil Iyengar and a Madhava Brahmin; not some steamy one about a Shastri and a Chitpavan Brahmin. But is there any history of the Sangh having endorsed inter-caste marriages? For an organization that has the mobilization capacity of heaping lakhs of kar-sevaks at one place, of holding massive anti-minority hate-rallies, would it be difficult to conduct at least a hundred inter-caste marriages? And when I am speaking of inter-caste marriages, I do not even insist on Periyar's self-respect form of marriage that entirely removed the role of Brahmin priests from the marriage ceremony. Press the pause button there, please. Call in all your sants, sanyasis and sevaks if you need. But how about some transgression of caste for once, say, marrying Dalit men to your women. Or, vice versa. Sounds basic and elementary all right, but a change that could demolish the very basis of casteism. And the good news would be: it might create a change from this monotony of impossibly impaired inbreds, of weak bodies and weaker whatever.

Dichotomy in approach

The Sangh Parivar is not only adept at inaction as in the case of inter-caste marriages, but is also remarkable for its dichotomous approach in a wide range of issues. For an organization that mouths incredible propaganda about *Akhand Bharat* and national integration, what has it done for the divided Indias that exist on caste and outcaste lines: as villages and Dalit ghettos that are spatially apart and compulsorily segregated? Only the maps have not been prepared but of what use are imaginary lines anyway? Has it ever stood up to challenge this religiously imposed cessation that makes it mandatory for Dalits to live out of the villages? What has the Sangh, which continues to trounce and denounce Jinnah's two-

nation theory that created Pakistan, done for the integration of the two distinct Indias: the 'caste-Hindu'stan, and the outcaste India?

Saffron agendas and manifestos have a two-pronged approach of action and inaction. Take for instance, the Parivar's boast of having a background of sending its volunteers to help and intervene in tragic and disastrous events. But why are they missing when the Dalit colonies burn? How many atrocities on Dalits have they condemned? How many crushed Dalit lives have they rehabilitated? I have not seen the least shade of saffron during any event of Dalit distress, but I still put forth these questions. I am asking these questions not because I seek convoluted answers. I am well aware of what happens to those who dare to question. And, I have been through the hate-mail series too, so, fine, thank you. I am asking this because every time we talk of caste we address only the Dalits and as Ambedkar pointed out, people do not question the touchables for the caste system.

Further, what would happen if we apply the Parivar's principles unto itself? The Sangh justifies the breaking down of mosques and churches and constructing new temples there on the ground that it is 'correcting history'. Can the oppressor-caste ridden Sangh or for that matter this 'caste-Hindu'stan itself survive if Dalits and other oppressed sections decided that they too wanted to correct history and settle scores? What would be the state of affairs if every massacre and carnage that was perpetrated on caste lines was returned back dutifully? If it is corrective history to demolish a centuries-old mosque based on the belief that there existed a temple; is it not justifiable if reverse and compulsory reservation be granted to Brahmins in 'taboo' areas like manual scavenging as a part of the same corrective history? After all, these ideas are just an extension of the Sangh Parivar's. Talking of positive discrimination, the flashbacks of the Hindutva orchestrated agitations against the implementation of the Mandal Commission's Recommendations immediately come to mind. But the seeds of that 'revolt' were sowed decades ago when Golwalkar impishly wrote in his *Bunch of Thoughts*: 'Dr. Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for "Scheduled Castes" for only 10 years from the day we became a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested

interest in them in remaining as a separate entity'⁵. Today, or on any other day in the future, can the Sangh Parivar come publicly and reissue or re-quote what its 'Guruji' had said. Can it dare to impudently repeat that the continuation of positive discrimination would create vested interests among Dalits and alienate them as a separate entity? The policies of the Parivar are most often, strictly, for private and internal circulation. The faces that the Sangh reveals in the open are mere masks; but beneath these fancy masks, there hides the dreadful oppressor caste patriarchy of the Orange order.

Let me go back and concentrate on only women-related themes. A telling example of its dual tactics came to light when the Sangh imposed its barbaric dress codes and coordinated an unbearable hullabaloo in Delhi saying that girls shouldn't wear short skirts because it would expose them, among other things, to mosquito bites. If I am inclined to argue, I might wonder why an organization, whose male members wear khaki shorts as the uniform, have great worries when it comes to the attire of women. What prevents me from probing more on that count is the fact that I have larger concerns, greater responsibilities. Several of my activist-friends, most of them Dalit women, have told me that up to the 1980s, in some areas in southern Tamil Nadu, Dalit women were not allowed to wear blouses/upper-garments. That was the caste-Hindu diktat. Exposure now, was not an issue of liberty, it was an imposition. Where was the Sangh then? What happened to its cherished ideal of dear old modesty? After all, when the Sangh could find the blind rage to adamantly criticize dressing down, it could have well-nigh opened its eyes and spent a little of its energies in dressing-up.

On a larger canvas, two major legislative measures defined the year 2003: the repeated defeat of the Women's Bill and the attempt to bring in a Uniform Civil Code. While the Parivar's stand on the Women's Bill was all too evidently against the marginalized sections, its position on the Uniform Civil Code needs a lot of analysis. Mridula Sinha, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Mahila Morcha leader wrote: 'It is a tragedy that in the eyes of the law, the concept of Indian womanhood is non-existent. There are Hindu women, Muslim women, and Christian women.' She proceeded to argue, 'The emancipation of Indian women will remain a far off cry as long as a Uniform Civil Code is not passed.'⁶ The issue of the

Uniform Civil Code—like the feminist issue of discrimination against Muslim Women—has been hijacked by the Hindu Right. While it is certainly regrettable that minority women suffer for lack of reform in their personal codes, it is downright condemnable that Hindutva forces emerge as their unwelcome spokespersons. The politics of supremacy has ensured that under the guise of bringing about equality in the personal codes, there could be a blatant imposition of Hindu norms and practices on the minority communities. Paradoxically, equality would correspond to subordination and enslavement. The politics surrounding Sinha's yearning for a unified identity of Indian women is understandable. But why do the members of the Sangh Parivar not realize that Indian women move and mix not only along their religious identities but along their caste identities as well. Now that all religions have ingrained their versions of the caste system, why could not the Mahila Morcha bother about abolishing caste? Would it not have given all women an entirely Indian women identity?

The sanitized Sangh Parivar, despite its obsession and maniac control over women's sexualities, projects the view that sex is supposedly a taboo and thereby prevents all discussions taking place in its name. Within the Parivar precincts, it remains an unutterable word. This intolerance can extend to enormous proportions, as witnessed by the nation during the screening of the movies *Fire* and *Water*, when vandals of the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal ensured that no one had the right to explore these themes.

Saffron on Screens

The Sangh Parivar displays such an extent of hooliganism and reactionary attitudes towards counter cultures. And, yet, for the Saffron Brigade, mass media has become yet another route to a recruitment drive. In its obsessive endeavour to present the nation as a mother(land) that needs to be 'protected,' the Sangh Parivar lays a great insistence on the concepts of 'security' and 'honour.' This is visible not only in the spew of nuclear tests and rocket launches and warships and military parades and other choreographed extravaganzas, but also in the sudden spate of war-films that have been released during the five-year term of the BJP.

Agreed: Bollywood's obsession is with profit, not propaganda. Firstly, let us take a look at the numbers. There are only four major war-films that Bollywood churned out in a span of over two decades: Chetan Anand's *Haqeeqat* (1964; following the 1962 war with China) and *Hindustan ki Kasam* (1973; following the 1971 war with Pakistan on the issue of Bangladesh), Manoj Kumar's *Upkar* (1965; after the Indo-Pak war) and Ramanand Sagar's *Lalkaar*. But in a post-BJP-in-power India, the number of war-films getting released has been growing exponentially. In my limited knowledge there has been Anil Sharma's *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*, its sequel *Hero* (both of them filled with Pakistan-bashing), *Sarfarosh* with its ISI agent, *Pukar* with its anti-Pakistan slogans and finally J. P. Dutta's *Refugee*, *Border* and *LOC-Kargil*. Film historians could perhaps shed light on why the release of so many Bollywood war-films has overlapped with the increasingly militant posturing of the Hindutva brigade. While critics have suggested that patriotism was the last resort of the scoundrel, one gets to feel that either the industry is taking its dictates from somewhere, or, in its seemingly typical innocence, capitalizing on the prevailing sentiments of tear-jerking, chest-thumping nationalism to rake in the moolah and ensure good Fridays. Whatever the reason behind this, it has helped the Sangh Parivar to take advantage of the medium of cinema to perpetuate its favourite stereotype: the Other (here, the Muslim male) under the guise of lambasting Pakistan. Even the Pakistani foreign minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri had expressed his displeasure over Bollywood's war movies. As these films sublimate and divert all hatred towards a particular and well-defined enemy, the vast majority of the viewers are indoctrinated subconsciously; not only do they lose attention in the pressing issues that need to be challenged but also they become transformed 'patriots' whose potential for violence can be tapped with a next call to arms.

And then there is the second type of films that finds favor with the right wing. These films shot in picturesque locales, with captivating lavish weddings and large bungalows, are modelled after the perfect Hindu family. Such movies, usually produced with enormous budgets, encourage a palpable nationalistic sentiment coupled with an extravagant consumerist culture. Add the NRI

(Non-Resident Indian) phenomenon to this saffron picture, and then you could understand why the Parivar is floating in its feel-good factor. For NRIs, the need for a distinct, ethnic cultural identity makes them go hoo-ha about *anushasan* (discipline) and *parampara* (tradition) and *sanskriti* (culture) and the whole Hindutva boogie-woogie that they get to see on the silver screen. In their yearning to Be Indian, they are led to Being Hindu. Actress Nandita Das, in an interview with *Nukkad*, explains this concept:

‘In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* where a girl who is very modern, wearing short skirts, etc., when asked to sing a song in Hindi sings “Om jai jagadish hare”. This has an appeal in London and in Jhummri Talayya. The NRI phenomenon is scary. I have travelled with my films *Fire*, *Earth* and *Bavandar* to places where I met NRIs. I had a very interesting discussion with some top doctors of London. They feel rooted and said their nationalistic feeling was stronger. I asked them what they wanted to do for their country. They said they wanted to propagate Hinduism. And though we were talking about India. I think this juxtaposition of Hinduism for Indian is the most scary thing.’

Sadly, this juxtaposition keeps going on and on. In between this filmi masala, the Sangh Parivar goes lamenting about the predominance of ‘Khans’ (read Shahrukh, Salman and Aamir) as heroes. Some other Hindu actor meanwhile gets endorsed by the RSS as the Hindu hero who shall put an end to the ‘Khan’ culture. Contrast all this mischievous and high-energy behaviour of the Sangh with its delay in even releasing in theatres all over the nation a film on Ambedkar directed by Jabbar Patel. All these days, the film sat gathering dust (it was released only in Maharashtra). On the eve of the polls, it is picked up and dusted and plans are made for its screening across India. No prizes for guessing why; Dalit votes remain to be sentimental, take-it-for-granted affairs.

If this is the manner in which saffron has permeated Bollywood, then its perpetuation into the small screen is no small matter, either. In this vast nation of 61 million TV sets, soap operas have an

extremely high potential for outreach. The most classic instance of the power of television came to be seen with the screening of Ramanand Sagar's serial *Ramayan* on Doordarshan. *Ramayan* served as a quintessential pre-cursor to the Ramajanmabhoomi movement. First, it transformed the *Maryada Purush* (so far beheld only in imagination) into a living, breathing man. Gradually, the whole monkey-army nonsense and kitschy valour that characterized *Ramayan* were tapped by the Hindutva forces to represent Hindu militancy. The serial gave fruit to the dreams of a puritanical golden age set in a patriarchal, patrimonial state.⁷ This was followed by other productions like *Mahabharat*, *Jai Vir Hanuman*, and *Om Namah Shivaih*.

Hindu nationalism has emerged successfully in politics because of its careful machinations and permeations into the public culture. For the Sangh Parivar, media mobilization and tapping all those with the 'right sentiment' has increased its conditions of growth. Now, daily, spread across many, many TV channels there continue to be screened the soap operas that hard-sell Hindutva. Marketed over satellite beams and dish antennas, the Parivar has ensured that there is a round-the-clock celebration of caste-Hindu patriarchy. If devotional or religious-themed serials end up magnetically attracting the first-level of people who are vulnerable to the Hindutva cultural onslaught, the second-tier people shall be glued into the current Hindi (and of course, similar regional language) serials like *Kyunki Saas bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* or another in that ilk which propagates patriarchal concepts.

Packed to capacity with the height of oppressor caste, exploiter class consumerism—these serials and soap operas also prominently place importance on conservative culture, pit women against women, and yet, within their capacity encourage flimsy lifestyles where the only thing the men are capable of, are extramarital affairs. The situation in the Tamil context is no different; in fact, one of the top-rated serials provided an elaborate and complacent justification of bigamy. Further, women in these serials depict a petty bourgeoisie lifestyle; and at their best speak the Brahmin dialect, and portray brahminical cultures and superstitions. The soap operas present a noteworthy situation because in the life depicted

on the small screen, the caste issues and class struggles are not just brushed to the margins, but even brushed away entirely. We have to understand the profound cultural impact of such soap operas on Dalits and other marginalized sections. Through such media of dissemination, the brahminical patriarchy shall only uphold its culture. While the stress is on tradition, there is a silent and indirect stress on caste. Besides, the serials present skewed worldviews to the Dalits, apart from encouraging conservative and consumerist cultures. Already, the blatant cultural invasions of the Sangh Parivar itself have been cause for worry. There have been documented instances of tribal and Dalit women in areas like Gujarat and Jharkhand who have been forced by the Hindutva forces to wear mangalsutras and *sindoor* as symbols of marriage. Now, when cultural invasion flows from the visual media, the conquering seems complete.

Contesting Beauty and the Hindutva Hysteria

On the one hand, the Sangh Parivar, directly and indirectly, engages in the glorification of brahminical traditions and imposes the same on Dalit and other oppressed caste women. Traditional feminists might like to skim over the threats of Hindu majoritarianism to Dalit women. However, it would also be worthwhile if they understood that gendered oppression has other shades as well, including caste, class and ethnicity. Besides, one has to understand that feminism in India has been fostered with protectionist discourses and conservative ideologies: a direct fallout of the patriarchal Hindu revivalism that formed a portion of opposition to the Raj. In this context, the increasing importance of a radical Dalit feminist approach for our times becomes all too evident. And the urgency for this approach is necessitated, because Hindutva is a force that is potent enough to reverse all that the women's movement has achieved in India. When the BJP was the ruling government (until the 2004 General Elections when it was routed from power) it had planned to rename the Women Studies Centres across the nation as Family Studies Centres; substitution of the word 'women' with the word 'family' shows the grotesque patriarchal aims of the Parivar to convert and convolute the agenda of Women Studies.

Also, for some time now, feminist-scholars like Indu Agnihotri have been worriedly pointing out about the appropriation of the terminology of the feminist movement by the Sangh Parivar.⁸ This has been further enunciated by researchers debating on the protest against the beauty contests: which in many ways won a great deal of media publicity for the Sangh's women chapters. In the protest against the Miss World contest held at Bangalore in 1996, the Left and the Right wings become mutually-embarrassed and thrown-together allies, each opposing the same issue on different stands. The Sangh's massive hysteria against high-flying fashion and beauty contests stems from its need to resist western cultural imperialism. For the Sangh understands things in terms of tradition and Indian culture, versus modernity and Western culture. Further, at no point of time does the Sangh seek to criticize the economic imperialism that is entwined with such a cultural imperialism. Moreover, the Sangh Parivar which opposes Western cultural imperialism that is being thrust on India has no qualms about being a cultural imperialist by itself. These can be viewed from the cultural policing that its various organizations indulge in.

Vandalism on St.Valentine's Day

The St. Valentine's Day celebrations have been a major target of the right wing. This year, not just stopping with attacking shops in its customary style, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Bhopal also vowed to blacken the faces of couples with soot if they celebrate what is known as Lover's Day in India. True, there is a 1500 crore industry subsisting on the celebrations surrounding Valentine's Day. And, it is widely agreed that blowing up Lover's Day is a major marketing strategy: but that's the Left argument. The sad thing is that Hindutva forces use the very same premise of Valentine's Day to spread their ideology, not by the traditional celebration, but by providing a fierce resistance in the form of continued, malicious propaganda, moral policing and uncalled-for agitation. Firstly what gets challenged is Lover's Day. Then, Love. Slowly, what they aim to put a full stop to is love marriages. More specifically, inter-caste, inter-religious, love marriages. It is this bunch of culture police and macho vandals of the Sangh who ensure that Valentine's Day does not get celebrated. In Tamil Nadu, RSS weekly magazines extol that celebrating Valentine's Day is not part of Indian culture.

And there is the second level of argument, that Love is divine. So, dear reader, it is out of bounds of you, and me, and the women and the men on the street. Divine, as enjoyed by the Devas. Love, as mandated by the Hindutva. Love, as chronicled by Kamban and Kalidas (and no, let us all maintain a steady silence on the *Kamasutra* anyway). Love, is given a lucid redefinition and our nation gets to be straitjacketed as the land that knew of such examples of divine love as Mira and Andal. So there, over to one-sided unattainable love over non-existent playboy gods. Teenage girls shall strut around singing Krishna, Krishna. And if your first impulse over your daughter's obsession with a charming god is any problem, don't fret. Blame it on '*Bharateeya Sanskriti*': force-fed and fundamentalist. My obvious squirming over the Sangh Parivar's attack on Valentine's Day is not out of place. I am not bothered about the removal of a Western cultural influence as much I am bothered about what the Hindutva chooses to substitute in its place. It is this substitution, rather this chauvinistic retrieval of a culture of patriarchy and casteist hegemony that shakes the ground beneath our feet.

In the typical style of the Sangh Parivar, there is this idea of a compromise floating around. An article in the latest issue of *Vijaya Bharatam*, an RSS weekly magazine in Tamil, after rehashing and re-insisting on the stand that love comes after marriage, and that love is a mutual feeling between a man and woman of similar backgrounds (there, that's caste and class ensured in a nutshell), suggested that there could be an alternative date for celebrating Lover's Day: and this date, should be from the Hindu calendar because the Christian traditions associated with Valentine's Day were not fit. And this alternative day was to fall on *Panguni Uthiram* (in the final month of the Tamil calendar: falls sometime in mid-April) when all the god couples married, who included the famous Murugan and Valli, Krishna and Radha, Rama and Sita, Shiva and Parvathi, and so on. And the command was that couples in love could celebrate at temples by praying to god. All this clearly reflects on the Brahmin paradigm: assimilate what you cannot annihilate.

Hindu Nari

The Sangh Parivar, apart from giving its timely sound-bites on conforming to control in view of a good society, also stresses on a code for how Hindu women should live. The manipulations of the Hindutva forces mandate that the Hindu woman must be chaste for ever and ever. Chastity translates into life-long monogamy. Indirectly the Parivar members attack the concept of widow remarriage on the ground that the Hindu union, that is, the affirmation and the solemnization of marriage is a pact made not just for a lifetime, but for seven births. For these desi Nazis, sati is about the virtuous wife's enduring love for her husband. (Alas, there is no corresponding ritual in which virtuous men with enduring love for their wives climb into the funeral pyres of their wives.) At one point of time, a prominent woman of the saffron order, Vijayaraje Scindia exalted sati as 'our cultural heritage'. With the Parivar working overtime and the judiciary acquitting those accused in the historical Roop Kunwar sati episode; it might not be surprising if few years down the line, the Sangh might put back sati into practice.

Now that the Hindutva force has female faces on its leaders list does not dilute the fact that the Sangh Parivar is an anti-women, casteist, patriarchal organization. One has to recall that the saffron-clad sanyasin Uma Bharati, who sits pretty today as the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, had to publicly proclaim her chastity when there were rumours floating around which alleged that she had an affair with a colleague in the Parivar. The burden of proof is on the women, and like the trembling Sita in the *Ramayana*, it is the woman who has to prove chastity, it is the woman who has to undergo the *agni pariksha* or ordeal by fire. Although women of the Parivar have been prominently placed in the public sphere and also serve as kar-sevikas and members of semi-militant factions of the Parivar-like Durga Vahini, they are all made to conform to the stereotype of the Hindu Woman. No matter what their positions of power, the women of the Sangh are only instruments of upper caste patriarchy.

The Sangh on Patriarchy: Oh,well, that is no problem . . .

The problem of patriarchy and male domination is never tackled within the Sangh Parivar. By refusing to acknowledge even the very

existence of the problem, the Hindutva forces succeed in totally ignoring the need for feminism. Tanika Sarkar brilliantly summarizes the construction of the Sangh's concept of motherland vis-à-vis its stands on caste and class. She writes:

Internal divisions of class and caste are seen as forms of divisiveness that desecrate the wholeness of the *desh*. These divisions, therefore, are not to be interrogated but submerged under a political piety that suspends all manner of criticism which might expose social hierarchies. Such criticisms, whenever encountered, elide into the metaphor of a divided and mutilated yet sacred body which is to be reconstructed as non-stratified so that it can continue singular and integrated. The sacrality of an integrated and aggressive yet perpetually threatened female body is the organizing principle that holds the edifice together. The argument loses its power, its charge, if the country is allowed to be seen as a piece of land with flesh-and-blood people living within it. The power of this vision is further undone if the mystical description of people as soldiers in a holy war lapses into one in which they are social beings with very real social problems. Rithambara warns untouchable Dalits against violating the sacred unity of Hindus by the lure ('candy') of the Mandal issue. The problems of territorial diversity and social division require endless transcendence; a reply on many registers of the long history of past mutilations and desecrations of an inviolable, sacred body. The loss of Ramjanmabhoomi, Partition, Hindu disunity, lower-caste protest—all these are ranged together as enactments of the same terrible sin³

Note here that the internal divisions of caste and class are seen in contemporary Hindutva theology as divisiveness, whereas the largest problem—of gender as the basis of subjugation—is easily given the go-by. As a further elaboration of Sarkar's thesis I feel that it has to be also observed that there is a questionable silence on the issue of feminism, and of women uprising against patriarchy. The

Sangh Parivar doesn't even mention this, because unlike other hierarchies that might come under challenge, the saffron brigade deems that this patriarchy must always remain status quo; and that the supremacy of men must never be challenged. All the while their call to arms is built around the nation as a 'perpetually threatened female body' metaphor, and yet the problems of womankind do not seem to press the Parivar. A careful comprehension of the Parivar's approach highlights their perspective that Ramjanmabhoomi *should not* have been lost, Partition *should not* have take place, Hindus *should not* be non-unified, 'lower' castes *should not* protest. Yet, when it comes to the question of the women's struggle, they exhibit the mindset that women *should not* rebel against patriarchy. By theoretically setting women on unreachably high pedestals and portraying them as worshipful mothers, the question of gendered oppression and sexual exploitation is never addressed.

Unutterables and the Untouchables

The conspiracy of silence that the Sangh Parivar maintains on casteist atrocities of sexual violence needs special mention. Rape, so commonly used in the context of Dalit women, becomes a tragedy of disgrace and defilement where the 'honour' of 'upper' caste women is concerned. In order to avert 'their' [read 'upper' caste] women from becoming victims they are empowered with self-defence techniques. And even in these seemingly open-and-shut decrees, casteism remains. Take the case of self-defence techniques and weapon's training imparted to oppressor caste women within the Parivar, whereas in reality, the women who need these the most are the Dalit women. Why is it so wary in doing anything for the Dalit women? Moreover, all this breast-beating terms about rape being an 'outrage of modesty' and 'loss of honour' is not liberatory feminist thought, rather these are protectionist discourses. One has to understand that when the Sangh says it is a [upper-caste] woman's modesty being outraged they indirectly speak from the pedestal of the Hindu patriarch.

Women in the Sangh are also constantly fed the patriarchal notions about purity, chastity and related bunkum. A glaring example of this inane brainwashing is the examples the Sangh

glorifies; of women who committed suicide because they were raped and of women who committed suicide because they would be raped (*jauhar*). Publications of the Sangh Parivar paint halos for incidents of *jauhar*. Sometimes, their exaggeration reaches unimaginable levels: the book *Partition-Days: The Fiery Saga of RSS*,¹⁰ cites more than a dozen instances of mass self-immolations of women who killed themselves to 'save their honour.' While one of the earliest reported 'incidents' details the mass immolation of 107 women,¹¹ other 'incidents' include stories of women consuming poison, and women being willingly beheaded by their kinsmen in order not to be 'dishonored by beasts in human form'¹² or in some cases, the heads of 28 girls being broken with bricks to save them from dishonor¹³ or 1700 women in Rajouri taking poison that the Swayamsevaks distributed in packets on Diwali day.¹⁴ These are lauded: 'Has any country in the world been able to present examples of such stern calls of honour?'¹⁵ and 'The history of *Jauhar* of Chittor was repeated, A glorious history of self-sacrifice was created.'¹⁶

By this covert propaganda and constant glorification of such women does the Parivar intend to suggest that suicide is the solution to being raped? When the premium on chastity for women is exaggerated to such limits, what is the practical solution that the Sangh Parivar gives to Dalit women (who form the greatest percentage of the women subjected to sexual atrocities)? Do not these stories that epitomize women who committed suicide following rape, silently show contempt on the lakhs of women who continue to live post-trauma? Significantly, while Dalit women increasingly become victims of violation, subordination and exploitation the Sangh Parivar continues to maintain its deafening silence on issues of gender, caste and class.

Phule—Periyar—Dr. Ambedkar

To gain an understanding of how extremely casteist and anti-women the Parivar is, one has to compare and contrast its silence and shoddiness on Dalit and women issues with the vehement and strong actions of revolutionaries like Phule, Periyar and Dr. Ambedkar. All these three stalwarts believed in liberating women to put an end to the caste system. Mahatma Jotirao Phule

championed the movement for the education of shudra and ati-shudra women and men for he believed that it had immense emancipatory potential. He was firm in his view of challenging caste and gender issues simultaneously, because only that would lead to an egalitarian society. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidian movement was not only a fierce anti-caste proponent and rationalist, but he was also one of the foremost radical leaders who took up the matter of women liberation with vigour unparalleled in Indian history. He lashed out that 'if slavery has to be abolished in society, the male arrogance and wickedness which leads to the enslavement of women must be abolished first.' He emphasized that "only when this was achieved, the tender sprouts of freedom and equality would register growth."¹⁷

In the same manner, Babasaheb Ambedkar, messiah of the millions of Dalits, declared that castes continued to be maintained through the sexual exploitation of women; and therefore, as mentioned earlier, women were gateways to the caste system. According to Ambedkar, the control on women's sexuality could alone ensure that the closed character of the caste-system would be maintained. In his early years, he burnt the *Manusmriti*, not only because this codification of crude laws was anti-Dalit, but also because it was anti-women. Incidentally, it is a matter to be rejoiced that the Indian Association for Women's Studies have started to celebrate *Manusmriti Dahan Divas* (25 December; the day on which Ambedkar burnt the *Manusmriti*) as the *Bharatiya Stree Mukti Divas*. Ambedkar repeatedly laid stress on the fact that the lower the position of the woman in the hierarchy the more intense her exploitation: a statement that serves as the foundation for the necessity of Dalit feminism. His resignation from the post of independent India's first Union Law Minister, because the Hindu Code Bill that challenged casteist patriarchal laws was not passed, is one of the defining movements in the history of the struggle against brahminical patriarchy.

Moreover, another common thread running through all their challenge to Hindutva is that they vehemently attacked its major icon, Ram. In the hands of Phule, Periyar, and Ambedkar, the character of Ram was exposed; he was portrayed as the original anti-Dalit, anti-shudra, and anti-women villain. Be it Phule's call for

Bali Raj and rereading of the *Ramayana* story, Periyar's counter-epic *Keemayana* and the subsequent holding of Ravana lilas, and Ambedkar's scathing criticism on Ram in the *Riddles of Hinduism*, the publication of which sparked widespread rioting—at no point of time have our leaders failed in revealing the truth about this image of Hindutva. But the Sangh lauds this same Ram, its politics of the Parivar revolve around him, he is their axis, their vote-bank consolidator. This duality of approaches displays the duality of attitudes.

If we go about such a comparison we are faced with a resounding emptiness: the Sangh Parivar's absolute and well-conceived absence of emancipatory ideology relating to Dalits and women. The Parivar's aims are clearly exploitative and smack of the fascist idea of maintaining the subjugation of both Dalits and women. What has the Sangh Parivar done to the Dalits other than imposing the false and oppressive Hindu identity and recruiting them, in large numbers, as foot soldiers against the Muslims? Except that the Sangh 'worshipfully' continues to treat women as bearers of the womb and as begetters of militant sons what is the contribution of the Parivar to Indian womanhood?

Hindutva in Periyar land

If the Sangh Parivar has vigorously worked its way into an Ambedkarite bastion like Maharashtra Dalits and put forth its *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* campaign—which resembles unfortunately, an ad for a popular detergent—a Hindutvaization, that is even more shocking has been taking place in the land of Periyar, Tamil Nadu. The Sangh Parivar which currently uses the religion of the majority as its mobilization potential has no qualms about using caste in the same manner. As long as there is the possibility of a vote-bank involved, one can expect the Sangh to stand at the forefront. Recently, human rights organizations in the state had to work hard to prevent the VHP International general secretary Praveen Togadia from participating in a Thevar (a land-owning OBC ok to add? yes oppressor caste in Tamil Nadu) conference in Madurai where he intended to distribute trishuls apart from delivering his customarily hateful speeches. Look at who the natural allies of the Sangh Parivar

are: oppressor castes who have a documented history of sexually exploiting Dalit women and have been the cause for a great number of caste-clashes in the southern districts in the state.

Or, take for instance one of the most anti-Dalit Hindutva measures of our time: The State Government of Tamil Nadu, ruled by a so-called Dravidian Party, the AIADMK, promulgated the Prohibition of 'Forcible' Religious Conversion Act in October 2002. In theory this Act, enshrined with stringent penalty measures prohibits anyone from 'forcibly' converting Dalits and women; those doing so would be fined up to one lakh rupees and face up to four years of imprisonment. In practice, sections of this law can be twisted to penalize anyone who converts from Hinduism. Leaders like Ambedkar and Periyar declared that the only solution to the problem of untouchability was to quit the Hindu religion and embrace another religion. As per his declaration, Ambedkar along with millions of his followers converted to Buddhism on 14 October 1956. But today, in Tamil Nadu, Hindutva has permeated to the extent that Dalits have even been denied the right to quit the religion that subordinates and oppresses them.

Now, it becomes clear that what is scintillatingly masqueraded as Hindu revivalism is in fact a Hindutva imposition. These anti-conversion legislations of the state governments (Gujarat government followed the Tamil Nadu example), are a bid to keep the Dalits forcefully and legally within the Hindu fold. This is done as a next step to the already existing practice where Dalits lose their reservation benefits when they leave the Hindu religion. Further, patriarchal and tyrannical Hindutva, not being pleased with just restraining Dalits and ensuring the continuation of their slavery; has also taken the diabolical step of clubbing together women. There are chances that sections of this act could be misutilized to prevent Hindu women from marrying those outside their religion and which could transform into a surefire way to guarantee the end of inter-religious love marriages. Thus, it has to be noted that the anti-conversion laws specifically targets not only Dalits, but also women. As a result, one needs to lay emphasis that combating Hindutva—whose primary aim (as in the ancient times) harbours on the preservation of purity—requires not only a secular and Dalitist/anti-caste approach, but also a feminist understanding.

This consolidation of Hinduism in the state was followed by a government direction that banned animal sacrifice in temples across the state, and therefore paved the way for the brahminization of all the temple rituals. This act of banning of animal sacrifice in temples, removed the non-vegetarian (and consequently, non-Brahmin elements) out of worship. With a single stroke of legislation, the pro-Hindutva government of Tamil Nadu decreed and converted the diet of the gods. Overnight blood-thirsty and malevolent gods and goddesses were forced into becoming timid vegetarians. Maariamamma and Karuppu, and a host of village gods could no longer demand roosters and goats. The Madras High Court, to add hunger and insult to injury, suggested that as substitute rituals to animal sacrifice, pumpkin could instead be smashed and lemons be cut. Now, in the anti-Brahmin heartland, there goes on a catastrophic brahminization on the fast track. With the worst ever electoral drubbing in its history, the AIADMK that lost all the forty seats in the 2004 General Elections has withdrawn the anti-conversion and anti-animal slaughter acts, as tempestuously as it was introduced, leaving the BJP high and dry.

In a state known for its rationalist self-respect movement, the rise of the Hindutva forces is due to the degeneracy of the Dravidian movement. The opportunist tendencies of the Dravidian parties have opened the state for an infiltration by Hindutva forces. The percolation of this slow poison is having its consequent effects. As in other states, the Hindutva forces have registered a partial victory, in mobilizing and recruiting Dalits, by making use of the splits and factions within the Dalit movement itself. Here is an example of what Hindutva's divide and rule policy could orchestrate: After the bill banning conversions became law, a Dalit organization based in Chennai planned a campaign tour all over Tamil Nadu to protest against the law and to bring awareness among the Dalits that they were not Hindus at all. Infuriated by this, the very Hindutva forces that were instrumental in bringing about the ban, funded some breakaway faction of Dalits, and this faction, with the 'blessings' of the Kanchi Shankaracharya, embarked on a simultaneous tour propagating to the Dalits that the 'need to return to their *thaimadham* [lit. mother religion]: Hinduism'!

I want also to record another instance that my activist friends and I have been discussing. Hindutva forces in the state, shaken and agitated by Dalit awakening and assertion, have started to undertake counter-campaigns in all possible ways. Because the Hindutva gang felt that the Tamil Dalit leader Thirumaavalavan's name had found its way on too many walls, it funded opportunist and breakaway Dalits to whitewash those walls and instead inscribe their names there. The climax of this narrative is that these opportunist and ideology-lacking Dalits have been asked to paint 'Swamiji Varugirar' [lit. the 'Swamiji Is Coming'] on the walls in Dalit localities and ghettos. For centuries, no Shankaracharya has ever ventured into any Dalit ghetto, because it would be 'polluting' to him. Though it is written so, when shall this celibate monk, the Kanchi Shankaracharya, finally come? What the Hindutva has partially succeeded in doing is to exploit every single avenue of encroachment in order to saffronize Dalits. Such political and ideological manipulations of the Dalit movement, has its consequent repercussions on the Dalit women too.

The Saffron Patriarchy and Dalit Women

This infiltration of Hindutva into Tamil Nadu—a state renowned for its anti-Brahminism and secular identity—is indescribably dangerous to Dalit women. Patriarchal dominance and caste homogeneity, both of which were implemented by controlling the sexuality of women, is now out on the rampage here. And, for your information, with state-support. It is no longer a closet deal. And that renders it all the more dangerous. Worse, this phenomenon is not restricted to the southernmost state alone. Having conquered the cow-belt and Gujarat and Maharashtra, the Sangh Parivar is slowly making inroads into every available sphere.

The increasing momentum of globalization has only added to the vitalized and alarming spread of Hindutva, which is, on the tango with the new economic policies. So, the more aggressive the neo-liberal economic policies, the more aggressive Hindutva forces get. It has to be noted with a lot of anxiety and distress that the processes of economic liberalization, globalization and privatization have all been coincident with the growth and rise of the Hindutva. Dalits supporting misconstrued nirvanas of

globalization have got it all wrong. There exist a lot of deeper links, and what appears like a shady twilight frolicking isn't so. Hindutva forces, under their self-imposed Gandhari-like blindfolds need the new rich just as they need the feel-good factor. And what must be remembered is that both Hindutva and imperialism, behind the masks of their many ideologies, militantly support oppression and exploitation. With relevance to Dalit women, this Hindutvaization and globalization receive new dimensions because in the world according to the Sangh Parivar there is no category like the female workforce. The Bharat Mazdoor Sangh is an entirely male preserve, anyway. The great bulk of the female labour is in the huge and unorganized informal sector: this has left them devoid of any protection and most severely hit by the vagaries of globalization. This combination of oppressive forces and the protagonists of hierarchy shall only intensify the exploitation and extraction of female labour: a move that shall affect Dalit women to the greatest extent.

While recruitment and enrolment of Dalits as foot soldiers of the Sangh Parivar is taking place in full swing, these same channels are also indoctrinating Dalit women. While it could impose on them new identities, it would also make the Dalits, as a whole, be 'convinced' about caste, about their own outcasteness, and thus render them in a position of perpetual slavery. After all, they would bring in bogus theories of karma here, and incorporate a blame-game where Dalits shall be held responsible for their degraded positions. This way they shall ensure that caste flourishes in this 'karmabhoomi'. Among the Dalit women, this simultaneous imposition and aping of values would corrupt their egalitarian proletarian lives. Dalit women, are now being relegated to the inner spheres. This taming of the shrew, this domestication of Dalit women, robs subaltern society of the very liberty and equality that it possesses. This construction of approved identities of 'subordination', the larger and centralized Hindutva, the saffronization and Sanskritization at work, all form the blueprint that manipulate Dalit lifestyles. For Dalit women, the victims of triple injustices and dual patriarchies, this cast(e)rated encroachment of their cultural avenues causes the sum of net risks due to Hindutva grow exponentially.

The fascist Sangh Parivar's twin agendas, of maintenance of Brahmin supremacy and male domination, culminate in their manipulation of the women's sexuality, a two-in-one project that enables them, as we have seen, to ensure the continuance of both the caste system and patriarchy. While for us, as women, the Hindutva dreams of a sacred thread-sporting hegemonic masculinity come alive as grotesque nightmares; the Sangh Parivar continues its old invasions, the unfamiliar encroachments. This aggression by her anti-thesis would further subjugate every Dalit woman. The war is now, between her legs.

A Caveat: A Kind of Brief Note on the Title

Although it is very clear, I had this nagging feeling that the title was too stark and too direct. Something discreet might have helped, I thought. But later, I was convinced of the aptness of the title when I recently got to read a Hindutva publication called *RSS: A Vision in Action*. In between rabid displays of fascism and repression, fundamentalism and perversion, the 400-odd page book had earmarked five pages for the issues of women, and mostly held information about the Rashtrasevika Samiti. Of the five pages, three were consumed with leggy themes. I have sincerely reproduced here two relevant extracts:

“Here is a telling instance of how even one single vigilant Hindu lady can effectively put an end to certain revolting practices in Christian schools. When a P.E. Teacher of a girls' convent ordered that girls shall thenceforth attend the school wearing skirts (above the knee) the mother of a student—a Sevika of the Samiti, protested against this to the teacher. However when the teacher arrogantly replied that she can take her girl from the school if she did not like her girl to obey the order, the mother took it up as a challenge. The Karyavahika of that Shakha mobilized about 80 mothers of the students and met the Christian principal and bluntly told him that they would not tolerate such insults to the traditional Hindu modesty. They even threatened that in case the order was not withdrawn forthwith, protests by hundreds will follow

suit. Evidently, the principal was prudent enough and the order was withdrawn. When the principal came to know about the work of the Samiti, he admired the Samiti workers for their organizing capacity at such short notices.” (p.173)

“On a Raksha Bandhan day, the Jilla Pramukh of the Rashtrasevika Samiti at Sholapur met the District Collector and tied the Rakhi on his wrist. He reciprocated the gesture in the traditional manner by offering her a token amount. But she refused it saying: “I would rather appreciate your help in the capacity of your high office. A bit surprised, the Collector asked, “Do you require employment for any of your relatives?” “No, no, far from it. I am pained to see the modesty of womanhood being slighted by the manner in which they display the undergarments of women in the cloth-shops. It is so appalling. Kindly do something about it.” That was the first time the Collector had come across an appeal not concerned with any personal benefit. Of course he promised to do whatever was in his power.” (p.174)

One of the chief issues is about covering the knees of adolescent girls, and the other is about, hmm, female underwear. This quite sums up something about the ‘vision’ and the ‘action’ of the RSS. Now, ‘Between Her Legs’ doesn’t sound anything other than appropriate. Before long, I had a vague feeling of contentment for choosing a title which reflected the position of the Parivar.

Notes

¹ John Stratton Hawley, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, Oxford University Press : New York, 1994. (see text p 92)

² *Our Women*, Advaita Ashrama, 2003. (see text p 92)

³ Golwalkar, M.S., *We or our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, 1923, p. 27 (see text p 93)

⁴ Sriram Sathe, *Hindu Rashtra: Interpretations-Misinterpretations*, Itihasa Sankalan Samiti, Hyderabad, 2003, p.76, emphasis mine.

⁵ Golwalkar, M.S., *Bunch of Thoughts*, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore, 2000, p. 356.

⁶ Mridula Sinha in *Dashak ke Jharokhe Main*, Mahila Morcha, BJP, New Delhi, 1991, p.5.

⁷ Interestingly, the screening of the *Ramayan* on Doordarshan has spawned sociological books that study that phenomenon on a wide scale; some of the more interesting titles include: Ananda Mitra's *Television and Popular Culture in India*, Sage Publishers, New Delhi, 1993 and Nilanjana Gupta's *Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998 and Arvind Rajagopal's *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2001.

⁸ Indu Agnihotri, *Whose Life is the Sangh Parivar's Adarsh Hindu Ghar based on: A Comment on Hindutva's Attempts to Appropriates the Vocabulary of the Women's Movement*, Nukkad Janam Samvad, July-December 2001, pp.32-42. Agnihotri presents her conclusion of how "the Sangh attempts and achieves a classic doublespeak: it decries the patriarchal mind-set even as it upholds and wishes to strengthen the structures in which patriarchy is rooted in India, both within the family and in society."

⁹ Tanika Sarkar, 'Aspects of Contemporary Hindutva Theology'. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).

¹⁰ *Partition-Days: The Fiery Saga of RSS*, by Manik Chandra Vajpayee, Shridhar Paradkar ; translated into English by Sudhakar Raje, Suruchi Prakashan, 2002

¹¹ Ibid:126-8

¹² Ibid: 164-65.

¹³ Ibid: 192.

¹⁴ Ibid: 298.

¹⁵ Ibid: 157.

¹⁶ Ibid: 299.

¹⁷ *Periyar on Women's Rights*, translated by R. Sundara Raju, Emerald Publishers, Chennai, 1994.