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Gender in Dalit Identity
Construction in Punjab

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GENDER IN DALIT IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN PUNJAB*

**Pramod Kumar
Rainuka Dagar**

INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION, CHANDIGARH

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Tel : 0172-2707942
Fax : 0172-2702254
E-mail : idcchd@sancharnet.in.

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Caste antagonism in Punjab is becoming more pronounced as an exclusive Dalit identity is getting nurtured and evolved. The core elements of the emerging Dalit identity include an assertion of de facto recognition of their rights, occupational mobility, status parity through adoption of cultural markers and parallel religious symbols, and transforming their women from objects of sexual liaison with upper caste males to icons of group honour. Historically the superordination-subordination relational paradigm could not provide the Dalits with a reservoir of symbols around which an identity could be evolved. The Dalit identity assertions are multi-dimensional articulations for recognition of individuals as human, escape from social abuse, equitable share in decision-making and corresponding power, privileges and social status.

Another dimension of Dalit identity assertion relates to liberation from cultural power hierarchy by adopting dominant cultural practices, rituals and activities having a common set of meanings, but located in exclusive identity sites. The underlying thrust is to acquire social parity without getting assimilated into the hierarchical social system. This identity formation is exclusive, as it is based on acquiring it more for a competitive politico-social space. More so, in the gender context, Dalit assertion is distinct as it attempts to transcend 'sexual liaison' of a survival alliance to evolving women as identity denoters in spite of lacking associated patriarchal values and a material context. In other words, issues of purity, inheritance, mobility, norms of control have not been integral to their economic conditions and traditions. However, the Dalits of Punjab have experienced moderation in social interaction based on purity-pollution as reflected in sexual liaison with the peasantry as an extension of feudal relations.

Punjab has been known for its liberal religious practices in relation to caste.

Caste was not the dominant agency of social organization of the religious strands in the area as majority of the population was non-Hindus, i.e. Muslims and Sikhs. These religions per se were devoid of caste distinctions, though social divisions did reflect an influence of caste hierarchies. "The concepts of ritual pollution and Karmic retribution are not so strong in the cultures of these religious traditions. Consequently, caste in the Punjab does not have the same rigour or force of religious sanction as it has elsewhere" (Juergensmeyer, 1988: 6). In fact, Sikhism and the Arya Samaj provided religious space for the liberation of the Dalit population from the stringent behavioural patterns based on purity-pollution. For instance, equality in religious gatherings, establishment of common kitchens and the institution of langar were initiated to overcome caste-based superior and inferior relationships.¹ Offering of Karah Prasad by anyone, irrespective of his caste, was a symbolic departure from the notion that forbade food sharing by the upper and the lower castes. According to MacLeod (1975: 87), "this ensures that high castes consume food received in effect from the hands of the lower castes or even outcastes and that they do so from a common dish." These holy injunctions were, no doubt, clear but with the passage of time differentiating rituals and practices continued. The interactive social practices between the upper and the lower castes continued to be imbued with the notion of purity-pollution which co-existed with symbolic religious rituals like langar, sangat and pangat. In a caste-based society, besides kinship and descent, social position is maintained through occupations, food and objects considered impure. In case of the Brahmins, George Hart has argued that they exaggerated the notions of purity and pollution adopted from the Dravidians to maintain superiority. In Punjab, while segregation in religious rituals and places of worship was transcended, the social divide, particularly in terms of occupations, was maintained. The fact that the Chamars worked with leather automatically placed them in an inferior and impure category. Hart has located the hierarchy of purity and pollution in a negative sacred power:

Among those called low in the example just given there is one factor that virtually all share: they are rendered dangerous by the sacred power with which they come into contact in their occupations. The leather worker is infected by the soul of the cow whose skin he works; the man at the funeral by the spirit of the dead man; the washerwoman by the dirt (and especially the menstrual discharge) on the clothes she cleans (Hart, 1975: 122).

This hierarchy of purity among the dominant castes and Dalits in Punjab continued to be accepted in social exchanges such as marriage and social celebrations, and was reflected in social organization. To illustrate, Mahila Mandals were created to uplift women and a scheme for income generation through renting out tents and utensils for celebrations was launched. However, assertions for maintenance of exclusiveness prohibited the Dalits from using these utensils as the non-Dalit castes would not like to re-use these utensils. This led to the formation of parallel Mahila Mandals by the Dalits. The formation of separate Mahila Mandals, Gurdwaras and dharamshalas reflected both the intense desire among the Dalits to establish their exclusive identity and to assert their rights based on their emerging political consciousness.² The power of political numbers was asserted in 1931 when the Dalit leaders demanded enumeration as Ad Dharmis rather than Hindus in the census.³ The re-emergence of this number power is a reflection of the growing identity assertion among the Dalits of Punjab and is based on both status of an identity as also demand for redistribution of community resources. As Hanna Papanek argues:

Identities also represent entitlements to shares of a group's or a society's resources, the question of individual and group identity have also become a powerful bargaining chip in the politics of the late twentieth century. Conformity to the common

identity proclaimed by social or political groups becomes increasingly important to the group's bargaining power in identity politics, as numbers usually become an aspect of power (Papanek 1994: 42-43).

While the strength in numbers was not consolidated to represent political power, the Dalits achieved some success on the economic front.

Caste codification and structure continued to define the social rank of the Dalits, in spite of their economic progress. The Dalits, engaged in some of the traditional occupations, such as leather trade, became upwardly mobile in the social ladder.⁴ Reservations in educational institutions and also jobs brought them into the larger occupational canvas. The disconnect between improved material conditions and capacities of the Dalits on the one hand and continued social subordination on the other, was further fuelled by the dissipating nexus of feudal relations.

The crisis in agriculture and the influx of migrant labourers reduced the interdependence of the upper castes and the Dalits. These factors weakened the hegemonic control of the upper castes and also provided a life force to the Dalits' assertive attitude in political, economic and social spheres. This process accelerated the formation of an exclusive Dalit identity. Religious reforms and occupational mobility could not transform the inferior hierarchical social placement of the Dalits. They continued to live on the margins of society. However, political mobilisation for nurturing the exclusive Dalit identity has challenged the social exploitative relations and transformed these into caste conflict.

The emergence of the Dalit identity can be understood within three broad boundary conditions. First relates to the Dalits' assertion highlighting the inadequacies of the co-option for the assimilation model.⁵ The dominant religious tendencies provided space to co-opt the Dalits in their respective folds by religious moderation of the stringent purity-pollution customs and rituals. However, the

socio-cultural hierarchy rooted in the caste system could not be stamped out, providing continuity to the marginalised existence of the Dalits.⁶ The Ad Dharm movement, the more recent assertions to create parallel Dalit institutions and organisations such as temples/Gurdwaras, deras, sects, dharamshalas, cremation grounds, and social groups such as Mahila Mandals bear testimony to this continued demand for recognition of the rights on an egalitarian basis.⁷

Secondly, the Dalits have made the social divide between them and the dominant castes ambiguous by selectively appropriating symbols and practices of the dominant culture, universalising the earlier pattern of upper caste exclusivity.⁸ These include the holding of satsangs, reading of the Guru Granth Sahib in the light of the contribution of Ravi Dass, the use of auspicious objects (the Pipal tree) and myths. In the gender context practices reflective of status enhancement have been adopted. Dowry exchange, levirate marriage, male child preference to the extent of female foeticide are adopted as status symbols, necessary in their utilitarian mode rather than as normatively valued. Universalising social norms bridges the boundaries imposed by a ritual and rule hierarchy. It is important to note that the replication of rituals, customs and practices of the dominant caste is not a process of sanskritisation of the Dalits in Punjab⁹. By their very rejection of the assimilation model, they vetoed the acceptance of the 'high born's religio-cultural organisation of society. Instead, they adopted specific cultural practices laying claim to norms of a distinct status with a view to bring about a 'structural change' rather than only 'positional changes' in the system.

Thirdly, the Dalits are mobilising around an exclusive Dalit identity which presupposes intra- group homogeneity and inter-group difference, where control over women is an essential identity marker to ensure group membership and purity. Sexual liaison of upper caste men with Dalit women has become an unacceptable violation of Dalit dignity. Simultaneously, control over women, through codes of conduct, dress and behaviour have been imposed, as against

the earlier indifference.

Dalit assertion represents a kind of dualism in the context of gender. This dualism entails adaptation of universal practices to structure particularistic group dynamics and negation of 'polluting' aspects for nurturing exclusivity. In other words, the attempt is to transcend the hegemonic hierarchy by cultural adaptation of dominant gender practices such as dowry exchange, levirate marriages, and to ensure exclusive identity by restricting polluting social interactive relationships.

Interestingly, Dalit assertion has usurped the idea of purity to present itself as a competing identity. Notions of honour, revenge and chastity typed within the gender context are selectively used for boundary demarcation for construction of group identity.

Physical and sexual mobility of Dalit women is now the concern of the entire community, with woman emerging as an identity symbol. The struggle is not to escape pollution but to emerge as a power group to compete politically in a social context, absolved from hierarchy through a universalised adaptation of cultural norms.

The Dalits have challenged the divide of hegemonic hierarchy by adopting the gender-related socio-cultural practices of the Jat peasantry such as dowry, female foeticide and levirate marriages¹⁰. For the construction of gender relations the role of the Jat peasantry remains pronounced in Punjab. Demarcations between male and female behaviour patterns, roles and placements are rigid among the peasantry - with high preference for, male child control over female sexuality and reproduction and hegemonic exchange between bride giving and bride-taking families regulated by a systematic set of rituals and practices. An intensive field study indicated that the Dalits were selectively appropriating feminine and masculine traits of the dominant cultural groups. These particularly refer to physical appearance, conduct and lifestyle.

Table 1
Caste-wise Characteristics of Manliness

Manly Characteristics	Dalit	Jats
Daler	34	38
	(54.0)	(88.4)
Loud Voice	19	23
	(30.2)	(53.5)
Manly style of walking, talking	41	34
	(65.1)	(72.1)
Good physique	57	40
	(90.5)	(93.0)
Use of abusive language	20	7
	(31.7)	(16.3)

Figures in parentheses show percentages

Source:- Field Survey, IDC 2001, Notions and practice of Masculinity

The differentiation between the Dalits and the Jats is not as starkly practiced as in some southern states of India. But, there exists a well-defined hierarchy which is eulogised and imbibed.

In a narrative, a Dalit woman while describing manliness gave the example of her son and said, "He is tall and well-built and when he goes to the town, everybody thinks that he is a young specimen of a Jat male". Others mentioned that their men were tall and strong like a Jat DSP, and "one cannot make out the difference from his stride and behaviour that he is any less than a Jat." These comparisons run into other spheres of day-to-day life also. A healthy diet of milk and milk products as also the produce from one's own field is a norm in peasant households. This seems to be the standard that is now being followed by the upwardly mobile Dalits. In these Dalit households it is common to hear, "We live well-we get four kg of milk a day"; 'the saag is well cooked in our home'; "the school teacher also comes and takes food here just like they do in the landlords' homes". The issue of rich diet does not find as much mention in

Jat homes since it is an accepted way of life, but constant reference to food habits is made in Dalit homes.

In other spheres also Jat standards and symbols are being adopted by the Dalits. For instance, honour, revenge and levirate marriages are exclusive to peasant groups, where both land and women are to be protected as they reflect the social status of the families, and instances of these practices are also found among the Dalits. It is not uncommon to find firing of guns as a mode of celebrations in Dalit marriages, again something that was peculiar to the Jat peasantry. In terms of dress also, the Dalits are adopting the Jat apparel. In our Focus Group Discussions (FGD) among Dalit men, a male appearance was described as using a small head covering called a 'parna'. But it was mentioned that if a Dalit had to go to his in-laws' house, then he would wear a turban "like a Jat" so that he looks a man of influence. Similarly, it was mentioned that white kurta-pajama was a dress worn only by Jat landowners, and dark coloured clothes were the garb of the Dalits. But, now, this is changing, with Mazhabi Sikhs especially wearing white kurta-pajama. In fact, the Dalits are selectively appropriating dominant universal practices to achieve status enhancement. This has added another dimension to the existing debates, whereby universalism of rights, cultures and humanism has a tendency as a dominant standard to subsume difference. To quote Ann Phillips:

...cultural difference, like sexual difference, still resonates with images of superiority and inferiority... Cultural difference is more often read as cultural hierarchy than cultural variation. There are said to be 'better' and 'worse', 'more advanced' and 'more backward' culture (sic). Given this history, the deployment of universal principles as a measure for judging the practices and values of other cultures begins to look rather suspect: yet another case of those 'false' universalisms that draw on the practices and values of one group for the delineation of supposedly universal rules, refuse to recognize the legitimacy of difference, and seek to impose the practices of the dominant group. (Phillips 2002: 119)

However, the Dalits are internalising universal cultural standards, specifically in the gender context, to absolve "the resonate images of superiority and inferiority". As the Dalits do not possess recognised homogeneous organic cultural traits, adoption of cultural traditions of the Jat peasantry blurs the social hierarchy and is used as a tool to shape a particularistic identity.

Among the Jats, gender role prescription are in accordance with their social placement and cultural ethos. Thus, for instance, the practice of dowry manifests as both, "a structurally hypergamous, non-reciprocal, asymmetric and extractive relationship between the bride giving and bride receiving families, and also between men and women" (Mies 1986: 161). Among Dalits on the other hand, there is a more utilitarian exchange and prevalence of hierarchy between men and women. In field studies, the significance of dowry among the Jats has been reported as a peaceful settlement or adjustment of the girl with the in-laws and a tradition among the Jats, while for many Dalits it had no significance or was mentioned to fulfil the material needs of a newly settled couple (see table 2). Dowry as a practice is then expected to reflect the affluence of the Dalits and of taking part in prevalent social practices. The Jats looked to extending their kinship influence through marriage-to the extent that a girl with no brothers finds it difficult to marry for "who will stand shoulder to shoulder to wield the stick with her husband in case of a feud"?

Table 2

Perceived Significance of Dowry as a Custom by Caste

Caste	No Significance	Tradition	In lieu of property	Peaceful settlement of girl in in-laws home	Fulfil needs of newly married couple
Dalit	54	50	13	42	69
	(22.2)	(18.3)	(5.3)	(17.28)	(28.3)
Jat	10	58	13	38	22
	(7.3)	(42.3)	(9.4)	(27.7)	(16.1)

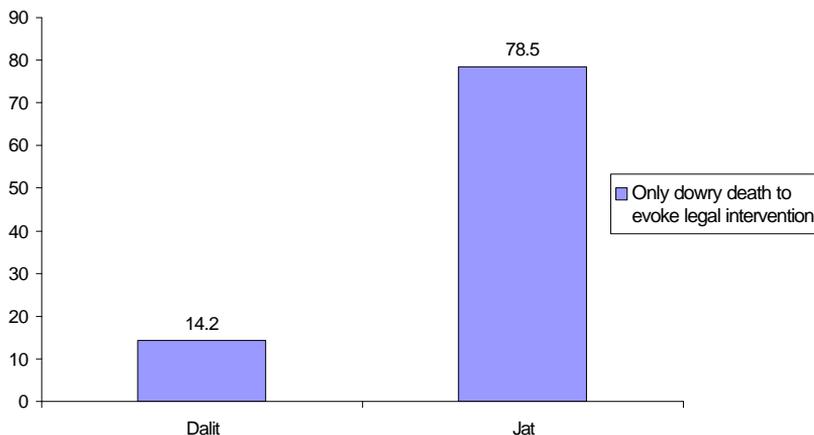
Figures in parentheses show percentages

Source:- Field Survey, IDC 2001, Combating violence against women in Punjab

Yet, among the Dalits, dowry exchange is reduced to a monetary exchange with little symbolic influence. In Dalit FGDs, women mentioned taking loans and said: "We make a deal with the girl's in-laws over a fixed amount which is paid over a period of three to five years, unlike the Jats who continue to demand more dowry and badger the girl." The range for grievance articulation is rather large for the dominant groups. For the Jats, the exchange of dowry is a status symbol and signifies the emergence of an ongoing relationship between the families which is supported by practices such as presenting gifts on the birth of a baby, karva chauth, lohri, diwali signifying subordination of the bride giving family for life. Also conspicuous consumption is a statement of status rather than fulfillment of utilitarian needs of a young couple. In the FGDs among the Jat peasantry they reiterated time and again that dowry formed a part of the marriage rituals, a custom and compulsion, so much so that no one could marry off a daughter without giving a dowry. The acceptance of dowry exchange among the Jats can be gauged from the perception, where 78 per cent of the Jats mentioned that dowry exchange (which did not involve dowry death), should not have legal repercussions as against only 14 per cent of the Dalits, reflecting the relatively newer adoption.

Figure 1

Castwise Perception Regarding Need of Law for Dowry Related Abuse



Source:- Field Survey, IDC 1995, Atrocities against women

The underlined thrust was that dowry was given in lieu of a share in the property and thereafter the girl had no right to the father's property. Yet, most Dalit women earned their living, had no claims to parental property; there is no kinship network to extend or support, and the role assumption was vastly different from that of the peasants. The point is that Dalits have adopted dominant gender practices and rituals, even though these do not arise out of the norms and values of their socio-cultural or economic placement.

Similarly, the increasing practice of female foeticide among the Dalits does not find support from the normative worth of a male child, the importance in terms of lineage and consolidation of land and assets as among the landowning groups. Among the Dalits male child preference was cited predominantly in terms of reversal of generational flow of income, thus the male child was perceived as an old age insurance rather than in terms of a culturally accumulated normative value.

The necessity of a male child was voiced among Dalits for his role as a breadwinner for the family and as an old age insurance (53 %), while similar findings were restricted among the Jats (31.4 %) which reflected the patriarchal and male centered kinship structure of the Punjabi society where male children were perceived to be a major source of social and political power. ¹¹

Table 3
Reasons Cited for Necessity of Male Child by Caste

Caste	Old age insurance	Lineage	Social Status	Protection
Dalit	113	50	19	8
	(53.3)	(23.5)	(8.9)	(3.7)
Jats	38	58	19	18
	(31.4)	(47.9)	(5.7)	(14.8)

Figures in parentheses show percentages.

Source:- Field Survey, IDC 2000, Combating violence against women in Punjab

The male child preference among the jats was seen to emanate not only from utilitarian needs of a bread-winner, but were based more on normative justification such as social status and family protector (see Table 3).

At one level, the appropriation of gender subjectivities by Dalits was reflected in the dominant confluence of patriarchy, socio-cultural ethos and market to blur the divide in social practices among different hegemonic groups. However, the Dalits are appropriating gender norms to establish a 'difference' in identity from the dominant groups, i.e., the Jats. Thus, exchange of dowry, levirate practices, increasing acceptance of female foeticide fall in the realm of dominant gender manifestations. The concept of purity and pollution, however, exercised control over women's bodies, specifically on reproduction and sexuality to ensure that group identity remained distinct and exclusive. Women's bodies in particular and gender subjectivities at large continued to be the site for unfolding of the power dynamics of identity-related struggles.

Control exercised over women in states and movements where, once again, group identity is linked to "purity"-either of race or behaviour in a concrete sense, or of ideology at the more symbolic level. In all these cases the definition of "purity" is constructed as dependent on female sexuality and reproduction so that these aspects of women's lives become central not only to the definition of female personhood but also to group boundaries and group identity. (Papanek 1994: 46)

Presently, among Dalits, the focus is to negate their women's sexual liaison with the dominant castes by increasing controls. However, control over reproduction functions has yet to find expression in defining their identity politics. Women's placement is being redefined from sexually exploitative dependence to the emerging symbol of Dalit honour. Historically, the issues of restricted mobility, parda, chastity protection of women and the notion of masculinity as a control over female sexuality did not arise among Dalits. Within the socio-economic relations of patronage-subservience, women represented a survival alliance with access to their bodies as a feudal perk of the dominant caste. A common saying regarding a beautiful or good looking Dalit girl or a strong and

tall Dalit boy was that she/he must be the progeny of a Jat. The under-lying portrayal being that an 'inferior' community cannot possess socially valued traits and these are a byproduct of liaisons with the peasantry. The acceptance of upper caste men having access to sexual favours of Dalit women was reported by 91 per cent of the Jats and 88 per cent of Dalits in 1994. A similar trend is reflected in a 2000 study with this acceptance being around 80 per cent (see Table 4).

However, the justifications provided by the two groups were different. The Dalits attributed it to poverty and power-lessness; the Jats maintained that women of lower castes were 'characterless' or the 'property of land holders' and were easily lured by material considerations (see Table 5). In the same vein, Dalit men were taunted for being unmanly since they could not protect the honour of their women.

How are SC men manly? They only know how to beat their wives. They cannot even avenge the insult of their wives nor are they manly enough to protect them? A man should be passionate enough to nurture feelings of revenge. The Scheduled Castes may have acquired money, but they have no status, since they cannot safeguard the dignity of their women. (Dagar, 2001)

Table 4
Perception of Dalit and Jats Affirming the Sexual Liaison of Dalit Women with Upper Caste Men

Caste	(1)	(2)
Dalit	36	185
	(87.8)	(77.0)
Jat	31	105
	(91.1)	(78.31)

Figures in parentheses show percentages

Source: (1) Field Survey, IDC 1995, Atrocities Against Women; and (2) Combating Violence Against Women in Punjab, 2001

Table 5
Perception of Dalit and Jats Respondents Regarding the Reasons for Dalit Women's Sexual Liaison with Upper Caste Men

Caste	Exploitation due to poverty	Landholders considered Dalit women as their own property	Lower caste women are mentioned to be Characterless	Illiteracy
Dalit	141	21	10	5
	(79.6)	(11.8)	(5.6)	(2.8)
Jat	50	22	35	4
	(47.6)	(20.9)	(33.3)	(3.8)
Total	191	43	45	9
	(67.7)	(15.2)	(15.96)	(3.19)

Figures in parentheses show percentages

Source:- Field Survey, IDC 2001, Combating Violence Against Women in Punjab

Group inferiority was promoted through naturalistic arguments and social inferiority was rated against dominant norms, particularly in the gender context where group superiority entailed protection and seclusion of women. It is interesting to note that caste hierarchy was operationalised in terms of exploitative relations rather than untouchability. Caste impurity or notions of pollution only arose in the context of hypergamous marriages.

Social status was gauged from inter-caste marital alliances. Inter-caste marriages involving Dalit women are seen as polluting. Marriage of daughters with upper caste men (hypergamy) with added dowry as compensation, was a common strategy. Dalit men experiencing occupational status enhancement entered into matrimonial alliances with upper castes to symbolise their upward mobility. The persistence of status marginalisation based on social placement could not, however, be negated by matrimonial alliance with the upper castes. Notions of masculinity, sexuality and dignity continued to be based on inferior social placement. This process was building a backlash where occupational upward mobility came to be shared within the group through matrimonial alliances.

Moreover, group purity proclaimed woman's body as a defining parameter for the question of identity appeared to be exercising influence on individuals to conform to the prescriptive norms and thereby marry only within the group.

With politicisation of Dalits, checks and control over women are beginning to emerge. In view of the cultural milieu where the women's honour symbolised family and kinship status, values of honour and chastity are beginning to be reflected among the Dalits. According to a young rural Dalit,

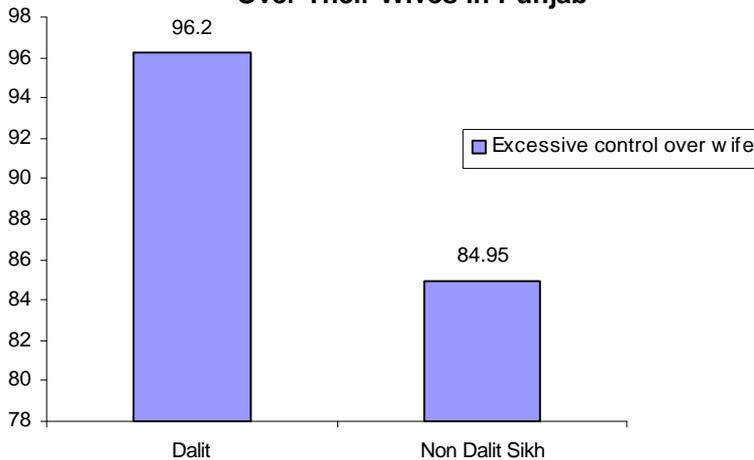
in our village the Jats are considered powerful. Our subordinate Dalit castes work in their fields. Our women also work and collect fodder from their lands and the Jats sexually abuse them. Now if I as a Dalit misbehave with one of their girls, they will not tolerate it. They will not say let us beat him, but they will say let us kill him. But if the opposite occurs, 'then they are Jats!' But I will not tolerate this. I say kill or be killed. What is prevalent now is if a (Dalit) woman is abused, then it is kept under wraps and she is made to sit at home. The reason for this is the thinking that the Jats are powerful and they can do anything (cited in Mazumdar 1994: 250)

While revenge and threat of violence may not have become part of social relations, the recognition of abuse indicated not only unacceptability of the historical sexually exploitative relations, but a simultaneous imbibing of dominant gender norms that the abuse of the honour of a women, albeit a Dalit woman, is both a shame, and an affront.

In recent years, there have been instances of honour revenge being taken by the Dalits. This reflects that both among the females and within the community the concept of purity, along with associated values of protection, honour and revenge, is finding acceptance. The aspirations for an exclusive identity of the Dalits is reflected in the increasing control being asserted over Dalit women by their husbands. Recent data reflect that exercising control over the wife was undertaken by 96 per cent of the Dalits (in contrast to 85% of the Jats).

Figure 2

Percentage of Men (Castewise) Exercising Control Over Their Wives in Punjab



Source:- Field Survey, IDC 2001, Gender Violence : Construction of Masculinities

During the period of militancy in Punjab, codes of conduct and bodily control over women were enforced to segregate the Sikh and non-Sikh communities. While among the Sikhs, implementation of these codes has abated with the end of militancy, the use of similar controls and checks on Dalit women seems to be taking hold. "Heightened pressures for conformity usually exist in groups seeking to present a united front to others who are yet doubtful of their cohesion. The interest of the entire group in achieving conformity will then be invoked to increase control over weaker or less 'obedient' members, decreasing the range of choices for individuals" (Papanek 1994:45). In a study of three caste and religious groups-Dalits, non-Dalit Hindus and non-Dalit Sikhs-Dalit men were found to be exercising greater control over their women (see Figure 2). Among the Sikh Jats the symbolisation of power and dominance alludes to a trait that cuts across the realm of gender. For instance, the idea of being *daler* (valiant) is engrained among the Jats - as a warrior and a protector of the weak and the women. These characteristics of dominance and protection were not integral to characterisation of the Dalit men, but were limited only to control over their women (see Table 6).

Table 6
Opinion of Dalit and Non-Dalit Sikh Regarding Protection as a Responsibility/Roles of Men Outside Their Family

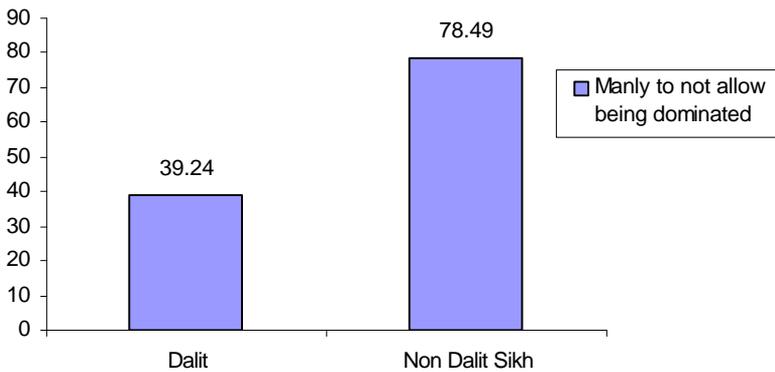
Responsibilities/roles of men outside their family	Dalit	Non Dalit Sikh
Responsibility-Protect weak	41	68
	(51.90)	(73.12)
Responsibility-Protect women	44	60
	(55.70)	(64.52)
Responsibility-Protect children	30	63
	(37.97)	(67.74)
Responsibility-Protecting rights of community	62	61
	(78.48)	(65.59)
Responsibility-Protecting your country	57	72
	(72.15)	(77.42)
Responsibility-any other	6	9
	(7.59)	(9.68)

Figures in parantheses show percentages.

Source: Field Survey, IDC, 2001 Gender violence: Construction of Masculinity

Figure 3

Caste-wise Male Opinion of Dominance as a manly Characteristic



Source:- Field Survey, IDC 2001, Gender Violence : Construction of Masculinities

Associated values such as not bearing insults, protection of the family, the community, the children and the weak have been historically nurtured. Data clearly reflect that the Dalits, in contrast, did not find the overarching value of protection to be a manly attribute as such but is limited only to protection of their women. Similarly, the Jats resented being dominated by their women (78 %), whereas similar resentment was reported by only 35 per cent of the Dalit respondents.

However, preoccupation of the Dalit community with women's purity and control over their sexuality can be easily gauged. While Jat women accepted the need for avenging a woman's insult or rape by the men of the family they decried honour revenge since it ruined another woman's life. Yet Dalit women were vociferous in their support of honour revenge. "When you feel the brunt yourself it is only then that you can understand that honour revenge must be taken. Dalits are not scared. Everyone has his or her honour." Similarly, FGDs revealed that virginity of a new Dalit bride was a matter of concern among the mothers-in-law and they were adopting practices to verify the girl's chastity. Such dialogues did not emerge among Jat women or men where female chastity was valued under family control. Institutionalisation of the value of chastity among the dominant group can, however, be depicted from legal enactments, both historically and in more recent times. There are instances where widows were unable to legally defend their share in the husband's property on grounds of 'unchastity'. The norm, until its recall in 1996, was writ on law, with compensation for women victims of militancy being dependent on their chaste behaviour. Contrary to this established propriety of conduct for upper caste women, sexual mobility of Dalit women was historically well established. It is in this context that the promotion of female chastity as group purity acquires added importance.

The crucial aspect of Dalit identity assertion is to redefine inter-group relations with female sexuality as central and to put in place control-oriented mechanisms within the group. These mechanisms are blatant and violent rather than normative.

Further, the core of this identity formation process is an adoption of universal standards to construct parallel status markers. Interestingly, hegemonic subordination of the Dalits expressed in survival alliances is being changed to an exclusive identity while adopting elements of upper caste practices. Unfortunately, Dalit woman continued to be subject to abuse, with the site of violence undergoing a change-the shift from the public domain of sexual liaison, coerced or consented, to domestic violence.

Notes

1. This egalitarian thrust in social relationships extended to gender also: "Guru Nanak also welcomed women to *pangat (langar)* and offered them a seat side by side with men. This Sikh institution of langar, or community meal, symbolizes the equality of humanity. Men and women worked together in the *langar*-drawing water from the well, grinding corn, collecting fuel, cooking food, distributing food and cleaning the dishes. This food, prepared by men and women of mixed backgrounds, was eaten by all, inmates and visitors alike, sitting in rows affirming their new sense of community which was founded on the equality of humanity." (Holm and Bowker 1994: 142).
2. These demands have been raised democratically, in a 1971 conference on the issue. Ad Dharmi representative to be included in the new Scheduled Caste Corporation; land distributions to move at a faster pace; poverty line to be raised from 3,600 to 6,000 and for Dalits to register themselves as Ad Dharmi in the Census (Juergensmeyer 1988:263)
3. Ad Dharm Mandal, 1926-31, Official Report, Jullundhar: Kisan Steam Press, Government of India (1931), Punjab Census Report, vol. 20, Chap 11, p. 289.

Also see R.C. Majumdar, R.C. (1969), *Struggle for Freedom*, Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, p. 1001 for the Hindu reaction against the segregation of Ad Dharmis from the Hindu fold.
4. As early as 1911 skin trading and the leather-processing industry had become established, providing growth in employment by 360 per cent or a four-fold growth from a decade earlier. According to Punjab Census Reports, 1911, "A great impetus has been given to the export of raw hides by the imposition of heavy duties in European countries on tanned leather, while uncured skins are exempted from taxation." The trading of raw leather was to the advantage of Dalits since dealing in leather particularly raw pelts was considered offensive to upper caste traders. (Punjab Census Report, 1911: 515).

5. Assimilation within the dominant folds but with hierarchy enstated. The subordination of the Dalits in realm of everyday power play can be captured from the bias that panchayat show in their functioning towards the Jats and the Dalits. Even the 1911 Census of India, Punjab notes that "the higher castes are seldom subject to governing bodies; and where they are the control is not very effective" (Punjab Census Report, 1911:420-21).
6. "This ambiguity on the question of caste persisted despite the Sabhas' encouragement to institutions like the initiation ceremony (Pahul) and communal eating (*langar*) with their apparent disregard for caste distinctions. The Singh sabhas reflected a vision of a hierarchically organized society, with some groups within it more privileged than the others, even though a Sikh identity hinged upon declaring everyone in its fold as equal" (Malhotra 2002: 43).
7. A lot has been written about the Dalit leaders' preoccupation with social hierarchy to the negation of a nationalistic identity.
The Dalit and non-Brahman anti-caste movements can be classified as 'anti-systemic movements' in the framework of such Marxist theorists as Immanuel Wallerstein, or, in the language of functionalist sociological theory, as 'value-oriented movements' as opposed to 'norm-oriented movements'. That is, they challenged and sought to transform the basic structure of the Indian social system, replacing caste and the accompanying social oppression, economic exploitation and political domination by an equalitarian society.
See Immanuel Wallerstein's original paper, 'The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, 4 (September 1974). More recent brief statement's of Wallerstein's view of anti-systemic social movements (which he defines broadly as 'class' movements and 'national' movements), see 'Anti-Systemic Movements and the Three Worlds', *Lanka Guardian*, 1 June 1985 and 'Patterns and Prospects of the Capitalist World Economy', *Contemporary Marxism* No. 9, Fall 1984. For more conventional functionalist analysis, see the most well-known work by Neil Smelser, *A Theory of Collective Behaviour* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963) (Omvedt 1994: 112-13).
"The Ad Dharmi claimed a quam identity precisely in order to undermine the notion of caste: as a quam they would enter into society as equals" (Juergensmeyer 1988:50).
8. Scholars have noted differences in customs of Dalits and upper castes in Punjab - in matters pertaining to social mores, family patterns, eating habits. (Juergensmeyer 1988:19)
9. Srinivas has explained sanskritization as the adoption of rituals, customs and ideology by a low caste to that of the dominant caste. If conceded the resultant mobility leads to positional but not structural changes in an essentially stable hierarchical order (Srinivas 1966:6-7).
10. The practices of levirate marriages (chaddhar chadhana) among the peasantry in colonial Punjab has been well documented. According to Prem Chaudhary, the

popularity of this practice emanated for retaining landed property within the family (Sangari and Vaid 1993:315).

11. In a similar analysis of rural Punjab selective discrimination against females has been explained in terms of strong patriarchal traditions that marginalise females and provide them with a poor status. (Das Gupta 1987:77-100)

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INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

S.C.O. 1126-27, Sector 22-B, Chandigarh