

Identity Politics and Marginalization of Women's Movement: An Overview

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Introduction

Identity politics for a long part of a state's political landscape refers to movements, campaigns, party strategies and group assertions that mobilise political support around caste and religious identities to gain access to political power and public goods, services and resources of the state¹. There is a close relationship between culture, identity and women as women are seen as the symbols of culture and treated like political pawns in male-directed power hegemony and struggles. The smokescreen of secularism has been palpably abused by political vested interests and has more or less turned to a culture now. The situation has reached a point where even communalism is interpreted as secularism for vote bank politics in order to ensure maximum votes. On the other hand the Impact of religious revivalism and fundamentalism vis a vis women and has played a significant role resulting in further restrictions on women besides discrimination, exploitation and abuse. At the same time, Women's movement has been unable to gain momentum due to a range of factors like Caste, group, community affiliations, etc, that actually checks the involvement of women to raise voice for their emancipation or against their constant exploitation as they keep the factor of community honour or group identity in consideration. The increasing communal atmosphere also has further strengthened the community consciousness thereby giving a blow to the ideas of unity and integrity for the cause of women's liberation. Not only this but the issues of identity politics and power question also acts as a motivating factor to adhere to community norms rather than working for an inclusive movement aimed at women's equality and justice. There are also scores of issues based on regional intricacies, complexities and affiliations operating along a plethora of negative stereotypes and biases against each other in terms of rural urban, civilised or less civilised, poor, illiterate, high profile, dignity conscious, etc, which also play a significant role in the lack of unity for a cause. There are also racial and ethnic barriers where in people including women maintain a gap between the people of other ethnicities or races. Moreover, the most

significant of all is the religious politics and religion based identity and normative codes which hinder the integration and uniting of women under a common platform in a lot of ways like adherence to religious codes and laws and reluctance or unwillingness to subscribe to a general code resulting in boundary formation and creation of contrasting identities. For example, opposition to uniform civil code and adherence to personal laws, age old patriarchal codes and practices, etc. Also women being taken as the savours of honour of the community or group or their own understanding of such a vague perception also mars the success of women's movement as it hampers their coming together for a cause. Also the social reality of the lack of mobilisation of women and self emancipation is a genuine reason for such a social reality. Further domestication of women, their internalisation of violence, perception of violence against them as a routine matter or a personal or family affair, their belief in the culture of submission, their economic dependence and survival liabilities, their poverty illiteracy and ignorance, their lack of awareness about the justice and activism spirit, their belief in patriarchy and following the same as a social normative code, etc, further strengthen and legitimise their individualistic or small group norms rather than raising the voice for all women. Therefore women's movement, emancipation and formation of a universal sisterhood on the basis of general exploitation and patriarchy against them still remain a distant dream.

For some time now the women's movement in India is being debated with interest. In the recent past a conscious articulation of women's issues has been witnessed among many urban and educated middle class women. Also women issues have surfaced in academic debates and 'Women's Studies' has emerged as a discipline of study besides role of media in highlighting women's issues and coming together of women and formation of groups to strive for women's cause.ⁱⁱ However simultaneously the fact remains that picture is not all rosy and optimistic throughout. Pressing issues like Indoctrination and exploitation of women for political interests, women as active agents but marginalized in the political and social sphere, parallel legal frameworks as obstacles to justice and issues of identity and collective goals, etc, have been playing a detrimental role against the success of women's movement in India. The major factors that virtually act as deterrent to a unitarian women's movement are discussed as below:

Role of religious revivalism and fundamentalism

Amid the impact of religious revivalism and fundamentalism hardly any human escapes the toxic impact. Communal/ethnic violence or religious fundamentalism has specific implications for women in particular. They are not just victims but are also seen as symbols of communal identities and relations between men and women.

It is not so unusual to argue that women's being the agency of religiosity or ethnicity and their acts of symbolizing these identities can either turn them into peace agents or perpetrators of violence. In general, the social, cultural and political concerns of movements for religious revivalism play a key part in legitimizing gender differences embodied in traditional attitudes. Many of the movements flowing from this phenomenon define the place of women and assign to them a certain status within the community and perspectives on family and gender relations. The very language of traditional ideologies singles out women as the symbolic repository of group identity.

Women by virtue of their positioning in the private domain are expected to live and abide by religious norms; their fidelity to religious values becomes the basis for the judgment of community identity as a whole. Communal consciousness shapes up in security and fear of the loss of social or economic status. The notions of 'izzat' (honour) and 'biradari' (brotherhood) are the main elements which link a family's public position that is lost if the honour of the family's women is lost (Hastings, 1988, 48).ⁱⁱⁱ These notions get generalized in the community and it becomes essential to show that men of that community have total control over their 'own women', Communal propaganda is full of the fall from greatness in the past, challenge of domination today, the need to prove strength, courage and manliness. What can be better way to prove manliness than by showing that your women are under men's control? If the community is losing, its economic status, its social status, at least it still has one form of property within its reach. The fact that women are raped during communal riots is an expression of the same principle. Rape of the other man's woman is a way of humiliating him and showing access to his property^{iv}. Further women being linked to ultra-nationalist and revivalist ideologies has been the tendency, over the past hundred years, to demonize the emergent 'new woman' of South Asia. For example, Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist 'revivals' of the late nineteenth century – which were part of the nationalist project – spoke of the Aryan woman of Vedic times,

the women in early Buddhism and women in the Qura'an as 'liberated' women, Women's rule and missionary influence, etc.,. The spread of modern education, talks of 'women's right' and the entry of women into professions in South Asia led ideologues of various religious traditions to denounce these women as foreign influenced, corrupt and immoral. Women were viewed as potential disrupters and it is their behaviour which became / becomes targeted for control.

Not just this but the issue of symbolic and cultural representation was useful in opposing western political hegemony. Religious nationalism referred back to a better past in which women were a symbol of cultural purity. Women as a category were central in the recreation of community. This aspect of how they were viewed helps us to understand why constructions of the 'ideal woman' by revivalists from early twentieth century onwards, were so frequent.

Conservatism, Community identity and Women

Conservatism and acute community/religious consciousness compromises even justice and the first victims are often women. As gender identity loses its appeal if it is located within a struggle for one's ethnic identity. The pressures of belonging to a minority discriminated community, for example, forces two Muslim women in India, Shahnaz Sheikh and Shah Bano, to temporarily suspend taking up the issues of divorce and maintenance on secular ground, since the challenge of Muslim personal law was perceived as a threat to the identity of the Muslim community as a whole.

Issues of personal law in India have been raised by feminists to show how multiculturalism harms women. Personal laws in India are one of the most complicated issues and bring out the tension between multiculturalism and feminism. Independent India opted for a model of separate personal laws for each of its religious communities. As per this model, the religious community in India governs a broader range of family laws and issues including marriage, divorce, maintenance, guardianship, adoption and succession. Under such a model each community is given autonomous powers to demarcate its membership boundaries and preserve its cultural distinctiveness. After independence, some scholars and many indigenous political leaders believed that a system of separate personal laws for religious minorities could be an important source of cultural autonomy in divided societies, contributing to ethnic stability and facilitating the

preservation of minority cultures. On the whole this was the model to accommodate multiculturalism and cultural diversity in India.

In recent years the issue has become considerably more complicated with the changing positions of women's groups and sharp divisions on a range of issues relating to it. The decisive shift occurred in the wake of the Ayodhya conflict and the dramatic growth of the BJP and with it of Muslim fears of the imposition of a 'Hindu' code. There is agreement among feminists that all religious personal laws are discriminatory and must therefore change. There are, however, disagreements over the means to achieve this objective, whether through a state-sponsored civil code or internal reform. Aware that legal change cannot be isolated from wider political conflicts and majoritarian politics, women's groups made an attempt to distance feminist positions from the Hindu right's demand for a uniform civil code. The women's movement has since moved to a more nuanced position which combines the options of reform from within personal laws, with the formulation of gender-just laws deriving from the concept of a common civil code.

This means that we need to locate identities within power relations and recognize that people have multiple identities. In South Asia, women's consciousness of the dangers of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism has increased though there is an iota of resistance in activism as well. One hopeful sign has been the growing resistance of women to these dangerous trends and the emergence of individual women who have spoken up in spite of death threats and harassment. In the 1970s and 1980s women in Pakistan were on the front-line of opposition to retrograde laws affecting women, such as the *Hudood* Ordinance. In spite of the organized mass hysteria women lawyers in Bangladesh and Pakistan have very bravely taken up the dangerous cases of Taslima Nasreen and Christian minorities, respectively^v. Also Feminists in Sri Lanka have, from the late 1970s, exposed the politics of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists and their double standards in respect of women and in India, vociferous women's groups have agitated on the Shah Bano case, sati, dowry deaths and the continuance of violence against women. Despite the active role that women have played in challenging oppressive structures, it is they who are the first to be marginalized, whether it is political or the social sphere.

Communalism and Patriarchy

Chenoy (2010) argues, “Feminists show how patriarchy is part of all the identity construction and remains so, unless it is actively challenged and transformed. Thus gender; ethnicity, religion; class; caste; race; nationality; state; citizenship; sexuality, etc intersect with patriarchy”.^{vi} Though the fact remains that women had been crucial not only as passive victims of violence, but also as a crucial lifeline to the tradition and cultural identity even if oppressive. However, the present atmosphere of heightened communal tensions unavoidably strengthens patriarchal controls over women within the community. At the same time, the process of women embodying the vestiges of culture has its own internal logic of women’s empowerment with patriarchal sanctions. Also the women’s affiliation with caste and community further legitimizes and strengthens patriarchal institutions. There is a particular cultural transmission at family and community level targeted at women. This takes place not only at the intellectual and normative levels but through the details of daily life pattern, food habits, pollution taboos like who we eat and sleep with, how we dress, body language and so on.^{vii}

As women are crucial in the organization of the home and socialization of children, cultural control over them is fundamental to the continuity, not only of the race, but tradition and communal identity itself. The production of life and cultural controls are thus intrinsically related. Engels views that inheritance of property was the key issue in only one aspect of the problem; feminists in the meantime have discovered the constitutive function in establishing control. Without this control men’s very access to children and the continuity of life is imperiled. Beyond the control over sexuality, fertility and labour, however, men’s control over culture by constructing women as its vestiges also needs a critical attention. Women are the carriers of authenticity; this puts them in a difficult position vis-à-vis their gender and religious identities. This dilemma needs to be recognized as it helps to understand why some women accept their ‘construction’ in order to defend their culture.

Women as Communal Agency and Perpetrators of Violence

A plethora of riot incidents, communal tension and communal polarization is testimony to the fact that women have not just been victims but perpetrators of violence as well. Almost throughout South Asia, fanaticism has penetrated into female psyche as well. There are women activists like *Karsevikas* of

Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, rightwing leaders, etc, who are given roles to propagate religious and social messages (Agnes, 1996 and Allen, 1993). They are the new mothers in the fatherland’ and it would be unrealistic to discount the use made of women for such political and communal agendas. The ultra nationalist movements have used women as cultural representatives and constructed them in relation to western or other dominations^{viii}.

Women’s experience has been influenced by the rise of religious nationalist discourse. Nationalism attempts to legitimate the collective in time and space (Jayawrdena, 1986: 15). Women are being mobilized for fanatic aims as well. The *Shiv Sena* in India was able to mobilize a large section of women to block traffic and hold demonstrations outside police stations to protest against the detention of community youth, even at midnight. Women slept on the roads to prevent army trucks from entering the area to rescue Muslim hostages or put out the blazing fires (Agnes, Flavia, 1993). The slogans which the left groups had used to strengthen collective actions were now used to whip up communal frenzy among violent mobs. For instance, the slogan – “*Hum se jo takarayega, Mitti me mil jayega*” (Those who confront us will be destroyed or in other words might is right) rent the air.

Women as perpetrators or participants of violence in riots are an emerging negative trend. Normally, the social space which is denied to women in times of peace was now being offered to them on a platter in the face of grave adversity. The political implications of the gender/ethnicity divide relate why women choose communal identity to whether a unified women’s movement is possible. Women’s organizations may limit themselves to organizing on the basis of ethnicity; this means that gender subordination takes second place in the context of an appeal to ethnic identity. This needs to be challenged since ethnic identification can lead to an increasing conflict. As to the idealization of women, the problem with the reification of the role of women is that it has conflated class/caste issues. This is one of problems with nationalism –it seeks to homogenize. This may be possible in response to an external threat, but once the threat recedes, social and economic difference will reappear and expose the illusory nature of the homogenous national self.

Women not only suffer from rights or become victims of rape, murder, molestation, etc, but actively take part as well through not always. It is being argued that women participated in the riots in Surat (Gujarat), Mumbai (Maharashtra), etc,. They threw stones at Muslim men while they were being set on fire in the

middle of the road. Not only did women participate in attacking, they were always active in helping their men store stones and sticks and making torches, acid bulbs and bottle bombs. There were incidents of women of the Hindu community throwing boiled water on Muslim men in Surat (Choudhary 1996). While this strategy is used both as a means of offence as well as defence, in some place in Delhi, Sikh women used water mixed with red chilly powder to scare away the mobs. This helped them to run away and save their lives, but in retaliation their property was looted and destroyed. Women had been in Ahmedabad and Surat active in looting shops. Of special attraction to them were garment, shoes and jewelry showrooms. There are reports that in Surat middle class women actually participated in looting. For instance, Chandra writes: Women in Maruti cars, on two wheelers and on foot were seen looting almost all over the city where Muslim shops were small in number, were picking up *sarees*, matching blouse pieces, clothes and petticoats. They were also seen selecting pairs of expensive shoes and sandals of their size.

Also during the Ayodhya movement in the 1990s the Sangh combine intensified the mobilization of women with the assistance of RSS affiliated organizations-Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, the VHP's DurgaVahini and the BJP-affiliated women's organization, the Mahila Morcha and of the women leaders they had thrown up. During this period it was keen to project its women leaders in public places and roles, and also its elected women members in legislative assemblies. For the first time it won recruits from educated middle-class families and professional backgrounds for the Hindutva cause. This was a major advance in so far as it succeeded in activating women and brought them into the politics of the Hindu right. Most of these women did not come from women's organizations or movements, and therefore were indifferent to women's issues and problems. In fact, they performed mostly sex-linked roles in the public domain. Their activities in the public arena re-enacted their private roles, for example preparing food packets for Karsevaks (Hindu volunteers) during the Ayodhya campaign.

The association of women was not, however, limited to supporting roles in the Ayodhya movement. Many of these women were also willingly involved in the campaign for the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992. Indeed, the most powerful voices heard in the course of the Ayodhya movement urging the destruction of the mosque were those of women goading Hindu men into violence against Muslims. Another feature was the complicity and direct participation of these activists in violence against Muslims. During

these events Hindu women were frequently leading processions through Muslim neighbourhoods' with *Trishuls* (tridents) and shouting provocative slogans. They were seen guiding Hindu mobs in the direction of Muslim localities and, worse still, preventing the police from helping Muslim families. It is evident from these episodes that the leadership of the Hindu right does not advocate pacifism; rather, it implicitly sanctions and endorse women's participation in sectarian violence. Immunity from punishment has further fortified and encouraged violent action as the perpetrators of violence are self-assured that they will never be punished or be held to account for their acts of violence. On the face of it the *Sangh Parivar* appears to promote women's activism, which has helped the BJP marshal fresh support since 1989. Participation in the activities of the *Rashtriya Sevika Samiti* brings women into the public domain and this helps them to cultivate engagements beyond the confines of family and kinship^{ix}. The Hindutva ideologues take pride in the fact that women were out on the streets campaigning for Hindutva and establishing a Hindu community identity through aggressive and visible religiosity. Many leaders projected the public participation of women as a sign of the emancipation of Hindu women. Tanika Sarkar remarks, however, that, while the Sangh combine brought women into the public domain, it did so in ways that do not fundamentally challenge their traditional roles within a generally conservative domesticity. She also notes that it permitted and encouraged education, employment and activist politicization only on the basis of communal violence and commitment to an extremely unequal social perspective.

A new shift in post 1980's communalization of politics have not allowed a demonstratively public or even a very active political role to women so far. The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* is a very significant but in fact an exclusively male organization. When Lakshmibai Kelkar approached Hegdewar in 1936 with an appeal to admit women as members, she was refused and Hegdewar later helped her to set up a parallel but separate organization with a small yet significant difference in name.' the members of the RSS are *Rashtriya Swayamsevaks* while the members of the women's wing. The *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* has kept a remarkably low public profile through the six decades of its existence. Even though it is one of the oldest women's organizations in the country, its total membership is about a lakh now and is largely restricted to traditional RSS and BJP bases-Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh. There have been debates within the RSS about giving membership to women but so far the 'sangh' has remained uncompromisingly male.

Today when communalization and politicization of religion seems apparent, the waning of secularism and attacks on minority rights, the question of true nationalism versus religious nationalist identities turns so pressing. Women are being indoctrinated for fanatic purposes and identity/group/ethnicity based nationalistic venom is being injected in them under different ideologies. Talking of India, now there are full time women cadres (Karsevikas) to work for rightwing parties and the new communal phase enables the woman's self constitution as active political subject in dangerously, unprecedented ways.

Women's Movement and identity politics: Indian Experiences

All patriarchal agencies perceive women as a repository of their identity and honour hence women end up shouldering the greater burden of identity politics. Scores of power struggles of identity politics are settled over women's bodies by control like imposition of dress code, restriction on their mobility, stringent codes of racial purity, blind ethnocentrism and punishment for mixed marriages of inter-caste, interreligious, and interracial varieties. They are even subjected to violence like rape and assault and undergo psychological damage by humiliating, terrorising and subjugating continuously^x.

The growth of religious fundamentalism and misuse of minority rights by vested political interests combined to convert the issue of gender justice into pawn in political dealings between the government, religious authorities and politicians. The Shah Bano case and sati incidents illustrate this.^{xi} Kalpana Kannabiran(2014) in her edited work^{xii} quoting Zoya Hassan argues that the debates of secularism in contemporary India with a focus on the impact of identity politics on gender equality. The implications of the interface of politics and religion for women's rights generally and minority women's rights more specifically merit close examination.

1. Imrana Case (2005)

Imrana, a resident of Charthawal of District Muzaffarnagar was raped by her seventy year old father-in-law on June 6, 2005 who was later convicted by a lower court. The incident to the surprise of all prompted a minority community Panchayat to direct her to treat her husband as a son, sparking a nationwide furore^{xiii}. Imrana even received a *fatawa* which declared the marriage to her husband as void. There was a huge

uproar from the community and outside against this fatwa. But government's silence on the matter was noticeable which resulted into mass protests especially by women and slogans like '*Sarkar hamari chup hai-maulana se dari hai*'^{xiv} were chanted by protesters. It was also the case of identity politics where even government played the politics of silence to keep the vote bank secure.

The content and even the existence of the Imrana Fatawa is a point of controversy. Certain members of the Deoband Ulema apparently in response to public outrage later claimed either that no *Fatawa* existed or that it applied only to a hypothetical case of rape between father and daughter in law^{xv}. Whatsoever, the fact remains that Imrana verdict violated many people's beliefs about the equality of men and women. Moreover, it followed a very different standard of admissible evidence compared to western and Indian criminal courts.^{xvi}

The Indian Express editorial on Jun 30, 2005 wrote, "The Deoband Ulema and the Muslim Personal Law Board have made it quite apparent that, even in the 21st century, authorities that act under the imprint of religion do not understand one simple principle: that a woman is a person in her own right. She should be allowed to exercise her choices. Imrana was a victim of a heinous double crime. She was a victim of violence. And she was a victim because the trust of an intimate relationship was betrayed"^{xvii}.

on June 30, 2005, Alka Pande and Atiq Khan wrote in Indian Express as "Amidst a raging debate over the fatwa issued by Darul Uloom Deoband in the Imrana case -that she cannot go back to her husband after being raped by her father-in-law-Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has expressed his support for what the religious leaders have decided. After some initial hesitation, the then Chief Minister said the decision that Imrana was '*Haraam*' for her husband and that she should not be living with him was taken by religious leaders who are learned people and who must have given it the necessary thought"^{xviii}.

This incident reflected the impact of personal laws, religious brigade, blind fatawas and above all even taking the heinous case of rape as a community's internal issue and even justice becomes subservient to identity politics. Joan D. Mandle in his article argues that, "Identity politics is a politics that stresses strong collective group identities as the basis of political analysis and action. As political engagement with the society as a whole was increasingly perceived to have produced insufficient progress or solutions, and in the

absence of a compelling model of a society worth struggling for, many progressives retreated into a focus on their own "self" and into specific cultural and ideological identity groups which made rights, status, and privilege claims on the basis of a victimized identity."^{xix}

2. Roop Kanwar tragedy (1987)

On September 4, 1987, Roop Kanwar-a girl of just 18 years was murdered through Sati tradition in the village of Deorala in Rajasthan. She was burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her husband. However as per the local tradition, the poor victim had become a "sati" and had "voluntarily" immolated herself. Her cries for help drew no response from the villagers, reflecting the legitimacy of even live murder out of the custom and pride for the same. This case also reflected the preference of identity over human life.

Roop Kanwar and her twenty four year old husband were hardly married for a year when Mal Singh, her husband was taken ill suddenly and died in a hospital. His body was brought to his house in Derola in Rajasthan and the following day Roop Kanwar mounted the funeral pyre and died with him, an event witnessed by thousands of people^{xx}. Her death was glorified and she came to be seen as true Sati, exemplifying the noble ideal of Hindu womanhood. Roop Kanwar tragedy prompted the government to amend Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987. Kalpana Sharma (September 23, 2007) a well known columnist wrote in 'the Hindu' as, "In 1987, when this law was first debated following Roop Kanwar death, there was widespread opposition to it in Rajasthan spearheaded by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Its members argued that this was Rajput tradition and that any law that prevented the community from following such traditions would be opposed. This was a time when the BJP was trying to reassert itself in national politics as the protector of all Hindus and the upholder of Hindu traditions. Despite its opposition, the law was passed"^{xxi}. The Roop Kanwar incident ignited a fuming public and legal debate that raised questions of legal identity and communal autonomy, the identity and social position of Hindu women, and role of the law and state in the society. Though Sati had been banned by colonial legislation in 1829. The poor girl who was immolated became the symbol of Rajput identity politics^{xxii}.

(3) Shah Bano Case (1975)

In the year 1975 a 65 year old wife of a Muslim lawyer was forced to move out of home by her husband due to a marital conflict. In 1978 Shah Bano sued her husband in court for maintenance which he had stopped under section 125c of the criminal code^{xxiii}

“The Shah Bano case was a milestone in the Muslim women's search for justice and the beginning of the political battle over personal law. A 60-year elderly woman went to court asking maintenance from her husband who had divorced her. The court ruled in her favour. Shah Bano was entitled to maintenance from her ex-husband under Section 125 of the Code like any other Indian woman. The judgment was not the first granting a divorced Muslim woman maintenance under Section 125. But a orthodoxy deemed the verdict an attack on Islam”^{xxiv}Jain (2007) while paraphrasing the Shah Bano case in the Bourdieu’s symbolic perspective maintains “The Supreme Court ruled that a Muslim woman unable to maintain herself was entitled to take recourse to section 125 of the CrPc that requires husbands with sufficient means to pay maintenance to wives or ex-wives who are unable to support themselves. The ruling was based on the understanding that Muslim personal law, which limits the husband’s liability to provide maintenance to a divorced woman for the period of *iddat* does not deal with a situation of destitution, the prime concern of the provisions of the CrPc. The judgement provoked widespread consternation in the Muslim community in the country. The *ulema* (Muslim clerics) condemned the judgement as an attempt to undermine the *Shariat* (the source of Islamic law). A large number of Muslims took to the streets to register their protest, accusing the supreme court of trespassing on their domain”^{xxv}.The state also has to work for the emancipation of women by spreading awareness about the general issues rather than politicising the specific community or religious issues. (Jain) argues that by not recognising the overt discrimination perpetuated by its own codes, the state makes no serious attempt to ensure that the cultural orientation of different communities is respected and that its policies have a possibility to marginalise/exclude certain categories of population^{xxvi}.On the other hand, such a politics based on identity also affects the intra group issues and treats whole as one united unit which is a myth. Kimberle Crenshaw (1993) argues that “The problem with identity politics is not that it

fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra group differences. In the context of violence against women, this reality of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class^{xxvii}. Drawing from the lack of strength of dearth of a shared experience, women are yet to recognize that the political, rights based and social demands of millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated voices.

Conclusion

The irony of Indian secularism is that the protection of diversity and minority rights has resulted in a sheltered retreat into conservatism and ghettoisation of minorities. Identity politics in its very essence, symbols and signifiers resonating with people's lived realities, or collective identities that are harnessed to promote political agendas embedded in a religious cloak, besides in the colour of ethnicity, culture and race. In the context of growing Hindu right wing communal mobilization or the attempts to reform the Muslim personal law (1986) was seen as an attack on the identity of the community by the so called secular state^{xxviii}. Scholars of social movements and democratic political theorists have argued that “identity politics” weakens social movements and undermines their influence on public policy^{xxix}. The notion of the personal is political and the philosophy of multiculturalism today is best articulated in critical multiculturalism which visualises democracy as a domain of cultural groups contesting for power, resources, identity and status. The hegemonic base of marginalization continues where even victims follow the created codes of identity politics. Even the aims towards socio-political and associated structural changes are based on identity ideologies where women serve as the repositories of such cocooned identities. Therefore the acceptance of critical multiculturalism requires changes in the mindset of people as well as in their cultural narrative of “self” defining it in more inclusive terms. It also requires changes in the understanding of cultural differences, placing them in the unequal power structures that affect the functioning of societal institutions as well as negotiability of the different cultural communities to come to a single platform for change for all^{xxx}. Though the liberal democratic framework advocates limited governmental intervention in a free market economy however operating on the principles of neutrality and

hence of uniformity, liberal democracy, the formulation of universal laws made them applicable equally to all citizens is the need of the hour but not without understanding and addressing the sensitive issues of diversity and issues lying beneath. Recognising the group differences is essential however the main focus should be to liberate oneself and others from the yoke of exploitation and patriarchy. Parekh(1998), Mahajan (2001) and Kymlicka (2007) have discussed that the notion of cultural diversity however in general it does not recognise group differences for policy formulation equating such a recognition with practice of discrimination and favouritism^{xxxix}. The social reality of gendered identity and identity politics intersects with patriarchy. Acknowledging that community consciousness and more than that religious identity shapes and strengthens nothing but patriarchy and further weakens the idea of gender justice. Not only this, but at times regional consciousness shapes identities often based on sub nationalism and armed conflicts. For example in South Asia, many Kashmiris may not identify with the Indian nation and propagate their Kashmiri nationalism. The Nagas have been waging a struggle for self determination. Mizo's and Bodo's have their own identity politics; Tamils in Sri Lanka had asserted their nationality cause, and so on. When these identities based nationalisms are constructed, gender politics intersects with it and women are given a specific role and status that is not equal to that of men. Also in such cases women hardly identify with the other women belonging to other groups or ethnicities. Also women are engaged in patriarchal politics and homogenize identities in order to distinguish between groups and to privilege one group over another. This homogenization constructs an 'us and them'; 'we and the other'; the insider and the outsider^{xxxix}. Further in a male dominated culture, honour is a key concept and women are responsible for large measure of social power behind the scenes. In such settings women do not fight for their rights and empowerment but are exploited for political motives and mobilised by vested interests without any actual gain of their own. Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that women mostly bear the brunt of community codes, religious norms, group politics, identity politics and fundamentalist ideologies which is why the women's movement still has lots of hurdles to face.

Back home the fact remains that the Hindu right wing has demonstrated an enormous capacity to mobilize women but this was not progressive or emancipatory politics. Overall Hindu women's activism provides a

compelling example of the instrumentalization of women for the achievement of the political goals of the *Sangh Parivar*. At the same time the resistance of minority communities to legal reform in the name of preserving their religious identities poses a serious problem for gender equality and to the question of inclusive justice. In this regard the major issue is the eagerness of the state to put up with an enlargement in the influence of conservative leadership, which has resulted in the propping up of identity politics and strengthening the hands of forces that oppose women's rights. Even though women's groups have seldom opposed religious politics and religious patriarchies in all communities, they have nevertheless had to contend with minority vulnerability, which has often pushed women's rights aside. Muslim women frequently pushed into the conservative fold of the community have paid the price of such a compromise. On the other hand, women have though grouped into many organizations however not for women's causes but for political and fundamentalist causes. Organizations like *Rashtriya Sevika Samiti* with their communalized public identity reinforced conservative ideas about women and their status. For Samiti women, their work was different from that of other women's organizations, which educate women about their rights, Samiti was telling women how to sacrifice themselves to hold the family together by being a good mother; it did nothing to help them emancipate themselves as women.

Socialized under the religious or false spirit of group/religious identity women have reached their fulfilment in a violent campaign of blind hatred, regionalism, religious bias, communal mindset and not in a critique of class, caste and patriarchy. It prepares the woman to be an unconscious collective being of their rights and emancipation.

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