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**“I AM DALIT, HOW ARE YOU?”:
IDENTITY REPRESENTATIONS
IN DALIT HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the Dalit transnational activism that advocates Dalit human rights. It analyzes the representation of the collective Dalit activists' identity. The primary data (interviews and representational data) was collected during the fieldwork in two organizations, the NCDHR and the IDSN, which are the focus of this thesis. Thesis uses international relations' theory on transnational activism. For the analytical part, discourse analysis is applied in order to find the main identity-related themes in the Dalit Human rights movement, and to place them into the wider Dalit social movement discourse. The point of departure for the analysis is the paradoxical aspect of the epistemological tensions between the collective identity and human rights standpoints. It then describes the transnationalism of the organizations. The discussion is followed by analysis of Dalit identity representations. Finally, it then discusses the attempts of Dalit activists to enter the human rights discourse. The thesis concludes that the discursive representations of Dalits do not escape the wider "local" Dalit social movement context. At the same time, it instrumentally uses international human rights' discourse.

Keywords: Dalits, caste, transnational activism, human rights, framing, India, collective identity, discourse, the global and the local, representation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDMAM	All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch
BJP	The Bharata Janata Party
BSP	The Bahujan Samaj Party
CERD	The Convention of Elimination of Racial Discrimination
DA3	Dalit Ardhik Adhikar Andolan
EU	The European Union
HRW	The Human Rights Watch
IDSN	The International Dalit Solidarity Network
IMF	The International Monetary Fond
INGO	International NGO
NCDHR	The National Campaign of Dalit Human Rights
NCHR	The National Commission of Human Rights (India)
NDMJ	National Dalit Movement for Justice
NFDLRM	National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movements
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OBCS	Other Backward Castes
SCS	Scheduled Castes
STS	Scheduled Tribes
TAN	Transnational Advocacy Network
TC	Transnational Coalition
TSMO	Transnational Social Movement Organization
UN	The United Nations
WCAR	The World Conference Against Racism

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*One man's imagined community (Anderson, 1983)
is another man's political prison.
A. Appadurai (1990, p. 259)*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

Dalit, as a category is a modern construct. Etymologically the word *Dalit* derived from ‘crushed, ground, destroyed’ which leads to the meaning of ‘depressed’ (Narayan, 2008, p. 171). The word was used since the early 20th century, the beginning of the Dalit social movement. Ambedkar¹ was using the word himself, and later, The Dalit Panthers expanded the meaning of it by including not only Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), Other Backward classes (OBCs)² and all groups, that are “oppressed” (e.g. women) (Webster, 1999 (1995), p. 68). Thus, it has always referred to a group of people that are contentious with their state of being. The word Dalit is used to refer to the untouchables, or the SCs (as it is mostly used nowadays) in this thesis³. Dalit is a new category chosen by untouchables themselves ”to indicate their lack of belief in being pollution, their sense that their condition was the fault of the caste system, and their inclusion in the Ambedkar movement of all those subordinated by their religious, social and economic status” (Zelliot, 2005, p. vii). It thus reverses the negative connotation in the identity into a positive one (Rao, 2009, p. 1). One must be well aware of the problem of the categorizing of the SCs. Gandhi, for example, used the term *harijan* (“Child of God”), which was critically met by the Dalits and has now negative meaning⁴.

To avoid further confusion, it is first appropriate to explain what is the caste system. In India, subcontinent it has been traditionally perceived as *varṇa* system. It comprises of four *varṇas* (Sanskrit - “colours”): *brahman* (the priests), *kṣatriya* (the warriors and the king), *vaiśīya*

1 Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was famous Dalit leader and activist during the pre- and post-independence period in India. He was one of the first Dalits to achieve high education status.

2 SCs, STs and OBCs are categories scheduled in the Indian constitution and given there reservations for jobs in the state sector or educational institutions.

3 According to the 2001 Census of India, SCs constitute 16.2% of the Indian population (Census of India, 2001). They are varied and dispersed through the entire country. However, one should note, in this thesis I do not refer to all Dalits of India, but representations of particular movements of Dalit activists, as it will be shown further.

4 For Dalits, *harijan* had a protective and humiliating meaning (as a God's child would mean a person that does not have parents (interview with an NCDHR activists). This argument also reflects the disagreement of the Ambedkar and Gandhi. See Zelliot, 2005, pp. 150-178.

(merchants and peasants) and *śūdr* (laborers and peasants). Anyone outside the *varna* system is an untouchable. Within *varṇas* and the untouchable groups there are numerous *jatis*, or castes (e.g. rajput is *jati* within the *kṣatriya varṇa*). Even traditionally, the system is far more complicated, and each category is debatable. Also, the same categories can hold different status in different regions, and many *jatis* can be found in only one particular region.

There have been numerous writings on the caste system by authors from different disciplines in social sciences in India and outside the country. Most of the classical approaches looked to the caste system as a hierarchical social entity that contains features like division of labour, rules for food, marriage, etc. (See Dumont, 2009 (1966), p. 21, Ghuriye 2004 (1991), Bouglé 2004 (1991). Bouglé and that this division is determined by the purity and impurity categories (Dumont, 2009 (1966), p. 26). Many authors have attempted to explain the caste system by combining methods from social sciences and anthropology and using classical Sanskrit texts, such as the laws of Manu or *Jātaka*⁵. Terms like "dominance" and "sanskritization"⁶ were of much importance in describing the relationship between different castes. Some authors like Gupta tend to adopt different methods by analysing subaltern literature instead of brahmanic texts (Gupta, 2004 (1991), p. 111). For Gupta, castes are *discrete* categories that have discrete ideologies (*ibid.*, p. 121). In this way, Dumont's concept of hierarchy is challenged. Other bottom-up approaches to the caste system put more stress on the subaltern Dalit literature.

In the recent decades, because of the politicization of caste, writings from the political and social science disciplines have mushroomed. The Dalit mobilization from social movement perspective is discussed by Gorrige (2005, 2009), whose articles focus principally on Dalit Panthers and movements in Tamil Nadu, particularly their rhetoric. A recent book, based on the doctoral dissertation by Hardtmann (2009) which is an attempt to provide a holistic picture of Dalit social movement and the discourses that it forms, is, an important source for this thesis. Political aspects of Dalit mobilization are discussed by Sudha Pai and Anupama Rao (2009). Some authors have described and provided a picture of Dalit human rights movements and their attempts to make the Dalit issue international (See, for instance, Clifford Bob, 2007; Jens Lerche, 2008).

5 For instance, Dumont consciously underlies the importance of ancient Sanskrit texts in analysing caste system (Dumont, 2009 (1966) p. 31).

6 *Sanskritization*, a term introduced by M. N. Srinivas in 1952, describes a process in the hierarchical caste system where a low caste groups rise their status by accepting and borrowing the higher caste rituals and religious practices (Srinivas, 1952, in Srinivas, 1956, p. 481).

1.2 Problem, Purpose and the Research Question of the Thesis

This thesis is an attempt to provide a deeper picture of contemporary Dalit social movement in India; particularly, its tendency to locate itself in between the global discourse of human rights and identity-based social movement discourse. It uses a discursive approach to identity, which “sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always ‘in process’” (Hall, 2000, p. 16).

The Dalit category is now often used for political, social, developmental mobilization. This is especially related to the issues of quotas, reservations and policies that favour them (Fuller, 2003, p. 493). As a consequence, there is a tendency to employ a stable and stagnated concept of the Dalit category. However, herein lies the paradox, as the Dalit activists use the concepts that have been criticized by scholars, such as the romanticized and savage “local” (Reddy, 2005, pp 545-546). In addition, identities (in this case, Dalit identity) which have mostly been studied from the constructivist point of view and have been described as fluid and changing, are now defined by Dalits as static entities and thus a way for primordialism is paved: “[caste] define itself and the problem of caste in terms of its rigidity, its doctrinally (and therefore historically) given nature, and in general its presumed stasis” (*ibid.*, p. 547). Reddy makes her argument within the debate of “ethnicization” of caste. According to Gorringer (Gorringer, 2005), the central paradox of identity politics is that it “emerges in response to meta-categories within which groups are subsumed, but often culminate by reinstating essentialisms that delineate distinct group identities” (p. 656). In this way, people identify themselves as members of one particular group, and thus essentialise and narrow identity to one particular category. Human rights then are suggested as a way to escape the drawbacks of identity politics and avoid the possibility of reinforcing discriminatory structures (*ibid.*, p. 669).

Indeed, in the past twenty years the Dalit movement has made huge strides to internationalize their issue and reformulate it in the language of human rights. The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) is the organization that contributed most to these developments. Currently, these activists are continuing their work together with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (ISDN), an organization, established partly by their initiative. These organizations mobilizes activists under Dalit identity locally (within India) and internationally (South Asian countries that fall into societies where caste system exists; non-Indian Human rights activists and among the Diaspora). However, there is a question if quite recent attempts to formulate “Dalit human rights” escapes the paradox of identity politics. The wording of their aims (“Dalit rights are human rights”) pose questions as what

these activists mean by human rights and Dalit rights and how they translate globalized concepts of human rights into a local caste discrimination issue, or vice versa. Another interesting question is how this mobilization under “primordialized” Dalit identity goes along with human rights premises, and how or if it facilitates to glocalization of human rights.

In respect to this problem, the aim of this thesis is to investigate and discuss the Dalit identity representations in the language of the the NCDHR and the IDSN, and their relationship to the strategies of internationalization of the caste issue. Thus it is also a try to make a contribution to the academic debate on identity-based and human rights oriented transnational activism. In addition, the thesis will also attempt to describe the discourses that are formulated by these organizations, or that the organizations place themselves in. Thus, the main research question of this thesis is “how do Dalits represent their discursive identity in formulating their rights as human rights?”. To answer this research question, firstly, the language and the representation of the organizations that form a particular discourse, will be analysed. Secondly, it is important to ask how and why the Dalit anti-discrimination struggle is made into a struggle for human rights (internationalization), or how human rights are made into Dalit rights (glocalization)? The thesis attempts to answer these questions firstly, by providing analysis of the transnationalism aspect in the Dalit human rights movement. It is then followed by analysis of the discursive representations of the Dalit identity. Finally, it discusses how this identity is placed into the International human rights discourse while framing the caste issue.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses theories from the social movement and human rights disciplines and some aspects of the academic discussion on globalization. It also focuses on representation and discourse, formed by the organizations. The type of the organizations that are analyzed in this thesis is described by Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998). These authors called them “transnational advocacy networks (TANs)” (p. 1):

Transnational advocacy networks are proliferating and their goal is to change the behaviour of states and of international organizations. Simultaneously principled and strategic actors, they “frame” issues to make them comprehensible to target audiences, to attract attention and encourage action, and to “fit” with favourable institutional venues. Network actors bring new ideas, norms, and discourses into policy debates, and serve as sources of information and testimony (pp. 2-3).

In the academic discussion on Dalit transnational activism, Kecks and Sikkink's concept is most often used. Although the NCDHR and the IDSN could be considered to be TANs, it is important to note that sometimes, the boundaries between TANs, International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) are blurred (Pipper and Uhlin, 2004, pp. 4, 6; Tarrow, 2006, p. 29). While INGOs are described as "primary actors that constitute transnational collective action", this action is also taken up by TANs and TCs, the latter one being more formal type of activism (Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, 2008, p. 329). TSMOs are considered to represent stronger collective identity and be more apt for mobilization and protest action (*ibid.*, p. 330).

However, the examples of the IDSN and the NCDHR demonstrate how difficult it is to place transnational activism into a rigid classification. These organizations mobilize under strong identity politics, they have paid personnel, legal status (*ibid.*) and routinised activities. They are networking, creating pressure, making recommendations, organizing rallies, campaigning, lobbying and cooperating with other organizations on the grassroots level. Thus the NCDHR and the IDSN will be discussed here while focusing on *transnational activism* (Piper and Uhlin, 2004, p. 4). This focus also helps to "emphasize advocacy and monitoring – not service delivery [...]" (*ibid.*, p. 7), an activity that NGOs are mostly engaged in, and that the NCDHR and the IDSN are not. Transnational advocacy *networking* and *coalition formation are*, however, important strategies used by these organizations and so this typology is not completely rejected in the analysis.

TANs work by constructing cognitive frames of the issues that concern them, and they often do it in innovative ways and by framing old problems in new ways (Kecks and Sikkink, 1998; Snow et al., 2008 [1986]; Tarrow, 2008). These networks usually have a value-based ideology and make claims to use "universal" principles of, for instance, women's rights, human rights, environmentalism, etc. In this context, questions emerge about local issues that are brought on the global stage and attempts to make them universal (or, *vice versa*, attempts to bring universal principles to the local environment). Some theorists challenge the idea of globalization as homogenizing cultural flows. By using the term globalization it is not meant to refer here to the merged economies of the world which are consequences of liberalization policies. Neither is globalization understood as homogenization or Americanization (Appadurai, 1998, p. 17). Appadurai (1990), for instance, introduced the term "ideoscapes", which means flows of political ideologies (p. 299).

Basu also argues that "the dangers of excessive universalism can be confronted" only when global activism is "grounded in local realities" (Basu, 2003, p. 100). Thus, although the TANs spread sets

of shared practices and norms, it is important to take the local variable into account. Consequently, the theoretical questions asked by this thesis are: In which ways do TANs reformulate the local issue into an international human rights discourse? Do the reformulated issues within the “global” space depart far from the “local” formulations? How are the “local” identities used within the “global” human rights discourse? Here, the word “local” is used without the romanticizing, essentializing and primordializing connotation and “global” does not mean the universal and “western”. Rather, like in Basu's article, “local” means regional and indigenous and “global” means transnational (*ibid.*, p. 84).

1.4 Methodological Framework

1.4.1 Discourse Analysis as a Theory, Method and Tool

The research question proceeds from a constructionist ontology of this thesis as it “asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2008, p. 19)⁷. Therefore, the Dalit identity will be looked upon as a social construct and, what is more, as a phenomenon, which has many versions, is dependent on the social context, actors and historical period. By employing the constructionist view, I will attempt to demonstrate the plurality of interpretations of social reality and the fact that it is learned by social actors by interpreting their social environment and conditions, borrowing and constructing meanings. Thus, a problem of representation and the ability of language to represent social reality are relevant to this study. Discourse is constituted by language and representations, social activities and strategies. Language, it is important to note here, is understood as “system of representation“ that uses “some element to stand for or represent what we want to say, to express or communicate a thought, concept, idea or feeling” (Hall, 1997a, p. 4). While analysing discourse, this thesis will hold to a notion that language is metaphorical and ambivalent (Alvesson and Skölderger, 2002, p 151), and thus an emphasis will be put in this study on the language that is used to describe Dalits. One can assume that the Dalit human rights movement emphasizes particular identities and images, and it has its own language to describe these entities and to make them “its own”.

Furthermore, the importance of context for any kind of social phenomenon is significant in post-structuralists’ approaches. The representation and the language are thus considered to be contextual,

⁷ Interpretivist epistemology requires to “grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman, 2008, p. 16), selfreflectivity and acceptance of final “explanation” limits.

i.e. containing particular *situated meanings* (Gee, 2005, p. 57). This thesis will look into the “*effects and consequences* of representation - its ‘politics’” rather than “how language produces the meanings, which is the concern of semiotics” (*ibid.*, p. 6, original emphasis). Thus, this research will attempt to demonstrate the multiplicity of Dalit identity: particularly, how it depends on the context, in this case, the context of the organization which situate Dalit rights within the context of human rights and within the context of wider Dalit social movement, Indian socio-political and transnational spaces.

Here, it is useful to introduce a concept of discourse *model(s)*. discourse models are ““theories” (story lines, images, explanatory frameworks) that people hold, often unconsciously and use to make sense of the world and their experiences in it” (Gee, 2008, p. 61)⁸. Particular discourse models and situated meanings of words are connected (*ibid.*, p. 64), and so analysis of representation and language helps to describe the discourse models of a social group. The Dalit social movement constitutes a particular discourse. However, it is not homogeneous and contains different discourse models. Thus, this thesis will attempt to provide a picture of the Dalit discourse (which will be based on secondary data, i.e. academic readings), and see where and how the Dalit human rights organizations place themselves within this discourse and what discourse model(s) they represent. Consequently, discourse is analyzed in this thesis by looking at the historicities, identities, authoritative images, ideologies, debates within the discourse and the situated meanings of these in the representation of Dalit human rights movement.

In this thesis Foucault’s concept of discourse will be used. “Discourse constructs the topic”, “defines and produces the objects of our knowledge”, “governs the way that topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about”, etc. (Hall, 2007b, p. 44). However, Foucault’s discourse is broad and strongly historical (*ibid.*, p. 46). What I mean by Dalit discourse is that it is rather a narrower discourse, which has relation and can be situated within the wider (Foucault’s) discourse of Indian politics, multiculturalism and identities. Hence, this thesis will not focus on historical change of Dalit discourse (but will not neglect this aspect either).

For using discourse analysis as a tool, this thesis employs James Paul Gee’s (Gee, 2008) distinction between a “small d” discourse from a “big D” Discourse. The first one, “Big D” Discourse is a wider Discourse, that embraces also the language and enacts specific identities and activities (Gee, 2008, p. 7). In this thesis, then, I will look into Dalit socio-political mobilization/organizational Discourse, the models it contains, the relationship with other (e.g. Human Rights Discourse)

⁸ In other literature, a term “cultural models” is preferred. However, “cultural models” is not a precise concept, as not everyone that shares Discourse model are from the same culture. See Gee,(2008), p. 61.

Discourses, etc. A “small d” discourse is basically the language in use (*ibid.*) and thus analysis of it will be the analysis of language, employed by the organizations (its rhetoric) in their representation. To avoid the confusion and because ”D“ Discourse embraces the ”d“ discourse (the latter one being more a tool for the analysis), one wording, ”discourse“ is used in this thesis.

1.4.2 Case Study Approach

A case study approach in this thesis is used in a limited sense⁹, only meaning that data was gathered from two organizations (Bryman, 2008, p. 52). Although the focus of the thesis is on two organizations, they are related and form one discourse. The comparison of the two organizations *is not* one of the analytical tools of the study. For this reason, this thesis is a *single-case* study. The organizations are chosen because they are examples of identity-based human rights organizations, and thus this kind of case study may contribute to transnational activism theories and have some generalizability as there is not much research done on the relationship between discursive identity and transnational activism. At the same time, to some extent they constitute a unique case because of their specificity of advocating Dalit rights.

1.4.3 Primary Data

This thesis is based on data which was gathered in New Delhi, Copenhagen and also from the internet (homepages of the the NCDHR and the NCDHR). The fieldwork consisted of the following parts: (1) conducting interviews (with interviewees) with members of the the NCDHR and the IDSN¹⁰; (2) gathering primary literature sources for a MA thesis, such as reports, pamphlets and statements of the NCDHR; (3) interviewing academics and researchers (informants) who do research on Dalit issues, social stratification, the caste system, social movements and human rights. For the ethical purposes, all interviewees and informants are kept anonymous. The pictures in the Appendix 2 are used with the permission of the the NCDHR.

⁹ Since the method of this thesis is discourse analysis, and the focus is on representations and identity, case as an approach is limited here.

¹⁰ For the interview guide and methodology of the interviews, see Enclosure 1.

1.5 Delimitating Remarks

Dalit discourses in India are varied and different, intervened and related. It is sometimes difficult to talk about one Dalit group without mentioning the other. Although the IDSN is networking with other national Dalit human rights organizations in South Asian countries, this thesis limits itself to the two organizations. The reasons for this are the lack of space in this thesis; the close cooperation of the NCDHR and the IDSN; their agency in forming one discourse model which is close to the Indian cultural, social and political and historical space that the author is well aware of.

It is not the goal of this thesis to provide a full picture of the NCDHR and the IDSN from the social movement perspective. Nor is it to describe in detail the identities of the activists. Rather, it is an attempt to provide the analysis of the representational discourse that constitutes those identities. This thesis does not discuss general situation of human rights in India and leaves out the discussions on the subaltern Dalit communities themselves, the discriminatory difficulties they face on the ground, the statistics of these aspects and the ways the activists interact with these communities.

2. THE NCDHR AND IDSN: TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISTS

2.1 The Background of the NCDHR and the IDSN

2.1.1 The NCDHR Background

According to the NCDHR's self-description in their homepage, the NCDHR is “a forum committed to the elimination of discrimination based on caste” and “a democratic secular platform” (accessed on 25 03 2009). The NCDHR works as advocates and is involved more in networking activities than the activities on the grassroots level, although sometimes they do work directly with the disadvantaged Dalit communities. Established in 1998, the NCDHR is the first organization that has managed to unify Dalits nationally for the “Dalit rights are human rights“ cause. The activists are aware of the novelty of the the NCDHR, as it is clear from their representational documents and speeches.

While the headquarters of the the NCDHR are in Delhi, it has offices in 14 states of the country¹¹. The Delhi office is the national coordinator and communicates constantly with the state offices. The latter ones work on the field and cooperate with each other. The NCDHR networks between grassroots organizations in the whole of India, gathers data and does monitoring of media. For special events, programmes and rallies the activists from different states work together. The main events, activities and internationalization process is led by the Delhi office. This thesis is based on fieldwork that was done in the Delhi office. Besides this “geographical” structure, the organization has four “movements”, or departments, that work for separate causes: All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), Dalit Ardhik Adhikar Andolan (DA3), National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ), National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movements (NFDLRM).

AIDMAM is a movement, dedicated for the advocacy of Dalit women's rights. Focusing on caste *and* gender discrimination, this movement distinguishes itself from other NGOs that focus solely on women's rights (interview with an NCDHR activist). AIDMAM's strategies include networking, advocacy and training programmes that build the capacity of activists (NCDHR homepage, accessed 13 04 2010). They also monitor atrocities committed against Dalit women and record their

¹¹ These states are: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Pondicherry, Punjab Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

experiences. An outcome of the latter activities are reports with various case narratives from four states in India on individual Dalit women experiences.

The main strategies of DA3 are research, monitoring, advocacy and building of awareness. (NCDHR, DDA3 Annual Report 2008-09, p. 1). To be more precise, DA3 focuses on monitoring national and states' budgets' and checking the allocation of funds for SCs that is supposed to be implemented by the Special Component Plan (SCP) (*ibid.*, p. 5). They also organize workshops and teachings for grassroots organizations, arrange and participate in rallies, and advocate educational Dalit rights by supporting reservations in educational institutions.

Similarly, NDMJ also organizes rallies and increases the visibility of Dalit problems. Their focus is directed, however, towards advocacy of political and civil rights of Dalits. They defend Dalits against “human rights violations in the form of atrocities” (NCDHR homepage, accessed 13 04 2010). Advocacy of civil and political rights and monitoring of the criminal justice administration system are the basic strategies of the NDMJ (*ibid.*). Since 2009, they have also addressed the Dalit political participation problems and monitored the General Elections in the 2009. Another NDMJ focus is on the atrocities, committed against Dalits in 14 states of India. Full and part time activists monitor local and national newspapers in Hindi, English and eight state languages (NCDHR, “Dalit Monitor (Atrocities on Dalits)”, 2008, p. 19).

NFDLRM, as the title implies, is a movement that is networks locally among land rights organizations that focus on Dalit and ST land rights. It also monitors and documents the crimes related to land deprivation from SCs and STs (the NCDHR homepage, accessed 13 04 2010). NFDLRM is not based in Delhi, and its members were not interviewed while gathering data for this thesis. All movements cooperate with each other, share contacts, information and networking strategy. They all edit reports, and most of them are dedicated to a particular movement's cause. Some movements work in more states than others. The present structure of the NCDHR is not strictly fixed. The NCDHR leaders do not reject the possibility to restructure the organization in the future and include more “rights” movements (interview with an NCDHR activist).

It is obvious that the movements are established according to the international human rights norms, i.e. the human rights of Dalits are being reformulated after the international norms, formulated by the UN. The two main UN documents, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are represented by NDMJ and DA3 adequately. Similarly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and

the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women are the base document for the AIDAMAM. However, in the working process, the movements use different UN declarations strategically, i.e. to apply particular documents and legal discourses according to their needs. Most of the activists are well familiar with the UN declarations and formulations of the international human rights law, as some of them not only work according to these principles, but participate in the traineeships in Geneva (interview with an the NCDHR activist).

2.1.2 The IDSN Background

International Dalit Solidarity Network was established particularly for networking *transnationally* between the organizations that work for the eradication of caste discrimination. The IDSN networks between National advocacy platforms in caste affected countries, Dalit solidarity networks in Europe, international associates and research associates (the IDSN homepage, accessed 12 03 2010). The headquarters of the IDSN are in Copenhagen, and besides that it has small offices (some of them have only one full-time activist) in Sweden, United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, Belgium and Germany.

Besides transnational networking and information sharing among national platforms and international associates (particular list of NGOs that engage in cooperation with the IDSN), the IDSN advocates the Dalit issue and builds the international awareness about caste discrimination in South Asia. According to the the IDSN homepage, they do so by attempting to influence particular EU administration bodies and single governments' officials that could apply pressure to the states where caste systems exist and try to make them engage into political dialogue with caste affected countries. Secondly, they seek to make the EU to become aware of the caste system and its inequalities and be sensitive to it while making donations. Thirdly, they build awareness of private sector actors in trade relations (the IDSN homepage, accessed 20 04 2010). For instance, the IDSN in Copenhagen creates teachings and publishes manuals for private companies that work in India (interview with an IDSN activist). Finally, the IDSN also engages in the UN discourse. They network, create recommendations and facilitate consultations between special rapporteurs and affected communities and in this way contribute to the preparation of the UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent (the IDSN homepage, accessed 20 04 2010).

It is important to note that whereas most of the the NCDHR activists are middle class educated

Dalits, for the most part, the IDSN members are not from the Indian Diaspora community. Hence, they are not Dalits themselves, and hold more “activists” than Dalit identity. However, In this thesis, the IDSN representation is still analysed, as it does tend to represent Dalits and it says a lot about their identity. In addition, their close cooperation with the NCDHR and other national platforms, lead one to assume that the representations can be treated as one.

2.2 The NCDHR and The IDSN: Transnational Activists

It is known that transnational activism¹² is not a new phenomenon, and dates from the 19th century anti-slavery movements (Kecks and Sikkink, 1998) or even earlier, like Reformations spread throughout Europe (Tarrow, 2006). However, the recent developments in the world strongly facilitated the expansion of the scale and change in the patterns of transnational activism (Piper and Uhlin, 2004, p. 3). Tarrow argues that what is new about the transnational activism of our age is “its connection to the current wave of globalization and its relation to the changing structure of international politics” (Tarrow, 2006, p. 5). Tarrow puts emphasis on the actions of the international institutions as important factors in the creation of opportunities for causing the contention¹³ of transnational activists (*ibid.*, pp. 25-27). However, Dalit transnational activism shows that contention is not necessarily (directly or indirectly) caused by the international institutions like IMF, World Bank, etc. The organizations are dissatisfied with the state, but also much with the society, its norms, structure, and particular cultural values. Thus, the contention of Dalits is itself expressed through particular cultural symbols that are embedded locally, an argument developed in the third section of this thesis. Nevertheless, Dalit transnational activism does aim to some international institutions, like EU, UN, but only with a purpose to gain support from them and not to oppose them.

According to Piper and Uhlin, activism is *transnational* when it has at least one of the following characters: (1) it focuses on transnational issues; (2) actors and their organizational structure are transnational or the activists are not the citizens of the country where the issue is located; (3) methods and strategies are transnational; (4) the issue that they are concerned with is beyond borders of their country; (5) activists consider themselves “global citizens” or hold transnational

12 In the academic literature, a difference between “international” and “transnational” is made. International communication, networking, cooperation is performed by state actors, whereas transnationalism is enacted by non-state actors (Soyez, 2001, p. 8).

13 Tarrow defines transnational contention as “conflicts that link transnational activists to one another, to states, and to international institutions” (Tarrow 2006, p. 25).

views (p. 5). The NCDHR is an organization dedicated, as its title implies, to advocate Dalit human rights nationally, i.e. within India. It was established in 1998 after meetings and consultations of academics, activists, Dalit movements, human rights organizations and Dalit organizations from all India (the homepage of the NCDHR, accessed 20 02 2010), who then decided that there was a need for a platform, dedicated for *Dalit* human rights (interview with a member of the NCDHR). Despite the title's implication that the NCDHR is a “national campaign”, it has been involved in networking and advocating Dalit human rights transnationally from the very beginning of its functioning. In fact, it was established already within the existing discourse of transnational advocacy networking, human rights movements, and not as an isolated purely local Dalit movement. However, it could not have emerged if the whole Dalit social movement discourse would not have previously existed in India. Whether the caste system itself is a transnational phenomenon is a more complicated question and there is not enough space to discuss it here. Although formally the caste system exists in different countries, it is most prevalent in the South Asian sub-continent. However, the NCDHR and the IDSN allies occasionally with the Burakumin community in Japan and some African groups that face discrimination similar to caste discrimination in South Asia.

The transnationalism of the NCDHR meets more than one criteria of transnationalism, defined by Piper and Uhlin. It not only closely cooperates with the organizations and activists outside India, but it cooperated with human rights activists when founding of the the IDSN. An interviewed member of the IDSN, for example, told me that she was working on a Dalit issue in another organization, that cooperated with the NCDHR. Later, they decided that there was a need for a separate organization that would work for the Dalit issue solely on the transnational level. The set up of IDNS by the NCDHR and international activists is an example of *Transnational coalition formation*, “the horizontal formation of common networks among actors from different countries with similar claims” (Tarrow, 2006, p. 32). The IDSN however, calls itself a “network“. Networks, according to Tarrow, are more loose organizations and they are not as *purposive* as coalitions (*ibid.*, pp. 164-165). As shown, the IDSN and the NCDHR are purposive and quite strongly institutionalized organizations. In addition, this coalition falls into what Tarrow (2006) described (within the typology of transnational coalitions (pp. 166-179) as *campaign coalitions* which “combine high intensity of involvement with long-term cooperation” (*ibid.* pp. 168, 175), features that are easily recognized in the IDSN and the NCDHR.

The IDSN alone enacts internationalism by seeking support from UN, EU institutions and private sector actors. It is mostly occupied with what Tarrow called *externalization*, “the vertical projection

of domestic claims onto international institutions or foreign actors” (*ibid.*, p. 32), except that this organization is based outside caste affected countries and led by non-Dalits. The NCDHR, also employs *externalization* strategy. It drew attention of academics, civil society groups and media because of its participation in the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban in 2001. Together with support from INGOs like HRW and other organizations the NCDHR were trying to make itself visible and put pressure on the UN so that it would include caste discrimination issue into the conference agenda¹⁴. Although the idea of caste discrimination issue in the UN discourse was strongly opposed by the Indian government, and was not included in the final statement of the conference, the visibility of Dalits has definitely been raised.

In this way, the NCDHR and the IDSN formed a transnational coalition (Tarrow, 2006) that has tried to put pressure on the Indian state so that it would create more policies and reservations in the public and also the private sectors. The externalization strategy by reaching out for foreign support and in this way putting pressure on the local government is called a “boomerang” pattern, a concept introduced by Kecks and Sikkink (1998). They described the “boomerang” pattern as emerging mostly in authoritative states, where the activists' access to their own governments is blocked (*ibid.*, p. 13). India, however, is a democratic country and untouchability is prohibited by its Constitution (The Constitution of India, Art. 17). Still, Dalit transnational activists found it useful and reasonable to use the boomerang pattern strategy.

Some scholars hold the NCDHR along with powerful international organizations as one of the main actors in the process of internationalization of the Dalit issue. According to Clifford Bob, success of Dalits to draw attention of powerful organizations like HRW¹⁵ and Ford Foundation contributed a lot to the establishment of the NCDHR (Bob, 2007, p. 179). These developments and the awards that Martin Macwan, the president of the NCDHR received, later facilitated in making the Dalit issue more visible internationally. However, some of the the NCDHR founding members were

14 For a very detailed and thorough narrative of Dalit participation in Durban, See Hardtmann (2009). Based on her narrative, a short and superficial summary of the event is provided. the NCDHR and the IDSN had started to prepare for the event quite early before it started, and, together with some other activists, like Burakumin community, prepared a resolution, which “recommended that caste discrimination against Dalits should be taken up at the WCAR and at the Preparatory committee meetings, among other issues” (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 192). Already before the conference, some international human rights organizations, such as HRW, gave their support for Dalits (*ibid.*). In 2000 in Geneva, UN sub-commission of Human Rights passed a resolution that discrimination based on work and descent should be included in the WCAR in Durban and since then, Dalits started exploiting this terminology (p. 194). Caste was constantly renegotiated issue before and during the Durban conference. During this time, activists lobbied for caste to be included in the final discussions as a form of discrimination based on descent and work.

15 HRW initiated the report on Dalits called Broken People that was written by Smita Narula.

active in advocating Dalit human rights in India and participated in different Dalit human rights movements before the establishment of the NCDHR (interview with a NCDHR activist). In addition, some internationalization developments also took place before the establishment of the NCDHR and before HRW started paying attention to the Dalit issue (Bob, 2007, pp. 175-178). Thus, the establishment of the organization and its success on the international arena can not be seen as a sudden development that appeared only because powerful international actors finally accepted the importance of the issue. Rather, local and international agencies should be seen as interacting and having blurred boundaries and thus both contributing in creation of the powerful international platform for Dalit advocacy. Similarly, the founding of the the IDSN proves the agency and capacity of Dalit activists. The IDSN was founded by Indians and activists from abroad, who worked in other international organizations before (interview with the IDSN member). It is shown in this section the problems of a rigid classification of transnational activist groups with an example of Dalit transnational activism. The specificity of Dalit transnational activism and its local embeddings are clearly visible in discourse model they form and its relation to the main Dalit social movement discourse in India. This aspect is discussed in the next section of the thesis.

3. REPRESENTING THE DALITS: DISCURSIVE IDENTITIES IN THE MOVEMENT

3.1 Identity, Representations and Discourse

Social constructionists see “identity construction and attribution as a process grounded in different kinds of social practices and activities” (De Fina, 2006, p. 353). In this thesis, a discursive, and not a psychological approach is used to describe identities and the process of identification¹⁶. Identification is a dynamic and never accomplished process: “though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference [...]. Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption” (Hall, 2000, p. 17). Identity then, is never fixed and constantly constructed and reconstructed. It is discursive, as during the identification process, meanings that are attached to identities are borrowed, shared, redefined.

This process is embedded in the discourse (and discourse models). Identities are constructed within, and not outside the discourse (*ibid.*). Within the discourse, social groups represent themselves through particular situated meanings and thus identity creation is a “locally managed process” (De Fina, 2006, p. 353). At the same time, De Fina argues, that “identities that people display, perform, contest, or discuss in interaction are based on ideologies and beliefs about the characteristics of social groups and categories and about the implications belonging to them” (*ibid.*, p. 354). However, these ideologies and beliefs, I argue, are also discursive. As nothing exists outside of the discourse, and *all* practices have discursive meaning (Hall, 2007 (1997)), it is only possible to assume that identity construction is influenced by ideologies and beliefs that become part of the *particular* discourse or discourse model. The common understandings, beliefs and ideologies are discursive, but shared, borrowed and deployed in between Discourses and discourse models.

By contrast, identification in common understanding “is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (Hall, 2000, p. 16). This aspect of collectivity in the identification process, and its tendency to assert and construct

¹⁶ For the differences and similarities, also Foucault's relation to these both approaches, see Hall (2000).

identities on the base of particular understanding of what is a group is relevant to this thesis, as Dalits employ some primordial notions of identity process of its construction.

A dynamic identification process is not only about sharing the meanings, but also about a constant making of the boundaries between “us” and “the Other”, identifying differences and distancing or approaching other discursive groups and ideologies. For a construction of identity, this process is crucial: “identities are constructed through, and not outside, difference [...]. Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render abjected“ (*ibid.*, pp. 17-18).

Within the Dalit discourse, Dalit identity is constructed of different categories and meanings “locally”. At the same time, Dalit discourse contains meanings that circulate between different discourses within socio-political space in India and transnationally and become situated, when employed by Dalits. The representations of this process are analysed in the following sections, after description of Dalit social movement and Dalit human rights movement discursiveness.

3.2 Dalit Discourse and Discourse Models

Hardtmann (2009) describes several Dalit discourses that are from different geographical spaces in India: the Dalit Christian discourse from South India, Dalit Buddhist discourse from Maharashtra and Dalit political discourse from Uttar Pradesh with BSP as main political body (p. 88). However, in this thesis, the whole Dalit movement is believed to form *one* Dalit discourse in Indian socio-political space and the Christian, Buddhist or political trends in it formulate *discourse models*. In addition, these are not the only perspectives within the Dalit discourse, as Hardtmann recognizes herself (*ibid.*). She also shows how these perspectives are fused, combined and recombined together from pieces (*ibid.* p. 116). The different movements are decentralized and dispersed, but it makes one network where activists are linked through personal relationships, kinship, but do not have one leader (*ibid.*, p. 118). Thus, it would be rather difficult to separate those movements and treat them as separate discourses.

Along with the perspectives described by Hardtmann, one should consider following discourse models as the main ones within the Dalit discourse: political - BSP, Buddhist, Christian, Dalit human rights movement, Dalit feminist movement, Marxist, literary-artistic, academic¹⁷. Again, it

¹⁷ Because of lack of space, it is not possible here to discuss and describe all these Discourse models. Briefly, BSP is a Dalit political party that recently became prominent in Uttar Pradesh state of India. The chief minister of this state,

is important to note that they are not isolated from each other and share meanings, actors, ideas, etc. This thesis is concerned with the fourth one, the Dalit human rights discourse model. It contains particular situated meanings that construct activist identity. However, the Dalit human rights movement discourse model contains meanings that are shared with international human rights, UN, ILO, etc. discourses, as well as with the whole Dalit social movement discourse and discourse models. The further parts of this section analyse the situated meanings within it and the group identity that it formulates. In addition, it places Dalit human rights discourse model within the entire discourse of Dalit movement.

3.2 Dalitization: Making Dalits Visible

In the web-page of the NCDHR, phases of the organization's activities are described: (1) raising visibility, (2) internationalizing Dalit rights, (3) holding state accountable and (4) the present state, holding the four movements that were discussed earlier. The present phase is concerned with the following goals: “(1) to hold the state accountable for all human rights violations committed against Dalits; (2) to sensitize civil society by raising visibility of the Dalit problem; and (3) to render justice to Dalit victims of discrimination and violence” (the homepage of the NCDHR, accessed 2010 04 20).

One might ask, what does it mean to make Dalits “visibilized” (a word used by the informants of this study). Caste in India is often referred to as “*hidden apartheid*” by Dalit activists. To make this apartheid “visibilized”, then, is one of the tasks undertaken by the NCDHR. During the the NCDHR's representational meeting and in some interviews the NCDHR activists referred to this phase as “Dalitization”. The representation of the organizations thus have a clear picture of who is a Dalit, what makes her or him a Dalit. *Dalitization*, then, means a mobilization for the cause of

Mayavati, is well known politician and one of the most famous Dalit women in India, but met with controversy (Hartmann, 2009; Hasan, 1989). Another political movement that mobilizes Dalits, but does not focus on them, is Naxalites and other Marxist parties. Dalit feminism based on gendered identities, and thus pertains different Discourse models. Christian, Buddhist and Muslim ideologies for Dalits all emphasize conversion as an escape from the discrimination. They all have “Dalit theologies” and represent a refuge from discriminatory Hinduism. However, through the history, there have also been particular Dalit movements within Hinduism, like *bhakti* and prominent Hindu Dalit saints. Dalit artistic Discourse model evolved gradually after the independence. There are artists that paint, write theatre plays and authors that write Dalit literature and in this way influence the construction of Dalit identity. This literature is a modern form of social resistance that emerged since the Dalit panther movement and since then, it has been expanding and written in all India's literary languages (Brueck, 2008, p. 151). In addition, historical and epic narratives are produced that serve as demarginalization of Dalit history (Narayan, 2008). Finally, there are highly educated Dalit academics that teach in universities and work in institutes whose focus is on caste system, social exclusion, human rights, etc. These Discourse models, once again, are by far not isolated from each other. There are artists academics, who also take part in human rights activism, religious literature, Dalits that are involved in politics and other activities at the same time, etc.

Dalits, knowing clearly, that Dalits are "broken", hidden, but there is a strong feeling of potential change. The stories about the "real situation" and experiences of Dalits are revealed and the grievances are brought out. Another example of such rhetoric is an AIDMAM's report called "Dalit Women Speak out", a collection of individual stories of Dalit women that suffer caste discrimination. The stories, according to the report, are "women's first-person oral narratives" that are presented in order to unfold, highlight the violence, face by Dalit women (Irudayam, Mangubhai, Lee, 2006, pp. viii-ix). Similarly, the report "Realising Dalit Children's Right to Education" makes an allusion to an issue, that is not realized yet. It is the movement, then, which makes the stories become visible, outspoken and materialized in the human rights discourse. Change from "invisibility" to an "outspoken problem" and human rights violation is enacted by the movement.

The identity of the activists of the NCDHR is thus comprised of personal, community background and social movement experiences. This is also confirmed by one of the interviewees: "[those] who believe in Ambedkar ideology, who want to assert their rights, who want to have some changes in the Indian society. So they all come...one, second...and then those who decide that they want to be called Dalits" (Interview with a the NCDHR member). In this quote, it is not the decision factor that is important and most interesting, but that the engagement in social movement is a condition for being Dalit. Hence, action, engaging in the movement and self-awareness constitutes Dalit identity.

Still, Dalits are not represented by the NCDHR and the IDSN as a homogeneous community, or *one* community. Their significant number, 160mln. in India, is often emphasized, as well as their different occupations and dispersion through the South Asian region. However, one can recognize some collective Dalit identity symbols represented by these organizations. These symbols, I argue, do not mean literally, that a Dalit community is constructed. Rather, a Dalit *activist* identity is created and special symbols are selected to represent all Dalits.

Along with the making of social movement and making Dalits conscious about themselves, "Dalitization" is also a process of attaching symbols that provide the movement with cultural meanings. Different Dalit communities in India have traditionally been occupied with particular duties. Sometimes, duties vary from village to village. Some of them, like manual scavenging, being responsible for dead cattle and funeral fire are "negative" and represented by the IDSN and the NCDHR as humiliating, degrading, inhuman: "imagine you were not born free. Imagine you were assigned to clean dry latrines and sewers, sweep the streets or handle the dead just because of your family lineage. Imagine you were beaten, raped and humiliated because you were regarded as

“dirty” and lesser human being” (The IDSN homepage, virtual photo exhibition “We are not untouchable”, accessed 2010 04 24). At the same time, many of the “traditional“ Dalit occupations like drum-playing, particular food that they eat, their appearance, crafts are often made into a positive symbol of Dalit collective identity. This is visible in particular communities, like, for example, Paraiyars in Tamil Nadu. This community reformulated drumming, an occupation that used to be considered as polluting Dalit duty, into an art form and a positive symbol of their culture and identity (Arun, 2007, p. 207).

In the language of the NCDHR and the IDSN, these symbols also play a significant role. The NCDHR activists used drummers as a part of their representation in Durban (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 5). Similarly, there are pictures of drummers on some of their report covers. Drums and similar “positive” symbols play a part in constructing Dalit activist identity in two ways. Firstly, the NCDHR and the IDSN act on the level of mobilization and “Dalitization“ and thus inspire Dalit activists and serve as catalysts for collective identity construct, because many of the activists themselves come from Dalit communities (except the IDSN activists). Secondly, as they are representative, networking and campaigning organizations, they represent Dalits from the entire India, and, in case of the IDSN, South Asia. In other words, they speak from all Dalits and represent them to wider audience by using particular symbols.

Some of the the NCDHR reports are decorated with pictures that remind tribal craft style or even stone wall paintings of pre-historic times¹⁸. These pictures seem like traditional ornaments of a particular community that represent an ethnic group. The ornaments are different in style and aesthetics than mainstream Indian decorations, and thus it represents an opposition and belonging to non-mainstream cultural group. Along with the ornaments, the NCDHR motto is written: “Dalits. A people, a culture, a history”. Although Dalits do not have one land, as Anderson's *imagined communities* (Anderson, 1999 [1983]), they are obviously represented as a particular community, having people, their own culture and even history. This community, however, is not “local” and not “stable”. It has a history of “change”, and its whole existence is possible only because of their ability to make the change. This is also revealed by the representations of their historicity, which is discussed further.

18 This picture is added in the Appendix 2

3.4 Historicity and Identities

Like the *imagined communities*, the Dalit movement has its own historicity. Time lineage is perceived by Dalit activists from the perspective of their suffering and oppression by the higher castes. Dalits themselves often refer to the Brahmanic scriptures that legitimize the caste system. The Caste system is thereby something that have existed in the Indian sub-continent since the archaic past and thus their history is mythologized. The difference from before is that now they are engaged in social action and are struggling for a change. The history takes shape and becomes "real" and "their" in Dalit activists' perceptions since the major Dalit history landmark, Ambedkar's movement in India during the pre- and post-independence period. It divides Dalit history into two periods, one being archaic and mysterious, vague and of an endless suffering, and the other one of self-awareness and struggle, although still, full of pain.

In India's case, caste is presented as something that exists "even" after the independence, and "even" having a constitution¹⁹. Most of the Dalit activists consider the Indian Constitution one of the best in the world because of its inclusive multiculturalist ideology. Besides, the creator of the reservations for minorities, SCs and STs is Dr. B. R. Ambedkar²⁰. Hence, the Constitution symbolizes the success of Dalit struggle and merits of their famous leader. The Constitution is also important as a legal base and often referred to in their rhetoric.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was by no doubt the most prominent Dalit leader and his contribution to the Dalit struggle for their rights is obvious. As he himself was from the untouchable Mahar community, he was, according to Zelliott, a leader of caste, a spokesman of untouchables and a national spokesman (Zelliott, 2005 (2005 [1992]), p. 53). For Mahars he meant the struggle for political rights of all Indians in a democratic system (*ibid.*, p. 59). For this reason, the Ambedkar period marks a transformation in the Dalit history. Almost all the reports and publications of the NCDHR have a picture of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. The picture is located in the preamble, the cover or the inner side of the cover of the edition. They also edit pamphlets about him and his picture can be found on the agitation posters. Most of the pictures of Ambedkar are accompanied by a quotation of his thought, and sometimes he is quoted with no picture. In addition, forewords in the reports are often ended with a phrase "Jai Bhim" (literary meaning "victory Bhim"), an expression of respect for Ambedkar. Ambedkar and his principles are also referred to in the material, published

¹⁹ This particular wording of the disappointment about the present situation of Dalits "in spite of the constitutional provisions" and "even 60 year after the independence" emerged in some of the interviews with the activists and can be found in some reports of the the NCDHR.

²⁰ By advocating reservations and inclusive policies for particular castes and tribes in India as early as 1930, Ambedkar could be considered a pioneer of affirmative action in practice (See Thorat and Kumar, 2008).

by the IDSN.

In all pictures Dr. Ambedkar is wearing a suit, and thus represents an educated elite person, as he truly was. His elite image and status was of a great importance for his own untouchable Mahar community, as it represented the new identity he sought for the Mahars (Zelliot, 2005 [1992], p. 53). One of his main guiding principles for the eradication of untouchability was Dalits' education and leadership by themselves (*ibid.*, p. 62). He also saw high education as crucial precondition for Dalits to be able to represent themselves in the Executive and administration (Thorat and Kumar, 2008, p. 29). In addition, he sought to expand educational opportunities for Dalits and make them able to act in the highest levels of Indian urban society (Zelliot, 2005 (2005 [1992]), p. 159). As most of the the NCDHR activists are educated middle class and collaborate with the Dalit elite, the images of Ambedkar in the the NCDHR's representation seem to bring not only historical and ideological meaning. Most of the activists are Dalits themselves, who studied social work, human rights or other relevant disciplines that are useful in working for the Dalit issue. Hence, they constitute the continuity of Ambedkar's work and leader identities.

Ambedkar is also well known for his interpretations of Buddhism and the mass conversions of Dalit communities into Buddhism. Although in the beginning of his activities he himself even tried to promote conversion to Christianity and Islam, he gave up this strategy later (Zelliot, 2005 (2005 [1992]), p. p. 61). The activists within the organization come from different parts of India, and among them there are Buddhists, Muslims and Christians. However, the NCDHR does not relate themselves officially with any religion. Religion is not discussed in any of their reports, web-pages and not mentioned in self-representational events. Hence, for the NCDHR, Ambedkar rather means an example of activism, advocacy, ideological, but not Buddhist principles. This kind of ideology, based on ideological image that serves as a symbol for the organization is an example of a situated, “locally” embedded meaning. Whereas for some Dalits in Maharastra Ambedkar's image would mean a conversion to Buddhism and thus an escape, at least psychologically, from discrimination (*ibid.*, p. 220), for the Dalit Human rights activists it symbolizes educated elite, legal activism, unification and leadership or assistance for the discriminated Dalits.

3.3 “I am Dalit, How Are You?”: A Video Analysis

At the home pages of the IDSN and the NCDHR, a visitor can watch a short 11 minutes video,

called "I am Dalit, how are you?"²¹. This video was chosen for analysis in this thesis as it repeats the most common representations and images used in the Dalit human rights movement.

Already the name of the video itself suggests the Dalit self-conception, representation and interaction with the audience. He/she is a Dalit, a broken person. The second part of the title, i.e. the question, requires an adverb and not a noun for the answer and implies that "I am Dalit" is not simply a statement of "who I am", but "how I am". Without knowing what the word "Dalit" means, one would not understand the rationale behind the video title. A careless every-day question also makes a clear division between the speaker and the audience, as the Dalit, the one asking, wants to shock and make a clear distinction. There is the irony behind the question, as the audience is not expected to be worse than Dalits. Hence, the speaker supposes that the audience is not unprivileged and not "broken". This is also clear because the video is in English, and it is located on English web-sites. In addition, the visitors are invited to watch the video by stating the number of people who *already* watched it. It is dedicated for outsiders, so that they would understand who, or, better, *how* Dalits are. The purpose of the video is thus clear: to spread non-Dalits' awareness about Dalits and to inform as many people as possible.

Through all the video one can notice a clear distinction between "us" (Dalits) and "them" (the caste people and the Indian society). This distance is created not only linguistically, but through painful Dalit experiences of discrimination in different spaces (parts 6 and 8) and representations of their identities. Dalits are representing themselves as having particular "traditional" occupations and the feeling of tradition here is strengthened by the sound of the drum (parts 1, 2 and 5). This is also affirmed by introducing the "other" side, the upper caste members and thus creating a feeling of "debate" in the video. In this way, one would assume, an "objective" evaluation of the situation is provided, as both conflicting sides are representing their perspectives. However, with the help of irony behind the text, the ridiculousness of the caste discrimination and the pitiful representations of the Dalits, the arguments *for* caste system made by the upper caste members are illegitimized.

Dalits are represented as helpless in their situation. "I feel really sad, but what's the use?", the girl is asking at the end of the video. The constitution does not allow untouchability in India (part 7), but it is "they", i.e. the society who is practising it. The difficulties multiply when the government does not care about the Dalits (part 14). It is shown in the video that the legal constitutional protection of the Dalits is outweighed by "tradition", which is represented by the "learned Brahmin" (part 3). It is also said that the "Varna system is the oldest hierarchy in the world" (part 4), which, again,

21 A story-line of the video is added in the Appendix 2

reflects the archaism in the historicity of the Dalits and their imagined history, kept in the collective memory: the caste system, and thus subordination, is something that has been existing since the oldest times. It is only now, as the conflict emerges, that Dalits are not content about their situation: "Earlier we did not take these things to heart" (part 15).

It is traditional occupations through which the exclusion is enacted. Along with the progress of the video, the occupations tend to be represented as more inhuman: it begins with agricultural workers, *dhobies*, and, finally, manual scavenging, the most atrocious occupation (10). It is also in this pre-culmination spot that the rape and gender issues are brought in. Women are represented here as the most vulnerable, victims of rape and violence. They are "Dalits among Dalits"²², as even their Dalit husbands, discriminate them (parts 9, 11).

Finally, the discontent culminates in the narration of the military conflicts between Dalit and upper caste militia groups. The drum in the background is reminiscent of a military march, as one is preparing for the battle. Interestingly, it makes an allusion to an epic story line about the women and the inhuman practices, the honour of women, and, in the end, engagement of both sides in the military struggle. It is symbolic that this "war" topic is introduced after showing the humiliation experienced by the manual scavengers and Dalit women. The first one is the most "inhuman" practice, which causes the discontent. The second one represents the damage to the whole "community", as the bodies of its women are exploited. This soreness leads to the military conflicts, one might assume.

The *dénouement* of the video seeks to provoke the audience's emotions of sorrow and pity. A Dalit ("broken") girl is talking about her personal experiences of exclusion that she had to face at school, and, most importantly, her *broken* dreams. The emotional play with the children in the video is reminiscent with the representations of the development organizations that are used to inflame the compassion for the "Third world" children (e.g. like in some UNICEF representations). The question is posed for the audience one more time. One would assume, it wants to say: You have seen, *how* are the Dalits. They are broken, just like their dreams, they are humiliated and discontent. They are Dalits. How are you?

²² For a wider discussion on Dalit women in the whole Dalit discourse and their relation to Dalit human rights movement, see section 4.4 of this thesis.

3.5 Dalit identity and Primordialism

The representations of Dalit identities by the NCDHR and the IDSN resemble a creation of primordial identities. Firstly, in the representation, one can find a clear historicity of Dalits. They represent themselves as one group that has one history. This common past, however, is not so much defined through particular events, but through experiences of suffering, violence and subordination. Some crucial events and “heroes“, exist, however, like the Ambedkar's movement and its culmination – the creation of the Constitution of India, discussed above.

Because the caste system geographically exists in all parts of India, Dalits do not make one territorial claim. Rather, the attachments to personal land and territory are expressed in claiming for land rights and drawing the attention to the problem of deprivation of land or “painful” land that undermines Dalit dignity. The land and territory issues I call “Dalit geographies”. They are expressed in their representations as having different levels. The narrow and local one is the location where Dalits live in a particular village. Traditionally, the untouchable communities often live close to waste-disposal territory, funeral ground and far from water resources. It is usually a place that is worse strategically, economically and more harmful for health. This is often emphasized by Dalit activists, and claim for land means claim for dignity and regain of self-respect. In addition, global developmentalist arguments about disadvantaged communities' access to water, land, self-reliance and health enter the discourse. National geographies of Dalits are their experiences and characteristics within a particular country: their dispersion, non-homogeneity depending on the region and claims for land from the government. Finally, transnational geographies of Dalits are represented by the whole South Asian region, their ties to other excluded communities of the world.

The claims for land rights made by Dalits resembles the indigenous people's struggle for land. Dalit social movement resembles *indigenism* (Niezen, 2003, p. 9) not only in similar forms of protests, structure of the movement and advocacy forms and negotiations with powerful intergovernmental organizations like UN. Both movements construct collective identities in similar ways. It has been shown in this thesis how Dalit identity has been invoked by the intelligentsia. Similarly, “indigenous” identity is also invoked by a minority of educated leaders in the society (*ibid.*, p. 11). Another similarity is the collective memories, which, in the case of indigenous people, are accumulated and held by traditional orthodoxies (*ibid.*, p. 12). For Dalits, however, it is a long-enduring discrimination and subordination that dominates the collective memory, and not particular cultural values and world-views. Both, *indigenism* (*ibid.*, p. 13) and the Dalit movement makes use

of narratives and stories of horrors and collective suffering. Collective identity, constructed from collective histories and presupposition that the group has been existing in this way since long ago shows some features of primordialism in the Dalit movement.

Chopra (2006) has shown how some Dalit websites construct "global primordialities" by defining their group in more rigid terms and creating particular cyberhistoriography which resembles closely the one found in the Hindu nationalist websites (p. 196). The rigidity and primordialism of caste is a wider phenomenon and can encompass not only the rhetoric of internet communities. Caste, "in its modern formations(...) [tend] to define itself in terms of its rigidity, its doctrinally (and therefore historically) given nature, and in general its presumed *stasis*" (Reddy, 2005, p. 547). Hinduism and caste themselves are constructs of colonial, administrative, governmental, academic powers and "imagined" entities (Inden, 1990). But these concepts, however "imagined", "local" and romanticized they are, are used, as it is demonstrated above, by Dalits themselves. Hence, the irony and the Dalit identity assertion is a part of wider paradox that pertains academic definitions, social, political spheres. Reddy suggests not to reject the "ethnicity of caste" which inhibits to treat India as a special case for its caste discrimination practices, and still lets treat Dalit discourse as unique, local and concrete (Reddy, 2005, p. 571). This discussion is especially relevant for the Dalit human rights movement and their attempt to enter UN discourse during WCAR.

The representations of the NCDHR and the IDSN thus have some features of primordializing identity. They do not, however, make direct claims about the relationship between caste, race and indigenism of Dalits. Many activists are well aware and conscious as it is seen from the interviews, that Dalit is a heterogeneous category, and does not necessarily constitute *one* community. In fact, the heterogeneity is often emphasized by mentioning the geographical dispersion of Dalits and their belonging to different religions. They also often emphasize that caste discrimination is more prevalent in rural areas, where inhabitants know the community members and their membership in a particular caste. In some Dalit descriptions of discrimination in urban areas they emphasize that it is difficult or not possible for high caste persons to recognize Dalit without knowing his name. In his definitions of caste, Ambedkar too denied the theories about Dalits belonging to different race and different ethnic origin than caste people (Ambedkar, 2009 [1916]).

What is interesting with caste primordialism, then is the inescapable paradox, which can also be found in affirmative action discourse: once a group seeks protection from its exclusion from the society, it already epistemologically excludes and distinguishes itself. H. Gorringer suggests that this identity politics paradox can be avoided by formulating arguments into human rights language

(Gorringer, 2005, 669). However, there are opinions, that even within the human rights discourse caste does not escape its primordiality (See Reddy, 2005). The next section of this thesis thus looks into how Dalit discourse, particularly the movement of Dalit human rights, is making use of global human rights discourse.

4. MAKING USE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

4.1 Framing the Issues: Mobilizing Members, Searching for the Audience

The concept of *framing* was introduced to the social movement theory by David Snow et. al (Snow et al., 2008 [1986]). Snow et al. borrowed the concept of “frame” from Goffman, who described it as a “‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify and label’ occurrences within their life space and world at large (...) by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Goffman in (Snow et al., 2008 [1986], p. 255). Snow et al. distinguish a few types of frame alignment. *Frame bridging* occurs between organizations or at the individual level when “two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames [align] regarding a particular issue or problem. *Frame amplification* is a process of clarification and reinvigoration of an interpretive frame. *Value amplification*, a process of “identification, idealization, and elevation of one or more values presumed basic to prospective constituents but which have not inspired collective action for any number of reasons” (Snow et al., 2008 [1986], p. 257). Finally, *frame transformation* refers to “fairly self-contained but substantial changes in the way particular domain of life is framed, such that a domain previously taken for granted is reframed as problematic and in need to repair, or a domain seen as normative and acceptable is reframed as an injustice that warrants frame. (*ibid*, pp. 256-261).

Snow et al. elaborated the concept of framing as an explanation for how individuals join the SMOs. The concept of *framing* here is however used to analyse not only the mobilization of individuals, but also forming of transnational coalition, gaining international and local attention and allies. Kecks and Sikkink, similarly, argue that TANs “‘frame’ issues to make them comprehensible to target audiences, to attract attention and encourage action, and to “fit” with favourable institutional venues” (Kecks and Sikkink, 1987, p. 3). They frame issues in innovative ways, create new issues by reframing old problems in new ways, and “help to transform other actors' understandings of their identities and their interests” (*ibid.*, p. 17). Similarly, Tarrow (2006), emphasizes that framing is a

significant aspect of SMOs, and in *internationalization* processes many actors “reframe domestic claims to gain international attention” (p. 147).

The mobilization of activists requires frame bridging and tying the identities of the prospects with the movement's discourse. At the same time activists use more structured and strategic framing, directed at the other NGOs and International organizations. Both moments can occur simultaneously and influence each other. Prospects are moved to action by “ideology” or shared meanings, “cognitive frames”, “cultural discourses” (Tarrow, 2008, p. 147). In addition, “framing not only relates to the generalization of a grievance, but defines the “us” and “them” in a movement's conflict structure” (*ibid.*). Thus, framing is a part of the representation of particular collective identities. It was shown how the line between “us” and “them” is drawn in the representation of the Dalit human rights movement. At the same time, strategic framing of activities (e.g. during the internationalization process when gaining international allies) also uses collective identities and situated meanings, but it is more apt to, using Snow's terminology, to amplify or transform the frame (2008 [1986], p. 256), and thus manipulate the identities. In the case of this thesis, the analysis of framing helps to unveil the discourse of Dalits, more particularly, the discourse model of Dalit human rights movement. In the following sub-sections it will be shown how the Dalit human rights movement uses the identity representations and how it frames the caste issue on the local level, as well as during internationalization process.

4.2 Dalits are Human Beings: Group Rights and Human Rights

Group Rights are often discussed as a problematic issue in the literature of human rights (Lyons and Mayall, 2003). It is often emphasized that human rights are primary individual, and that they are not rights of the group (Donneley, 1989, p. 20; Donneley, 2003, p. 21). Primarily, an individual has the rights within a minority, and thus it is not a minority that holds the rights (Donneley 2003, p. 21). This human rights' individualistic ideology is grounded in liberalist ideas. The emphasis on individual rights means “guaranteed access to essential goods, services and opportunities for everyone” (*ibid.*, p. 27). Still, the individual-based rights approach undermines group interests, even if we consider the individual as the decision maker that belongs to a particular group.

Non-discrimination is suggested by Donneley as a “liberal starting point for addressing issues of group difference“. Its different interpretations, from *toleration* to *multiculturalism* take group rights

into account in different degrees. Multiculturalism goes beyond affirmative action and positive discrimination (which is the concern of *equal protection*) as it values diversity and even fosters the group differences. (*ibid.* pp. 29-30). Multiculturalism is a prevailing discourse in the Constitution of India as it is famous for protecting group rights, like religious communities', SCs', STs' OBCs' and women's rights. However, according to Donneley, in the case of minority rights, a non-existence of reservation policies would not mean that human rights (as they are defined in the Universal Declaration) are violated. As Dalit human rights movement's practical goals are related to the implementation of more legal protection for the SCs, i.e. pushing the government for more affirmative action policies, their rhetoric in the language of human rights poses some questions.

The very wording of the slogan of the NCDHR and the IDSN ("Dalit rights are Human Rights") is already interesting for theorists of human rights and collective group rights. On the one hand, Dalits seek human rights, which are inseparable from liberal individualism values. On the other hand, they mobilize as a group and claim so-called "group rights". According to the NCDHR activists, the specificity and uniqueness of the organizations lie exactly in that they look into human rights from the caste perspective (different interviews with the NCDHR activists). Because addressing only human rights without taking the caste into account is seen by many activists as an ineffective strategy, they do not see problems in combining human rights and caste movement discourses.

The caste system, as it is, does not accept the equality of people just because they are human beings. "Dalits experience violations of almost all their human rights", it is said by many Dalit human rights activists. In their argument, Dalits are discriminated in all spheres of life on the basis of them not being equal to the others, as most of the interviewed activists insist: "They do not consider Dalits as humans" (interview with an NCDHR activist). Dalit human rights activists explain their choice of international human rights strategy by arguing that "Dalits are human beings, and their basic rights as humans are being violated" (interview with the NCDHR activist). Thus, the source of Dalit human rights is believed to be the same as international human rights – one has the rights simply because is a human being. Similarly, the problem of dignity and self-respect that are demeaned by the caste system is often discussed in the representational language of the NCDHR and the IDSN. These values are also important and highlighted in the argumentation of International human rights law. Value-based rhetoric in the representation of the NCDHR and the IDSN is an example of *value amplification* (Snow et al., 2008 [1986], pp. 257-8). Dalits elevate and amplify values of equality, dignity and self-esteem. By emphasizing that these are the base values for *every* human, they come close to International Human rights discourse and in this way can

appeal to wider audiences in seeking transnational support. Once again, the concept of *framing* in this context is used as forming of a transnational coalition that seeks support and mobilizes prospect members transnationally and, at the same time, from the masses in the local context.

However, the question remains if the Dalits' quest for human rights goes well with the philosophical base of international human rights and their promoted values. Dalits use their identity to become visible and to be able to demand their rights. It is the human rights violations, that define Dalits as a group. As we have seen, their collective identity is constructed from historicity of subordination, suffering and belonging to a social movement. But this fact does not mean that their collective identity is any weaker than of the other groups who are demanding *group* human rights. Dalit human rights' activists clearly distance themselves from the other organizations that concentrate only on *human* rights, and strongly emphasize the "caste perspective". Moreover, the "caste perspective" is even more specified, as Dalit human rights activists do not include other caste members (OBCs) who also suffer from caste discrimination into their movement. According to one activist, Dalits suffer mostly from the members of the lower castes, and not even the Brahmins, and thus fighting only against caste would be ineffective, and would only "sound nice theoretically" (interview with an NCDHR activist). Thus, there is a quite clear quest for group rights within the Dalit human rights movement. In this way, by demanding *Dalit* human rights, Dalits sustain their own collective identity. Still, they are trying to enter the UN human rights discourse, that is defined by the Universal Declaration. It will be further shown how they frame the caste issue while trying to internationalize it. I chose two issues around such framing. First is the well known debate about the relationship of discriminations based on caste, race and descent. The second chosen issue is Dalit women's rights, as it makes this thesis gender-sensitive and demonstrates important aspects of the movement's framing.

4.3 Framing the Caste: Race and Descent

The caste issue is reframed by the activists according to the discourse which they are trying to enter. During the process of externalization of the caste issue, particular trends of framing in the movement emerged. Dalits transformed the frame into a one that contains more global concepts, emphasizing the discrimination *per se* and compared it to racial discrimination and discrimination based on work and descent. In this way, they have bridged frames with other oppressed and marginalized groups of the world.

The heated discussion about race, caste and descent began when Dalits decided to participate in the WCAR in Durban, in 2001. It was the NCDHR that managed to mobilize Dalits and organized their participation at the conference and networked with the IDSN at the same time. Durban as an event invoked many interesting expressions in the Dalit human rights movement and their representations. It is important to take into account that the Durban conference is not the only and certainly not the first event that caused reformulations in the Dalit human rights movement's language (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 197). One has to remember that the movement formulated their aims as Dalit human rights initially from its set up. The Durban event is not analysed in this thesis as one that contains historical significance, but as an illustrative example of how TANs frame issues.

The language during the preparations and the conference in Durban itself was constantly redefined, and the definitions (whether caste discrimination is similar to race discrimination and whether it is similar to discrimination based on work and descent) themselves were a matter of negotiations (Hardtmann, 2009; Bob, 2007). Hardtmann analyses these negotiations as taking part between two domains, one of which is the Dalits and other groups, the global counter-public who is acting in an “alternative world cultural discourse“ (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 11, *supra* note 11). By contrast, I further show the Dalits' relationship with the UN, the Indian state and other activists while they lobby for caste discrimination to be included in the UN documents.

Firstly, Dalits were engaged in an indirect debate with the Indian state, which, together with some academics in India, strongly opposed caste to be included as an issue in WCAR and its definition in CERD on the grounds that caste is not the same as race (Hardtmann, 2009, pp. 8-9). Tarrow (2006) argues that “movements are never free to frame their campaigns as they wish, for they compete at a structural disadvantage with rulers and the media [which] are quick to attack the legitimacy of challenges in the name of defending domestic values” (p. 62). The process of the negotiations in the Durban conference is an example of how framing of the movement is clashing with the government and the media “at home”. According to Dalit activists, they have never claimed that the caste is the same as race (interview with an the NCDHR activist) . Nevertheless, they sought that the caste issue would be included in particular documents and agenda of the WCAR. However, according to the NCDHR, this was because of a limited UN language. Although the opposition between NCDHR and the Indian goevrnt was clear in Durban, generally, their relationship is ambiguous. They do demand particular action from the state in the “Dalit Charter of Demands”²³, but at the same time,

23 “Dalit Charter of Demands” is a publishing with NCDHR demands from the state that mostly focuses on demands for positive discrimination policies.

cooperate with some state institutions like NCHR. In addition, it is mostly the members of the society (among which are the state members as well) that violate Dalit human rights, and discriminate them and not the state *per se*.

Furthermore, Dalits have attempted to enter the UN discourse, which is ambiguous and not homogeneous itself. During Durban, different states did not have a unanimous opinion, and during different moments caste discrimination was related and disassociated with the discrimination based on work and descent. The UN report by Gooneskere, for example, accepted that caste and tribal discrimination as a form of discrimination based on work and descent but different from *race* discrimination. (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 202). This could be considered as a great success of Dalits and their allies in and getting acceptance of the UN and entering the UN discourse. At the same time, the absence of the caste discrimination issue in the final document of the Durban conference could be considered to be a failure. The compromise that Dalits had to accept – a change in their language during the negotiations from “caste discrimination” to “discrimination based on work and descent” (*ibid.*, p. 195) shows a very dynamic nature of their framing and ability to be flexible in bridging. Recently, however, some achievements have been made in this sphere, as Dalit activists participate in the preparation of principles and guidelines on how to address caste based discrimination. They anticipate a change in the official UN documents as well as an acceptance of a new declaration that would take into account discrimination based on caste (although a hope for a new declaration is expressed with an understanding that this could take a lot of time, because “UN is not yet ready for that”) (interview with an the NCDHR activist). Dalit activists have lobbied, networked and used their capacity to act as a professional TANs while dealing with these issues. Hardtmann also notes that constant participation in the UN bodies' meetings, seminars, conferences, etc. facilitates to invoke feelings of commonality and is important in identity-forming process (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 191). Thus, Dalit human rights activists use their formal “activist” identity while cooperating with different country representatives and organizations.

Finally, Dalits have allied with Burakumin, Romanies and African groups that face, according to them, “similar forms of discrimination” (the IDSN homepage, accessed 2010 05 05). In addition, their collective identity and representation, which is similar to indigenous groups' or tribals' discourse, facilitates bridging as well. By this particular representation Dalit activists not only acquire allies, but draw attention to the UN and NGOs. They do not picture their situation as being unique: they are not the only ones that face this kind of discrimination. In addition, they are not the only ones, who face discrimination which is difficult to deal with when it comes to the international

regulations. One of the outcomes of this kind of representation is, for example, the UN report by Gooneskere and its recommended strategy against caste discrimination - cooperation between STs and SCs in India (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 204). Although the definitions of discriminated groups in the UN discourse are a problem in itself, Dalits use it for the frame bridging: the “similar discrimination” is used as a part of a collective identity that brings the groups together. The wording of “similar forms of discrimination” is a part of the representation of the groups that ally on the grounds that the type of discrimination that they face is not defined in the official UN documents. However, one should not underestimate this mobilization, as the established networks among these groups are not permanent and strong.

Thus, Dalits' attempts to enter the UN discourse and the participation in some of the events causes dynamics in their framing. Employing an activists' identity, they make contacts and allies more easily. In addition, they also use bridging when unifying with other discriminated groups. Finally, the opposition that they face also influences the framing. Hence, during the externalization process, new wordings, new formulations emerge and are negotiated as well as the possibilities for extension of the identity representations.

4.4 Framing the Gender: Dalit, Women, Human Rights

One of the the NCDHR movements, AIDMAM, is dedicated solely to the “Dalit women human rights“. This wording notes the existence of the group within the group of Dalits – *women*. By including women's rights in the organizations' activities (they are also emphasized in the the IDSN representation) Dalits frame the caste issue by combining it with the gender issue. In this way, Dalit human rights activists mobilize both: the prospect members and collaborating Indian and international organizations and institutions. These different levels of framing Dalit women's human rights will be discussed in the following.

At the local level, the Dalit women's human rights movement distinguishes itself from other organizations:

Everybody is talking about the women. Dalit women, they are included in there [in the other organizations and NGOs] [...] they are not talking separately about Dalit women. When we talk about Dalit women, we are talking about them from three perspectives: caste, class and gender perspective. The rest, they are talking from gender and class perspective, and not on caste. So we are focusing on caste [...] and we also call them “Dalit among Dalit”. (an interview with an AIDMAM members).

By focusing on Dalit women, AIDMAM seeks to advocate the “most marginalized” section of the Indian society that suffer from their own families and patriarchal system as *women* and as being *Dalit*. The caste perspective is emphasized in line with the whole movement's ideology and is presented as a unique feature of the organization. At the same time, it is argued, that after the Mandal-Masjid years²⁴, the discourse in Indian feminism has changed and “it became impossible [...] to deal with categories like gender *except* in relation to other markers of social difference. Since the early 1990s, then, feminists have grown increasingly concerned with describing how women's experiences, roles, access to justice, political participation, educational opportunities, and more are each modulated along religious and caste lines” (Reddy, 2005b, p. 319).

Dalit women's human rights activists have some recurrent topics in their representations. On the one hand, the woman is represented as an active agent who is capable of changing her situation, an identity that is common within the whole movement. A pamphlet with a woman's picture, where she has broken chains on her hands²⁵, or the name of the AIDMAM report - “Dalit women speak out” are examples of this. On the other hand, she is represented as constantly subordinated, having no rights not only in the society, but in her own family as well. She is constantly experiencing violence at home and in the public space. Another major topic of Dalit women's subordination is rape. Rape of Dalit women by their family members and by non-Dalits is emphasized at both, the international and the local levels. The latter issue, however, is given more attention. The untouchability of women is in Dalit language transformed to vulnerability and a “fake” practice, because “untouchability is not an issue, when it comes to sexual intercourse” (the IDSN homepage).

Rape is, however, an old issue of Indian feminist movements from its beginning (Reddy, 2005b). I am not challenging here the AIDMAM's claim for its uniqueness. As my focus is the meanings, embedded in the discourses and discourse models, I want to emphasize the *discursive* similarity between some general Indian feminist and Dalit women movement which arise because of shared meanings and common base for the movements – an opposition to the patriarchal system. Dalit human rights activists, frame the Dalit issue and relate it to the gender issue. In this way, Dalit activists were able to attract collaborators from India as well as Dalit women activists who were already active within the Dalit movement²⁶.

24 Mandal-Masjid year is the year of 1990-1992, when India's high caste members were protesting against the Mandal Commission act of the affirmative action policies for SCs, STs in the education sector. Masjid refers to the years of the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque by the Hindu nationalists. The year marked a change in the Indian political climate.

25 The picture is added in the Appendix 2

26 Some Dalit women activists that are involved with the NCDHR were before members of All India Dalit Women Movement (interview with an AIDMAM activist).

There is not so much difference between how Dalit women human rights are framed on the local and the global levels. However, Hardtmann argues, that for Dalit women themselves, the entering onto the international arena in Durban symbolized a successful challenge to Dalit men (Hardtmann, 2009, p. 219). In addition, by including Dalit women rights into their movement, Dalit human rights activists were thus able to attract attention and engage in cooperation with international organizations and allies that were gender-sensitive.

5. CONCLUSION AND THE FINAL NOTES

The social movement of Dalits in India is embedded in a “local” socio-political context. It forms one Dalit discourse, which is itself not homogeneous and contains different discourse models. Dalit identities are constructed “locally” within the discourse model, but they are based on meanings that are shared, circulate and make use of historicities and ideologies. Meanings become “local” or situated within a discourse model. Situated meanings circulate and thus enact Dalit identity on the following representational levels: (1) “locally”, within a particular Dalit discourse model, (2) “nationally” within the whole Dalit discourse in India, (3) transnationally, by, for instance, entering into the international human rights discourse. These levels are not an attempt to put any meanings and identities into a hierarchical order. Rather, they just help to understand how meanings circulate and how they are shared within and are grounded in different discourse models.

This can be well illustrated by the example of the Dalit human rights movement (which is, once more, a discourse model of Dalit social movement). Firstly, it enacts an “activist” identity, which is placed within the historicity of the whole Dalit movement. Secondly, it represents Dalits, through particular symbols, as having a collective identity of a discriminated group in India. Finally, while using transnational activism strategies, Dalit human rights movement uses global concepts of “universal” human rights and associate their identities with other discriminated groups.

The Dalit human rights movement has a strong ideology, which is a social movement feature. However, it is also structured and well organized and thus enacts a good example of transitionally networking NGOs. With the help of this strategy, Dalits are able to fit in between locally embedded representations and the global discourses, like human rights and the UN. They are also flexible in framing the issues. Hence, Dalit human rights movement represents Dalits locally. In this way it is able to gain support from different groups within the Dalit movement and network at the national level. Secondly, Dalits represent themselves as active agents who are able to change the situation of Dalits and have particular strategies and ideology, demands from the government and elitist identity. In this manner Dalit human rights social movement is able to draw attention of other NGOs, activists and academia. In addition, by framing the Dalit issue in the human rights language, taking gender issues into account, Dalits gain international allies and draw attention of the international and transnational organizations. Finally, the tendency in their representation to picture Dalits as a group that holds (limited) collective identity with particular symbols helps them to ally with other similar groups.

The above discussed relationship between the universality of human rights and groups that claim those rights and merge the liberal human rights discourse with the discourses that represent collective identities, poses interesting questions about the globalization. Human rights are one of the elements of the “ideoscapes”, as ideoscapes contain certain images and ideas, mostly elements of the Enlightenment world view, such as ‘freedom’, ‘welfare’ ‘rights’. They become a part of the narrative in the global flow. (Appadurai, 1990, p. 299). The keywords of the ideoscapes are tied to problem of translation within the local contexts. First, a careful ‘semantic’ translation of words that move from context to context is needed; secondly, ‘pragmatic’ translation is needed “to the extent that the use of these words by political actors and their audiences may be subject to very different sets of contextual conventions that mediate their translation into the public politics”. (*ibid.* p. 300). The local, then, always matters, even when the global concepts are brought in or the local issues are attempted to turn into global concerns.

We see both of these processes enacted in the case of the Dalit human rights movement. As it has been shown, deeply locally embedded issues like caste discrimination, that has representations which are not separable from the „local“ Indian context can reach for those human rights, and merge local discourse with the global. Human rights as a value enters Indian space and certain elements of it, depending on the local context, become important for the audience. Hence, it becomes transformed. Ledgerwood and Un (2003) have shown how human rights become transformed in the same way by the government in Cambodia. This thesis has not attempted to discuss the entire human rights discourse and its transformation at the national level in India. It has rather looked at these transformations from one movement's perspective. What it has shown, is how one movement uses global ideoscapes for its local purposes, and how it enters the international/transnational spaces and confront some dominating global discourses. The Dalit human rights movement is embedded in India's socio-political context and holds its ‘local’ historicities and ideology by connecting it to the entire discourse of Dalits. Hence, it captures and ‘localizes’ human rights according to its own context and the needs of collective identity expressions. Even more, it then attempts to escape the locality by entering the international/transnational arena of International human rights institutions, allying with other similar groups and claiming for the universality in the definition of their state.

The study poses some questions that were not addressed explicitly or were not touched upon in this thesis. It shows how Dalits adapt human rights for their own purposes and use them not only on the national (Indian) level, but attempt to enter the UN discourse as well. If the particular groups claim

human rights and at the same time mobilize under collective identities, how should they be treated when it comes to the questions of liberal values, embedded in the International human rights law? Do these group rights challenge the international human rights norms? By allying with other groups, like indigenous people, are Dalits attempting to offer any kinds of alternatives to the international Human rights, or are human rights universal enough to address the caste system?

Further, questions arise when it comes to the debate on affirmative action policies. If identification is never accomplished and different collective identities can emerge depending on the context, are there limits for affirmative action policies? This debate relates to a wider debate on multiculturalism, the constitutional rights of groups, minorities, etc. Similarly, while framing the issues internationally, are Dalits a part of the “global civil society”? What is its relationship then with international norms like human rights? Most likely, civil society is a field where groups not only ally, but also clash and challenge particular norms and each other, since collective identities play a significant role in transnational activist activities.

The further research on this topic could be also continued by looking into wider formations of political discourse in India or South Asia. More linguistic and representational data could be gathered from the other Dalit movements. Research could be extended by analyzing rhetoric, speeches and the representations of the political actors (BSP, Naxalites), development organizations and tying them to the entire discourse of Indian political space.

The discourse analysis is always related to the search for politics and power relations. The politics of representation and identities is always bias, self-interested and this is also part of the reason why it is so fascinating. One should not forget, however, that there are always reasons for one or the other type of representation and emergence of an assertive community. For academics, thus, Dalit issue remains an urgent question that is not only theoretical, but related to policies that improve the condition of the SCs and their implementation.

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ENCLOSURE 1

1.1 Methodology of the interviews

Further, questions that were asked during the fieldwork interviews, are listed. The interviews were semi-structured, and thus every interview varied according to the answers of the interviewee(s). Hence, the following questions are only the main questions that were prepared for the interview guide. During the fieldwork in NCDHR, 9 interviews with the activists were conducted. The length varies from one to two hours. In addition, a presentation was recorded for analysis, and is of a special importance because it was a representational event. All interviews were recorded (with the permission of the interviewees) and transcribed. Three interviews were conducted in focus groups (from 3 to 7 people) which were formed in relation to the activity and responsibilities of the members (as there are 3 active “movements” within the organization, their members were interviewed in focus groups). All interviewees were asked similar questions. Specific questions were asked about different movements. Also, different questions were asked of the founders and participants in the discourse of the internationalization of the Dalit issue. IDSN was visited in Copenhagen, where one interview was conducted.

1.2 Interview Guide for the Interviews with NCDHR Activists

Questions for the members of all four movements:

Basic questions

- How do people get involved in the NCDHR? Is it a voluntary or a paid position?
- When was the movement started? How and why?
- How many people are involved in the movement?
- Is the movement concentrating only on one main issue?
- To what extent do the movements cooperate?
- How is the activity organized? How do you work and what do you do personally in the movement?
- Why are exactly these movements needed?
- Who determines the NCDHR working strategies?
- What are the aims of different departments? Who formulate these aims?

- How do you build awareness of the Dalits about their situation?
- How do you make international contacts? What are the difficulties?
- Tell me about the internationalization of the caste issue and the Durban conference.
- Tell me about international connections and the way internationalization
- Tell me what is the difference in working at the national and international levels?

Dalit identity related questions:

- How would you describe “Dalit” category? Who is Dalit, and who is not?
- What do you think of Dalits as a group? Is it a group, or maybe a community? Does it have strict boundaries?
- What do you think of different titles used for Dalits?

Human rights related questions:

- Why are the human rights an appropriate strategy for Dalits' cause?
- Do you work with any particular documents, declarations of human rights? Which? How are they useful?
- Why do you think that Dalit rights are human rights?
- How would you describe relationship between “Dalit rights” and “human rights”?
- Do you think working for “Dalit rights” would be an appropriate strategy?
- Do you think working for human rights would be an appropriate strategy?
- Tell me what do you think about human rights as rights of a particular group?
- Do you find difficulties in applying human rights to the Dalit issue? What?

Questions for Dalit women activists:

- Why is it appropriate to formulate movement of “Dalit women human rights”?
- Which identity plays more in being activist: one of Dalit or of a woman?
- How, when and why did Dalit women's movement start?
- Do you cooperate with other organizations that work on women’s empowerment (not necessarily Dalit women)?

1.3 Interview Guide for the Interviews with IDSN Activists

Questions about the IDSN working and functioning strategies

- How would you describe your organization? What type of organization is IDSN?
- Are you an NGO? Activists? Civil society group?
- What are your main aims, who formulates these aims?
- Can you tell more about NCDHR? What is your relationship with it? Can you describe how is the cooperation proceeding?
- Why international links are important?
- Your strategy is networking, which units do you network with?

Questions about the history of the IDSN:

- Why is the IDSN established, who established it, how was it established?
- Who formulated aims, strategies and why?
- How would you describe *solidarity* and why is *solidarity* important for Dalits?

Questions about the Dalit identity

- What is caste discrimination? Is it exactly “discrimination based on work and descent”?
- What kind of discrimination is faced by Dalits?
- Who are the Dalits, how do you perceive this category? Who is Dalit, and who is not?
- What do you think of Dalits as a group or identity? Does it has strict boundaries?
- Do you think the caste system a specific problem, or a common “humanity” problem?
- Why is IDSN called “Dalit” solidarity network? Do you find the category of a universal use?

Questions about the Human rights

(same questions as in the interviews with NCDHR members were asked)

1.4 Closing questions for the NCDHR and the IDSN

- What difficulties do you face while working for these issues?
- Is there anything you would like to tell, that you think is important, and I did not ask?

APPENDIX 1

The Video “I am Dalit, How are You?” Narrated Story Line

The video “I am Dalit, How are You?” can be watched on the homepages of the NCDHR, IDSN and also found at www.youtube.com. The video was not created by the NCDHR and the IDSN directly, but with their cooperation. Thus, it is a part of their representation. Further, the video is narrated by dividing its sequences into smaller parts that are divided according to smaller themes that follow each other.

Part 1

The video starts with a small introduction made of pieces of Dalit responses (speaking in local languages which are translated with subtitles) that seem like pieces of interviews about what they are not allowed to do in the society and what are their traditional occupations.

Part 2

Then, a text appears on the screen that shows people doing agricultural work, work with coconut palm trees, carrying a dead animal, working as sweepers, workers, and playing drums: ”I am Dalit”; and, after a short pause, “How are you?”. In the s background, a drum and man's voice is introduced.

Part 3

Later, the song and drum sound stops, and the learned Brahman appears on the screen, who explains the caste system, four *varnas* that have separate duties, “as it is understood from studies”.

Part 4

The video picture of a lonely person working construction or a field labourer. The sound of a hammer hitting the ground and conversation is heard in the sound background. The text says: “The Varna System is the oldest surviving social hierarchy of the world. 160Mln. Indians are born outside the four castes of the *varna* system. They are called the “Untouchables”. They themselves have chosen the name DalitS (the broken people).“

Part 5.

Again, small narratives of Dalits themselves are introduced. Firstly, a *dhobi* (laundry duties possessing community member) woman is talking, then a man. Their short narratives are about Dalit exclusion and the distance kept from them in every-day life (at school, community feasts,

etc.).

Part 6

The video then shows how Dalits are not allowed to drink from the same tea cups in the street tea stall.

Part 7

The shot is paused and a text appears on the screen: “Constitution of India Article 17: “untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden”.

Part 8

An upper caste woman talks about everyone's duty to do what she or he is ascribed to do in his or her life. Similarly, an upper-caste Panchayat member is talking about sanitation workers as uneducated and thus having low intelligence. Another woman says, “we give grain, and not money to different Dalit communities.” Then, an upper caste landlord is talking about separation of plates and “changed customs”, as “they” are allowed to enter home to do work there.

Part 9

Another sentence appears on the screen: “Untouchability is not an issue when it comes to sexual abuse”. Then, the same upper-caste landlord is saying that “now there are not so many rapes”, and narrating at the same time, how “you do it”. This is followed by cuts from a newspaper that reports sexual assault and other violence against Dalit women.

Part 10

“Manual scavenging was abolished in 1993”, a sentence on the screen reads, which is followed by shots in which Dalit women work as manual scavengers and talk about the health problems that they face because of their occupation.

Part 11

A text follows: “Dalit women: Dalits within Dalits”. After, a husband and a wife are shown as they talk about the wife's fate, and how she was forced to do work that she did not want to, by her husband.

Part 12

“The problems of human intervention in waste disposal could be solved by introducing sewage system that exists in the cities. But this solution replaces it with much more inhuman [practices, that

is manual scavenging]”. A person, manually cleaning a sewerage tank that is fed by domestic latrines, is shown.

Part 13

“The caste violence against Dalits has in some states caused armed conflicts between Dalits and upper-caste landlords. By 1998, armed left wing groups with huge participation from Dalits, were operating in 36 out of 54 districts of Bihar”. This text is accompanied by an intensive drum beat. The text is followed by a display of cuts from some newspapers that report killings and violence during the clashes between Dalits and upper-caste members. Further, some Dalit men are narrating how the clashes in their village have happened, and how upper caste members surrounded the village and killed villagers while singing. Then, shots with the private militia of Ranvir Sena are showed, and in the sound background, their militaristic song about killings is heard. Members of Ranvir Sena are explaining why they are fighting.

Part 14

“7th January 9 Dalits were killed at Jagdishpur Siwan District North Bihar”. Mournings and cries of men and women are shown and followed by a narration of the militia's attack, a man and woman's grievances about the despair of their situation, because no one is helping them and the government does not care.

Part 15

A Dalit girl, who also appears in the beginning of the video, talks about discrimination at school, explaining that she dropped out in the 6th grade, when she understood and could not bear the discrimination any more. When her story turns to “broken” dreams about becoming a nurse or a doctor in the future, a quiet sad music is introduced into the background. The girl is asked if she is sad, and starts smiling and telling that she is sad, but “there is nothing to do”. At the same time, the music is getting louder, as the girl becomes silent and reflective. The text on the screen appears again: “I am Dalit. How are you?”, and other children's faces are shown, along with the authorship and copyright information subtitles.

APPENDIX 2

The following are the pictures from the homepage of the NCDHR and reports that are a part of the organization's visual representation.

1. Dr. B. M. Ambedkar and the Logo of the NCDHR

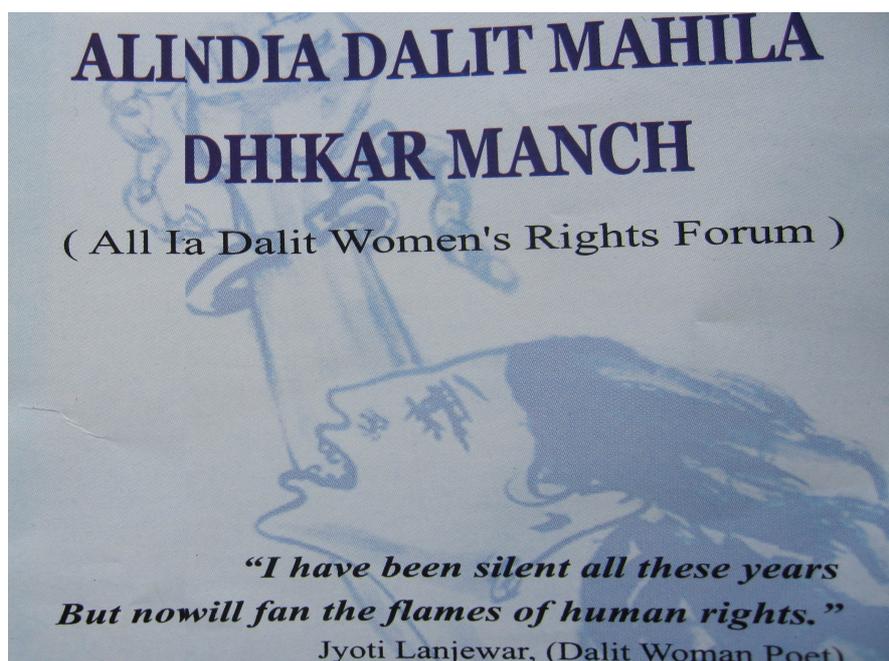
NCDHR logo with two faces that create connotations with indigenism is on the left side of the picture. Around the two faces, the text says “Dalit Rights are Human Rights” and “Caste out Caste”. On the right side one can see a picture of Ambedkar, which is also often used in the reports.

Source: webpage of the NCDHR (accessed 20 05 2010).



2. Picture of a Dalit Woman

Picture symbolizes a liberated Dalit woman that broke chains of suppression. Source: AIDMAM pamphlet, New Delhi: NCDHR.



3. Decorations of the NCDHR Reports

This picture design creates connotations to non-mainstream Indian art and culture. Source: back cover of the “Shadow Report to the UN CERD 2007“ (February 2007), New Delhi: NCDHR.

