Labelling ‘Bad’ Women: Separated Women using their Collective and Individual Agency in the Struggle for Rights in India

Dedication: I dedicate this work to the separated women in India, who are very strong, and are courageously challenging the patriarchal normative constructs. Amongst them, there are many with whom I have worked and in the process they became my mentors.

Summary

‘Separated women’is not a well-researched and documented issues, albeit constituting a large proportion of the population. Therefore, this study aims toexplore the label of ‘bad’ attached to them, their negotiations in using their agency to challenge this label/identity and craft their lives, and finally the collective struggle to fight for their rights. The paper argues that the label of ‘bad’ is the patriarchal construct to subjugate their sexuality. In response, these women individually and collectively create an overall politicalmeta-identity to challenge the heteropatriarchy, however, in the process gender binaries and heteronormative constructs are reproduced/reinforced.

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1. Introduction

Breasts bruised, brains battered,
Skin scarred, soul shattered,
Can't scream – neighbours stare,
Cry for help, no one's there.

In the intervening silences,
I gather up the jagged fragments,
Try to re-arrange them into some semblance of
the jigsaw puzzle I once called "me"
I see you've got some fragments too,
If we put them together, can we start anew
There are lots of pieces everywhere,
But the picture we make is one we'll share.

Neena Nehru (cited in Burte A., 2008)

Separated women in India are bringing these pieces together to make a picture of shared and collective strength and solidarity. The picture they are crafting, individually as well as collectively, is a creative and powerful demonstration of their courage and negotiations to challenge the patriarchal binaries of 'good women' and 'bad women'[1]. It is worth noting here that separated women are those women who do not have a legal separation from their husbands but who are no longer in marital relationship with their husbands. However, for the state, they are non-existent as a category, as separated women are either legally separated or have had a pending case for separation/maintenance in the court for more than five years.

Since separated women live outside the institution of marriage, they are beyond the domineering heterosexual marital framework of the society and therefore

[1] I have used 'bad women' in plural form purposely, as throughout the paper (with few exceptions), I have referred to the collective identity of separated women that is stigmatised and labelled as bad.

perceived as a continuous 'threat' to the heteronormativity[2] and heteropatriarchy[3]. Thus are 'inherently positioned as non-normative, deviant, 'bad women' (Berry, 2007). This stigmatised and tabooed identity invites a continuum of struggles in their lives; many of these relate to their sexuality, to mention a few: unwelcome sexual advances, sexual harassment, attacks, name-calling such as *'dayan/dakan'* (witch)[4], '*rand* (slut)' and/or many other pejorative comments (EkalNari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS), online[5]).

According to the Census of India (2001), the total percentage of widowed and divorced/separated women to the total female population in the age group of 10-80 years and above is 10.95%. This excludes all those separated women who are neither divorced nor have a case pending in the court. Despite this large proportion of the population, 'single women' (separated women are a part of this 'umbrella term' used to refer widows, divorced, separated, never married, and unmarried mothers by the women's movement in India) are marginalised from the state policies and programs. They, especially separated women, are not only marginalised by the family, society and government but also by the women's movement, academia and development discourses (Kulkarni and Bha 2010). The same challengesare faced while writing this paper due to the lack of available literature. Thus, the paper is intended to contribute to the literature on separated women.

I became passionate about this topic when I was working with the single women's movement in India. The issue that has been troubling me since then is the question: Why is there a continuous divergence between the individual rights of a 'married woman' and the individual rights of a 'single/separated woman'? Along

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2 Those cultural, social, legal and institutional practices that uphold the normative assumption that there are only two genders and that the sexual attraction between the two is 'normal' and acceptable (Kitzinger 2005 as cited in Schilt and Westbrook, 2009).

3Heteropatriarchy considers male political right of access to women (feminine bodies) and view women in relation (dependent) to men, thus normalising men's hegemony. This construction enables invisibilising 'the tolerance of dominant male violence together with intolerance of female violence against abusers, blaming the 'feminine' victim, and targeting a group of men as predators against whom dominant men can 'protect' chosen women' (Hoagland, 2000, p.245).

4 Sometimes, women, especially widows, separated, divorced women in India, are termed witches to ostracise them. It is a very derogatory and defamatory term to be used for any women. It is believed that a witch has the capacity to harm others by her evil eye.

5http://www.strongwomenalone.org/

with these enquiries, this paper will examine the following: Should these separated women to be seen only as victims or are they also agents for change? Why are they as a category labelled as 'bad women'? How are these separated women, with stigmatised and non-normative identity, negotiating their rights individually? How are they collectively challenging the normative constructs and heteropatriarchy?[6] This paper is based on qualitative research and has analysed secondary literature from historical sources to contemporary debates and interventions.

This paper is organised into eight sections. The first section introduces the paper, the second section is the reflection of the reason for choosing this topic and the third section explains the methodology undertaken throughout the research. The fourth section presents the context, which explains the normative situation of separated women in India and the process of their marginalisation and exclusion. The fifth section is the first part of my findings and it unravels the underlying construct of 'good women' and 'bad women' and how the entire category of separated women falls under the label of 'bad women'. The sixth section, which is the second part of my findings, examines how these women are using their agency to negotiate and strategise their positions within the hegemonic,heteropatriarchal structures. This is done by using three different narratives of their lives. The seventh section, which is the third and final part of my findings, aims to examine the strategies of collective struggles/resistance adopted by the separated women to contest the normative construct of 'bad women' and to claim their right to a life of dignity. For the purpose, the case of *EkalNari Shakti Sangathan* (ENSS) is taken from India. The eighth and final section provides the conclusion of the paper.[7]

[6] I am arguing in this paper that separated women, as a category is identified as 'bad' and they struggle and negotiate in their individual as well as collective capacity to contest and challenge this identity.

[7] The term PO, collective and movement interchangeably to refer ENSS, according to the context.

2. From a dilemma to motivation for the research

I developed an interest in this topic while working with the single women's movement in India, being based at Rajasthan from where the movement initiated, but it also related personally to my journey of life. I am a middle child with an elder sister and a younger brother. My brother is a votive child and I grew up thinking that if my brother hadbeen born in my place, I would not have been brought into the world. Having said that, growing up in a middle class family, Iwas given all of the opportunities and spaces to explore myself and never lacked anything. I never experienced gender based discrimination but I was always vocal about any of the favours (even in care and love) from my parents towards my brother. Being vocal, I began to understand that I was gender sensitive and aware of patriarchal systems and began challenging it in many ways.My understanding was challenged when I joined the single women's movementas a facilitator and a supporter.

While I was growing up, I used to see widows from a victimised perspective, following the norms of the society - being marginalised and excluded socially and especially culturally. I was socialised in a manner that enabled me to think of divorced (I was not aware of many cases of separation though) and never married women as 'home breakers, and as - 'loose women'.

Not being much aware of the strong web of patriarchal values and 'morals' I was trapped in, I joined the movement. Hearing the storiesof single womenin the first person, knowing them very closely not just as colleagues but as friends, experiencing their strengths not just their victimhood, knowing the complexities of their lives and their negotiations between 'bad women' and 'good women', learning and unlearning from them was a big challenge to my own beliefs, 'values' and 'morals'. After working and living with them for three years, there were different sets of questions that started puzzling me. These puzzles motivated my decision to undertake this masters' degree programme in order to reflect and challenge my understanding of patriarchy, power relations, sexuality, and to develop insight in these complexities and negotiations in women's lives. The particular question troubling me was the continuous conflict between the individual rights of a 'married woman' and the individual rights of a

‘single/separated woman’, as referred to earlier in this section, in other words, conflict between ‘good women’ and ‘bad women’. Why are these women always seen as a ‘threat’ to the marriage of ‘other’ woman?

Thus, this dissertation aimstoseek insights into these dilemmas and to define/redefine my own positionality in the discourse. Here I want to state that this process was very insightful, thought provoking and challenging, as the reading, stories, reflections from my work, and writing made me realise that the framework in which I was situating the various life situations was in itself superficial and was deeply influenced by patriarchal construct within me. This reiterated the presence of the strong web of patriarchy and the complex and continuous process of its disentanglement. The section on the methodology for undertaking this research is discussed in the next section.

3. Methodology

While exploring the topic, I realised that there is very little literature on separated women, especially, around the use of their agency. This is felt particularly in the historical literature, which remains silent on separated women discourse. This raises a bigger question – Why were these women invisible from the historical literature:did they not exist at that time or were they purposely made invisible?

The available historical discourses and researches are around widows, *devadasis*[8]*, sati*[9]*, etc*. Thus, I have drawn insights from these literatures with the position of exploring the perceptions and the status of widows and *devadasis* historically and placingthem in the discourse of ‘bad-good’ women. The use of literature ranges from the critique of historical discourses around the status of

[8]As an ancient practice in India where young girls were married off to the temple and were the signs of pleasure for priests, inmates of the temple, land lords, etc. They used to enjoying a respectful status during the pre-colonial period, however during the colonial period, they were targeted and their identity was diminished to sex workers (BBC 2011 Sex Death and the Gods, 2011).

9 An ancient religious practice in India where a widow immolates herself with her husband on his funeral pyre. The practice was restricted in limited parts of India, performed by few elite caste, however colonialists claimed this element of ‘Brahmanic scriptures’ to be ‘Hindu’ practice and considered it as prescriptive texts for all, even when the evidence for this assertion was problematic that is evident in the case of Sati (Mani, 1998).

women (especially widows and *devdasi),*to labelling women who challenge the institution of marriage, to the individual lives of separated women, and to single women's movements (separated women being part of those) in India.

The paper utilises a case study approach that reviews the use of agency by separated women individually in their lives to negotiate their positions. The case study of ENSS is used to analyse the collective struggles by separated women to challenge heteropatriarchy. One of the intentions of this research is to raise the question and attempt to find an answer to the question as to whether women are to be seen only as victims or alsoas agents for change. Women's agency is a less understood phenomenon in the context of desertion.

Therefore, this paper analyses the case studies of three separated women's lives who use their agency, but in very contrasting manners. The case studies of individual women are based primarily on their personal experiences and negotiations. The analysis of the case studies is done to situate their experiences in the discourse around positioning 'women' as good or bad. The case study approach is adopted because little is known about the negotiations of separated women in their individual capacities for defying the label of 'bad'. This approach is helpful to examine the overarching tension of considering them as a stable category and homogenising their collective experiences. Therefore, the case study approach has been noted as being particularly appropriate for researching an area where few studies have been carried out (SOPPECOM, 2005). The author's personal experiences and reflections offer valuable insights on the complexities of the processes and in problematising 'labelling' and tensions around 'collective struggles'.

By agency, I refer to the innate capacity and potential of separated women to affect a difference in their situation and to live a life of dignity. For the purpose of this research, this term 'agency' denotes theestablishment of a self-identity and use of the innate potential to challenge heteropatriarchy and the prescribed norms, traditions, practices that marginalises and excludes them. They are breaking the prescriptive spaces of marginalisation and exclusion (and the

silence as well), toensure a life of dignity and self-esteem, free of violence, abuse and stigma. The use of agency is not confined to fighting against marginalisation and labelling but also relates to their negotiations, albeitsecretly, in defying these labels.

The core conceptual tools used to understand desertion for the purpose of the study is the concept of ‘good women and bad women’. It will relate to the frameworks around ‘morality’, sexuality, identity, agency, power, heteropatriarchyand normativity. The concepts that aided understanding of the individual struggles are ‘victimhood’, ‘agency’, ‘desire’, and the collective contemporary struggle by the POs is the human rights framework. Throughout the paper, the analysis is done using the queer lens. It will be crucial to mention here that one of the major limitations of the research is that it unpacks the construct of ‘bad women’ primarily from the framework of ‘subjugation of sexuality’ by the heteropatriarchy. Thus, limiting its scope and not addressing a suite of other challenges faced from heteropatriarchy, normativity and the abundant potentials and several struggles of separated women.

The next section explains the normative situation of separated women in India and the process of their marginalisation and exclusion. It also briefly narrates the organised initiatives that they are taking to raise their collective voice.

4. Context

The conceptualisation of ‘womanhood’ in India, as elsewhere, is very narrow. The overwhelming perception about an ‘ideal woman’ is - married, bears children (especially a male child), pious, faithful to her husband, obedient, and heterosexual (Misra, 2011). Married women are positioned higher in a hierarchy along with other intersectionalities of caste, religion, class, ethnicity, place of living and sexuality. However, when the women who are beyond this institution are faced with these intersectionalities, their situation changes dramatically. There are very clear dividing lines separating ‘ideal’ (married) women and those who are out of the institution of marriage. There are stories of millions of married women, who live a life of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, and some of

them dare to take ‘that strong step’ – of walking out of marriage; others are kicked out of the marriage. Some of them take divorce and some simply live separately. Few walk out of the marriage for the fulfilment of their desires and contentment.

4.1 The normative position of separated women

In order to understand the normative position of separated women, it is useful to highlight their status in India. The first and the most imperative issues that separated women grapple with is their buoyant identity and the complexities attached with it. In many cases, these women oscillate between the identities of a married and separated woman. It is generally observed that before finally deciding on living separately, these women frequently (in many cases three to four times) leave and return to the marriage with the hope of reconciliation. But, even when they finally decide to live separately or are thrown out, it is seen that, when their husbands visit them, the family, relatives, and community force them to entertain him telling her ‘after all he is your husband’ or ‘who knows if he accepts you this time’ (ENSS, 2010). In this *experimentation* and/or pressure, theyoften become pregnant.

These women are ‘not wanted’ - neither by their natal families nor in their marital families. They are frequently denied any right over land, property, finances or maintenance for themselves or their children. In many of these cases, they are not even allowed to use the assets or possessions that they bring with them at the time of marriage. In such situations, they are left alone, often without any skills for making a decent livelihood, to fulfil their needs andthose of their children such as food, education, health, marriage, etc (NFSWR, 2009). Some of these women who decide to live together and declare their relationship (as lesbians) face practical difficulties at every level: filling nominations in bank account or life insurance policies, taking medical decisions, and so on, as legally in India only relatives by blood or marriage can take decisions relating to life and death by default (Sharma, 2006). Along with these challenges, another major struggle is around their safety and that of their daughters, which is generally at stake because of the absence of ‘men’ in their houses (NFSWR, 2009).

Along with these practical issues, some of the ‘strategic’ (Kabeer, 1999, p.27) issues they encounter are: ‘survival with dignity’ – these women radically challenge the normativity of the society. While widows may get sympathy considering that the situation of widowhood is bestowed upon them, separated women are considered the culprits of not abiding by the marital norms set by society,even in cases where their husband has eloped, is missing, is insane or abusive. It is observed that with the continuous reinforcement, these women development a ‘self-blaming’ attitude.

They are often considered ‘inauspicious’ - Womanhood, in India, is constructed and identified not only by ethnicity, class, caste, religion, but also by the status of marriage. ‘The institution of marriage and the baggage that goes along with it (patrilocal residence, motherhood) have been able to control women and perpetuate exploitation’ (SOPPECOM, 2005). Therefore, when they move out of the marriage they are socially and culturally excluded – they are not invited to the festivals, celebration, rituals, customs or occasions like marriage, birth, etc.

Since the ‘good-bad’ women discourse is intertwined with power, it embraces symbolism which is evident in language, practices or customs (Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.466). The community in which they live, many a times call them ‘*dayan or dakan’*. They (as separated women) are often referred to as ‘*rand’*, the term which is used interchangeably with *‘randi’,* an abusive term used for prostitutes (Gupta, 2001). These are some of the derogatory words that are used to address them in a day-to-day conversation. Moreover, sometimes these terms contain deeper meaning. For example, sometimes if someone is ill in their neighbourhood, some death happens or someone’s goat/cow dies then the blame comes to them. It will be presumed that it is because of their evil eye that all wrongs are happening. In extreme cases, the forms of punishment (of being *Dayan*) range from verbal abuse to battering and even brutal murder. Sometimes their hair is stripped and they are paraded naked, branded with hot iron rods, raped, made to eat excreta, etc.It is generally seen that there is a vested interest of some people in spreading these rumours against them. For instance, sometimes they have an eye on their land or property and sometimes they want

sexual favours from these women, which they may have declined (National forum for single women's rights (NFSWR, 2011).

Separated women are also presumed as 'loose women', they are considered to be 'on the make', looking for a man to satisfy her sexual urges' (NFSWR, 2011). If they are seen with any men, they are blamed as 'characterless' or 'impure'. When they separate, the first assumption is – her husband has left her because she was not of 'good character'. Another stigma attached with them is of 'home breakers' – in a lay person's way of expression – one who strategises to trap a married man and disrupts his marital life.

Alongsidethis societal and cultural marginalisation, these women are entangled in practical issues such as being excluded from the government records – the state does not recognise them as a category and hence does not hold census data for them. Since they are not recorded in the census data, their socio-cultural-political-economic dimensions areevaded, hence the limited scope for social policies for them (SOPPECOM, 2005).

Despite encountering the marginalisation and exclusion, many of these women feel 'free' after coming out of the marriage. Much of their self-conception is changed with the collective strength and solidarity and they can be heard saying: 'I have no regrets to leave my husband', 'After meeting so many women like me, I realised that I am neither a 'bad' woman', nor I was wrong (as people always told me), 'I have gained self-confidence by living on myself', 'I am also worth something', 'I have proved those people wrong who used to find faults in me', 'What happiness/benefit has one man given that I should look for another one?'

4.2 The issue becomes visible

In the recent past, the issue of single women/separated women hasbecome increasingly visible and some of the women's organisations havebegun to address their issues. Some of these issues are: land and property, maintenance, government entitlements, sexuality and some are organising them in a collective (people's organisation (PO)). These women are organisingthemselves with other single women in India –those who are widows, deserted, abandoned, walked out on, divorced, never married and have agreed to define/classify them as 'single',

as the term pulls all of them from the stigmatised and tabooed connotation. As is evident with these connotations and as is explained in the section above, these women are not in the prescribed normative framework of society but are challenging hegemonic normativity of the institution of marriage. The forthcoming section analyses the phenomena of controlling and regulating these women based on their sexuality. It also asserts how marriages, institutionalise this regulation and those women challenging this institution are labelled as 'bad'.

5. Separated women and the label of 'bad women'

5.1 Marriage

In India, marriage is constructed as the mandatory norm and an accomplishment in a person's life, whether male or female. Mehrotra (2003, p.202) notes that (based on the census of India) '95% of all Indian women are or have been married'. Misra (2011) argues - the debate around womanhood is centred on 'ideal woman' – the married, child bearer and the heterosexual woman. It is interesting to note that the emergence of the 'good/ideal woman' figure relates to the colonial period. The imposition of Victorian 'moral' and ethics, glorified 'woman' and 'womanhood' by signifying the importance of married women and domesticity on the one hand and introduced laws to criminalise sex outside of marriage, on the other. This resulted in narrowing the definition of 'woman' and 'sexuality' (BBC, 2011). A similar argument is found in Mani (1989) who argues that the colonialists framed the 'Indian' as backward by highlighting the way in which women (especially *Sati*, etc) were treated. In response, the Nationalists created the image of the 'Bharatiya Naari', who was more 'pure' and virtuous than anyone could possibly be. Women from then on had to evidence their worth in comparison to this ideal type.

Smart (1992) argues that the discourses around law, social sciences, and health such as birth control, abortion, sexuality, etc. construct feminine bodies as problematic, hence 'self-evidently' requiring regulation. She further states that the institution of marriage is thus the classic way to control the female subjects. Sarkar (2001) argues that marriage creates the categories and hierarchies of kinship, caste, class, religion, sexuality and gender. Berry (2007) further adds on

to the argument that marriage constructs the basis of inheritance and division of land and property. The above arguments state that all of these discourses are directed towards dominating the sexualness[10] of feminine bodies and keep them under surveillance and regulation.

5.2 The construction of 'good women' and 'bad women'

This domination is easily possible through the institution of marriage. Hence, those women who fall into this institution of marriage and thus abide by these heteronormative construction and norms of the society are considered 'good' by the society. Society respects and supports them, the law 'protects' them, the state ensures their citizenship rights, religion upholds them, and culture concentrates around them. But, the women who fall outside the hegemony of marriage, and thus heteropatriarchy, are 'bad women' (Erickson, 2010). Therefore, it becomes easy for the society, state, law, religion, etc. to label them 'bad', in order to castthem out, deny them from their citizenship rights, keep them out of the purview of law, religion, and culture – and thus marginalise and exclude them, making them vulnerable. Also the label 'bad' is used to promote conformity by discouraging other women from considering 'singlehood/separation'.

5.3 The process of labelling 'bad women'

As referred to earlier, given the lack of historical literature on separated women, correlations are drawn between widows, *devadasis,*who challenge the heterosexual marital framework, and separated women. The processes of labelling women as 'bad' have various traces in the past. As mentioned, *devadasis* were signs of pleasure and enjoyment for the inmates and priests of the temple. They were a group of women who were not a part of the mainstream conjugal style of sexuality and domestic world. They were not allowed to marry. However, they used to enjoy 'auspicious' and respectable status in the society, possess tremendous wealth and were recognised as the head of their households.

[10] 'sexualness' as eroticism and desire that flows through people without necessarily constituting them as subjects.

During the colonial period with the hegemony of Victorian values, sex outside of the marriage was criminalised. Hence, *devadasis* were criminalised as well and thus could not remain the citizens of India as their selfhood was essentially identified by their sexuality (BBC 2011 Sex Death and the Gods, 2011). Srinivasan (1985) claims that ‘while the reformers presented the Hindu temple dancer as a 'prostitute' in order to do away with her; the revivalists presented her as a 'nun' in order to incarnate her afresh’. Nevertheless, the new and modern India had virtually no place to accommodate *devadasis*, which became more and more difficult with laws targeting them and illegalising the practice. As a result, their identity was diminished to prostitutes, who were eventually criminalised by the law of independent and modern India (BBC 2011 Sex Death and the Gods, 2011). Thus, since their interpretation, *devadasis* were branded as requiring reform, these reform initiatives left the material and the ideological basis of the system completely unrecognised (John and Nair, 1998, p.12). Hence, the practice that was once recognised and respected was taken as an embarrassment by the Indian society. This confined the discourse of sexuality solely to the realm of marriage.

Similarly, there are life experiences of other categories of women who do not fall under the institution of marriage and thus do not enjoy ‘respectful’ status in the society - such as widows. The narrative of controlling the sexuality of widows by marrying them to their young brother in law (irrespective of his age) is a common traditional customary practice, across castes and regions in India. Chowdhry (1998) argues that through this custom, though sexuality of widows is recognised it is only done so to be subjected to regulation through marriage. It is interesting to note here that these remarriages were restricted only to the respective kinship.

The general perception of widows by society as also argued by Gupta (2001) is that widows were considered dangerous because of their sexual urge and Chowdhry (1998) claims with examples that in many cases, these women are being exploited by other males in the family. Jha, 1939 (as cited in Gupta, 2001) stated that society believed that women have eight times greater sexual urge than men and since widows do not have ‘legitimate access to sex’ (husbands), they are considered asa threat to the nation. Therefore, there were sexual

enforcements on them with the intention to ensure that their licentious sexual impulses are contained. These included – prohibiting them from ‘heating’ food, decorating their bodies with colourful clothes or any accessories such as henna, perfume, jewellery, etc, and keeping their distance from men (ibid). In other words, when they partfrom their husbands, they are expected also to part with their sexuality (it needs to be mentioned here that there is no such expectation from men in the same situation). These assumptions, practices and labels pose the complexities and problematise the discourse. Where there are all efforts to pacify the sexuality of widows, the continuous sexual abuses and exploitation is a reflection of the vested interest of patriarchy in labelling them ‘over sexual’ or ‘bad’.

5.4 Law and ‘bad women’

While society acts as a domineering paradigm to subjugate the sexuality of so called ‘bad’ women, law is another paradigm doing so. Although, India is a signatory of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of DiscriminationagainstWomen (CEDAW), it is observed that the human rights commitments of India contradict with the socio-cultural-legal systems of patriarchy and male domination. This statement gets validated with the provision of adultery in Section 497 that presumes - a woman can only be the victim of section and not punishable under the adultery provision, and it treats women as the property of the husband. The court held in Sowmithri Vishnu vs. Union of India*:*

> ‘the argument that Section 497 effects discrimination between men and women as it confers upon the husband the right to prosecute the adulterer but does not confer any right upon the wife to prosecute the woman with whom her husband has committed adultery, cannot be sustained because such argument goes to the policy of the law … In defining the offence of adultery so as to restrict the class of offenders to men only, no constitutional provision is infringed…the offence of adultery as defined in Section 497, is considered by the legislature as an offence against the

> sanctity of the matrimonial home, an act that is committed by a man, as it is generally.' (1985 Sup SCC 137 as cited in Khanna, 2009)

It is quite evident here that the law only recognises female sexual agency in its negation. Another underlying assumption is that women who are under the control of their husbands and those who are sexually passive are good women. The phrase "sanctity of the matrimonial home" (used in the judgement) simply implies the sanctity of the right of a husband over the sexuality of his wife (Khanna, 2009). Thus, women who deviate from this norm fall under the 'bad women' category. This explicates what Menon (2004, p.216) states - the identity of 'woman' is produced by the political and legal practices and does not necessarily pre-exist.This labelling of 'bad women' by the societal and legal instruments is challenged by the women themselves, which is dealt in the next section.

6. Separated women using their agency

Marriage is hegemonic as it gives women the identity of the *suhagan*, the auspiciously married woman (Berry, 2011). Married women thus draw upon the symbolism of being normative and 'good' women. 'Indian culture and society have generally viewed the female body as a site for all kinds of actions and reactions, but not as a legitimate site for sexual autonomy or personal agency' (Sharma, 2006, p.1). The three case-studies discussed here presents diverse strategies adopted by them in using their agencies to challenge the heteropatriarchy.

6.1 I found solace with another woman

The first story is about Shobha who works as a home guard and has walked out of marriage. Sharma (2006) has documented her story of leaving her husband in her own words,

> 'My marriage was a disaster. I was given in marriage before I was eighteen years old. I scrupulously followed all the prescriptions laid down for a 'good wife'. I did everything a woman ought to do. However, nothing helped, I

> had to leave. Even my children, I had to leave them, it was the hardest thing in the world, but I was forced to do. My husband beat me up, whether he was drunk or sober… my mother is single and poor, and was unwilling to keep me. A woman who did social work in our village helped me… This is how I escaped from my husband.'

Her natal family denied her, hence she had to seek refuge in a shelter home and work as home guard.

> In Shobha's words, 'There is a woman in – I can't reveal where she lives or who she is – this woman has bewitched me. We sleep in one bed when I go over her place…my hand strays over her breasts and thighs and I am always hopeful that she will turn to me, but so far she has not. I do not know what she thinks and feels…' Quoting the benefits of such a relationship, she says- '…There is no fear of violence from a woman partner. The other advantage is that we can take our pleasure, enjoy the satisfaction of our desires with women, without being considered promiscuous and labelled 'bad' by society, as long as we keep it a secret. Such relationships are the most convenient option for single women. But more than all these reasons put together, it is the way I feel around women, more comfortable, without the typical obligations that oppress me when I have to relate to men.'

Shobha's story is a classic example illustrating that within this idealised notion of marriage lay the foundations of oppression and thus spaces of resistance. With full awareness of the tension of bad women and good women, Shobha made that 'tough' decision. Labelled as a bad woman by deserting her husband, she was caught between what she had been conditioned to believe and what she is crafting for herself, the relations with another woman. It is interesting to note her negotiation between 'heteronormativity' – by pretending to control her desire (for a woman) and thus following the norms (Berry, 2007), and 'non-normativity' – by secretly fulfilling her desire of pleasure with her 'girl-friend'. This is the tension Butler (2006) refers to in treating women as a stable category. She further suggests that the category of women is provided and restrained by the power structure. Shobha's story gives important insight that women already considered

as ‘bad’ like Shobha for walking out of her marriage, still care about what society thinks about them, and therefore keep their ‘non-normative’ relationships secret in order not to be labelled ‘bad’! This confirms Butler’sargument ‘if the enactment of lesbian masquerade enables the subversion of identity to occur, it also throws into relief the extraordinary compulsion to 'act straight' (2006 as cited in Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.464).

6.2 Is being a victim the basis of ‘good women’?

The narrative of Durga[11] is taken from NFSWR (2009), the forum with which I was associated: Durga married Sushil as his own choice and was happily living with him. Durga's happiness however did not last long. As the family grew (they had three children), so did the responsibilities. Sushil seemed to have lost interest in earning a living and the family was in a dire straits. Faced with such a situation, Durga started making a living for the entire family. Sushil started spending his days loitering with his friends and would not contribute in any way.

One day Sushil expressed the desire to open a bakery shop for which he demanded money from her. She refused in the beginning but later she had to borrow a loan of 10000 INR (115 GBP) from a self-help group to meet Sushil’s forceful demand. However, the shop was closed in merely a month’s time as Sushil failed to manage. Whenever she tried discussing repaying the loan with Sushil, he became annoyed and started abusing her. During this time, Durga invited her aunt, who was illiterate, to stay with her in order to learn stitching and weaving to make a decent livelihood. While Durga was busy fending for her family, her husband and aunt developed an intimate relationship. On suspicion, Durga asked Sushil but he denied everything and accused her of being characterless herself to think of such things. After some time, Durga's husband and her aunt eloped.

Later Durga joined *Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan* (ENSS), an association of single women in her area. The association members assured her, “Now you are not alone, the Association is with you.” The association offered to fight the illegal

[11] Name changed

marriage between Durga's husband and aunt so that Durga could get her husband back. But with time, the association's assurance and support infused strength and courage in Durga and after much thought, she decided that she 'no longer wanted anything to do with her husband'.

Durga's narration of her separation was a reassertion to herself and the society of her devotion, compliance and purity towards her husband. This is a strategy of representation as a victim and a 'good wife'. Sharma (2011) claims that a woman who seems to be a 'victim' is still seen as a good woman (worthy of 'protection') but when she is a desiring person with agency, she falls out of that category and finds it difficult to gain support. Although Durga states that she 'no longer wanted anything to do with her husband', (implying that she does not want to reconcile with him), her presentation of romanticising her separation may be her strategy, but is also 'careful regulation of identity' (Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.464) by heteropatriarchy. Durga's performance of being good women is the reiteration of Butler'sargument that 'Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech... and exercise a binding power'(1993, p.225 as cited in Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.465). This 'binding power' involves the 'regulation of identificatory practices' (ibid) that can be seen when many separated women attempt to fall in the 'good women' category, because it offers security, stability and normativity.

6.3 A desire ensured her – 'her agency'

Dutt (2012) shares Kamla's[12] story through an online resource. Since childhood Kamla was taught that a daughter's ultimate home is that of her husband's,and that the duty of every woman is to serve her husband and his family. This was what she had internalised when she was married to the neighbour's son at an early age of eight, when she had not even lived her childhood. She had never been out of her small village that encompassed her small world. She had no one to talk to and so she had completely engrossed herself in accomplishing the role of a 'dutiful' wife.

[12] Name changed

A girlof her agecame to her neighbourhood after getting marriedand the two became friends. She came from a bigger city named ‘Kolkata’ and used to tell Kamla about the various adventures she had as a kid in that city. ‘She wove a magical world for Kamla’. To Kamla, Kolkata became a city of dreams, a place where the unthinkable happens. One day, when it became irresistible, she expressed her desire to her friend that she wanted to visit her magical world’ - Kolkata. The friend was taken aback by her persuasion and agreed to take her. They planned to run away from their homes and succeeded in doing so.They reached Kolkata! Once there, they did not have any idea what to do. Kamla’s friend was from Kolkata and was aware that in the Red Light Areas of Sonagachi, they could earn easy money. She took Kamla there. At this point in her life, Kamla took the biggest decision of her life, she became a sex worker. ‘The unthinkable did happen in Kolkata’!

Now, at the age of 60 when asked whether she regrets her decision, she answers with a mixed emotion. According to her, that single decision had changed her life andher identity - as a sex worker, an identity that she chose for herself in order to experience a world beyond her own village. She thinks that ‘the decision might have brought her to a lower rung in the society but has made her grow as a person. She is not ashamed to say that she is a Sex Worker.’

The story of Kamla highlights that irrespective of the patriarchal stereotypes embodiment within her since childhood, she used her agency to challenge the patriachal structures. Her decision to take a radical stand and break the hegemonic paradigm of the society in satisfying her desire is a reflection of her strength and courage that she demonstrated by accepting the societal label of ‘bad’ in exercising her agency to be autonomous. Acceptance of a ‘shameful’ and ‘stigmatised’ identity was a victory of ‘human agency’ over heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. It is important to reiterate that Kamla does not try to shield or hide her ‘bad woman’ identity as a sex worker in order to have society’s acceptance, contrary to the previous two cases. This assertion of agency might have been sustained with the organised strength that she gains by working in the Sonagachi area (the area has a presence of a sex workers’ collective).

All three cases exemplify how these women used ‘power within’[13] to bring confidence and contentment to their lives after coming out of the institution of marriage. They also illustrate the interplay of the negotiations between ‘good woman’ and ‘bad woman’ and the underlying complexities in these negotiations blended with positioning them as ‘victims’ or/and as ‘human agency’. These negotiations and strategies of gaining legitimacy and acceptance, however, at the same time reproduce the patriarchal binaries and construct. The diversity seen in the negotiations/actions of these three women reiterates the argument made by Cornwall that ‘essentialism’ (women’s essence is commonly shared by all women) negates and/or ignores the creativity and huge potential embodied in people, by which they are crafting their lives(2007, p.73). The stories of Durga and Shobhashows that they, like many other separated women, want to associate them with an imaginary identifications of ‘good women’, the identity that in itself is ambivalent or too idealistic to achieve. This struggle gives rise to what Butler states 'hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion and proliferation’(1990, p. 31 as cited in Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.462). In other words, the exaggeration of ‘idealist’ identity of ‘good women’ remains in disagreement to the practicalities in life, especially for women at margins, that creates confusion (within the subjects in particular and within the society in general) and thus reproducesnormativities.The stories reiterate that ‘good women’ identity is ‘a fantasy that is both hankered after and embodied through an approximation of its norms’ (Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.465). The next section explores the collective struggles of separated women through ENSS to redefine their identity, and challenge the institution of marriage and the stigmatised identity of ‘bad women’.

[13]‘Power within’framework is used to refer to the person’s sense of self-worth. It is the capacity within a person to realise one’s own potential; it is a constant practice of questioning and challenging assumptions (Miller et al., 2007, p.6).

7. Collective struggles of separated women contesting the label of ‘bad women’

7.1 Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS)

ENSSis a single women’s movement that includes separated women as one of the categories of single women. The movement began in 1999 from Rajasthan, which has a mass membership of 40,000 single women. To date, it has expanded to seven states, each having independent status respectively. In 2009, these states have organised themselves under the banner of the National Forum for Single Women’s Rights. At the inception of the movement, in 1999, they unanimously decided that they would not wait anymore for others – whether it be a women’s movement, civil society or any feminist activists to raise a voice on their behalf, but that they themselves would take action and struggle to claim and ensure the right to a dignified life for them and fellow women in similar situations.

7.2 Challenging heteropatriarchy and normativity

'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power', but instead, 'depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance' (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). Theenunciation of Faucaultian‘power network’ (ibid)is exhibited in the collective resistance/struggles of separated women. As a collective, the members (all single women) have decided to call them ‘Single’ in Hindi it means ‘*Ekal’*. As a PO, they believe in the slogan ‘*Ekal huon akeli nahi’* (I am single but not alone). The shared identity of ‘single’ was significant for them as it pulled them out of the stigmatised identities of widows, separated, unmarried mothers, never married and gave them a new identity of ‘*Ekal’*. This was crucial as a healer for regaining their crumbled self-esteem. It is a political identity as well to demand their citizenship rights from the state, as they are not primarily seen as an independent citizen of the state and are excluded from government entitlements and from claiming rights from the society that marginalises them.

For ensuring strong grassroots presence, the PO started holding monthly meetings at the block[14] level in rural and urban areas to support one-another. Traditionally, separated women have few spaces to share their numerous sorrows and difficulties, where their strength and courage is recognised and reflected back to them. For the first time, these meetings offered this space– where they could share their loneliness, sorrow, happiness, desires, aspirations, joys; gain strength to exercise their agency, to resist oppression in their individual lives, where they could collectively confront family members or other members of the community who harass them; seek and offer help from other single women in their personal affairs, gather information and support about government schemes and programmes and advocate access to their government entitlements. Thus, through using these spaces, they are challenging their stigmatised identities and producing counter-representations of their lives and identities.

There are many intertwined stigmatised labels within the construct of 'bad' – 'loose character', 'inauspicious', '*rand* (slut/prostitute)', 'impure', 'threat', 'danger', etc. One of the many struggles of separated women is - challenging the label – 'inauspicious', due to which they are prohibited them from auspicious ceremonies such as marriages, birth ceremonies, etc. They are not even allowed to perform rituals carried out by mothers in their own child's marriage. This is one of the worst treatments and dejections that they experience as mothers. The PO is challenging these practices and customs.

To enable single mothers to participate in her child's marriage, other single women of the PO form a group and go to the marriage ceremony. Since it is difficult for a separated mother herself to revolt against the family members, relatives and the community, the group of women work as a pressure group to ensure that she perform all the rituals. The group is generally from the same or nearby village/locality and hence are familiar with the customs, traditions and rituals. Hence, it is observed that they are comparatively well accepted by the family and community. It is seen that when one separated woman participates in auspicious occasions, it motivates and becomes a justification for other

[14] The administrative unit in India covering few councils of villages.

separated/single women and sometimes their families as well to challenge these cruel customs and traditions.

Another struggle is to challenge the labels of ‘loose’ and ‘slut’ - As women who disapprove the normativity of the institution of marriage, separated women are susceptible to being viewed as ‘bad’ women – sexually loose, immoral, dangerous and home breakers. In this way, women who challenge the heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy and thus express courage to be independent, use their agency and want to exercise their right to freedom are considered ‘bad’.

The PO deals with such societal perception at two levels - micro and macro. At the first level, it takes up individual cases of verbal, non-verbal, physical or sexual abuse/violence/assault against separated women. The process of taking up the case and addressing the issue is first to negotiate with the perpetrators and other people associated, and try to resolve the case at local level with mutual discussions, and using the PO as a pressure group. If the case is not be resolved then they hold a big meeting with other members of the village, slum, community and society, the influential members of the community and resolve the case there with making the mutual agreement on the PO’s letter head. If the issue remains unresolved there, then it is taken to court (this, however is generally the last resort). It has been the experience of the PO that the majority of cases are resolved with mutual consensus. The cases of serious nature where the separated woman is on non-negotiable terms are directly taken to either police station or to the court. Thus, in this way they are making a claim to a moral economy outside of, and prior to the law and the state. Thus, in an organised manner they are creating these moral arguments and in most cases are successful in creating the forms of moral capital that the members of this PO use, but can be accessed by non-members as well. By doing this, they are enabling structural change within the society.

At a macro level, the PO increases awareness around how these beliefs, perceptions, practices, and customs marginalise separated women. This is done through the media. The cases of violence, atrocities, exclusion and marginalisation are publicised.A conscious effort is made however to have a

balance of the messages reachingthe public. This balance is achieved byfirstly, reflecting on how these women are victimised by the normative systems and structures. Secondly, by reflecting the potential, strength and courage of separated women to demonstrate how these women are using their agency to uphold their rights. The PO is also advocating the state to formulate a stringent law that punishes the person who is found involved in tarnishing the dignity of single women.

Besides these formal engagements with the society and state, these women are redefining or/and are broadening the institution of family. As Sharma (2006) believes, 'the more family ties are loosened, the more air there will be for other bonds to blossom'. In Himachal Pradesh (one of the states in India which has a strong presence of single women's movement as well, and is a part of NFSWR), these women are envisioning the new family '*naya sasural*' where older and younger single women will live together with their children. Thus, in this way they can overcome the loneliness in their lives, be a support for each-other, maintain economic viability within family and re-work the division of labour (Berry, 2011). With this envisioning of the family, they are collectively challenging heteropatriarchy and establishing alternatives to the current hegemonic patriarchal constructs.

7.3 Reproducing normativity

What is most interesting about the ENSS is that it creates a new identity that goes beyond the specific forms of victimhood of the various social positionalities that it brings together. The identity of single women in this sense relates to a broader understanding of heteropatriarchy and normativity than relating particular forms of victimhood. However, this create tensions as well, which Menon (2004) and Butler (2006) argue in their works - the first is inpresuming 'woman' (single women, for the purpose of the paper) as a stable category, and second, in presuming a collective and shared experience of all single women.

To illustrate one of the tensions that is in the definition per se. Here I will unpack only the definition of separated women. By the definition of the ENSS, separated women are those who have walked out, abandoned, deserted or thrown out of marriage. However, the life experiences of individual women show that they hover between identities of separated and married, in some cases even for 8-10 years (Chandibai of Rajasthan in ENSS, 2010). There are some whose husbands, after abandoning, visit them for a couple of days only to reappear after years, there are still some whose husbands are missing and who have no clue whether or when they will return. Butler (2006, p.6) expresses this tension while referring to ‘presumed universality or unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constructions of the representational discourse in which it functions’.

There is an evident tension within the movement relating to differences in identities of separated women. There are women who have been deserted by their husbands, who have walked out of the marriage because of the life of oppression and violence, who have walked out to accomplish their desires and dreams, those who are living in a relationship with another women, those who are trafficked as sex workers, those who are sex workers by choice, etc. However, not all of these categories (especially lesbians, sex workers, etc.) of separated women are a part of the movement, definitely, not by declaring them as one. One of the reasons is the non-acceptance from the movement.Thus, there is a heteropatriarchal construct of normativity within the collective, of labelling them as ‘bad’ and ‘good’ based on exercising one’s sexual agency. Jagori, an organisation working with single women quotes in their analysis of categorising ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women, ‘We too would label women wanton and then push them outside the circle while occupying the centre stage ourselves’ (Bhaiya, Shanti, and Maya, 1996, p.17). This raises a larger issue that Cornwall et al. (2007) alsoraise ‘How to achieve solidarity across differences because there is no simple ‘us’ in feminism’. It also re-establishes the earlier discussed argument (Cornwall, 2007) that ‘essentialism’ produces another sets of normativitiesand binaries and it can is seen in ENSS and it may result to ‘exclusion’ of some women.

Another challenge before the PO is the emergence of different sets of hierarchies within it. As the collective expands, new spaces and structures are created for its smooth and effective functioning. But, in turn, those spaces and structures may become spaces for exercising 'power over[15]' 'other', thus creation of a new identity of '*others'*. This compliments the argument raised by Cornwall (2007) - sometimes the discourse around heterosexuality becomes so domineering that it tends invisiblisediscourse around other hierarchical constructs that may be far more substantial in women's lives such as female-female hierarchy.

The collectively shared identity of '*Ekal'* is transformative for many women who have been living a life with various stigmatised and tabooed labels/identities. However, caution should be laid on reproducing the heteropatriarchal constructs and identities as 'till the time we continue to contribute to the definition of 'bad' and 'good' women, the dream of all women to become independent will not be realised' (Bhaiya et al. 2006, p.42 as cited in Berry, 2007, p.32). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that being organised, they are claiming their rights from families, society and state. Creatively they are redefining 'family' and are crafting their lives by enabling the concept of *'naya sasural'*. The collective actions and struggles to bring structural change and challenging the normativity and heteropatriarchy bring hope, joy and confidence to their lives, thus regaining self-esteem and dignity. It enables separated women to use 'power with'[16] and 'power within' to struggle for their rights collectively.

8. Conclusion

As referred to at the beginning of the research, the motivation for undertaking this piece of work came from the dilemma I was encountering during my work with single women in India. The dilemma that was troubling me was the conflict

[15] Power over is the ability or authority (mostly gained by the access of resources) to exercise power by one over another. It operates to privilege certain people while marginalizing others, thus creating the category of 'powerful' and 'powerless'. It is observed that when marginalized get this ability/authority; they imitate the oppressor, thus maintaining these categories (Miller, et al., 2007, p.5).

[16]'Power with'is the identification of commonality among likeminded people to develop collective strength, solidarity and collaboration among all and in turn also develop individual potential. United, all these aim towards making a larger impact (Miller, et al., 2007, p.6).

between individual rights of single women and individual rights of married women. Through the process of reading, reflecting, critiquing, unlearning, learning and writing, I realised that the framework in which I was trapped was in itself patriarchal and the patriarchal imprints within me had constructed it. This realisation, though transformative, came as a big challenge to me as it reiterated that 'patriarchy is the strong and complex *catch'!*

The complexities of the labelling of separated women as 'bad women', as argued in the paper, lies in the dominant heteropatriarchal discourse around 'marriage' - the 'legitimate access to sex'. This was imposed by Victorian code of 'morals' and 'ethics' that glorified womanhood and marriage while criminalising sex outside marriage. This gave rise to the images of '*BhartiyaNaari*' (Indian woman, a fantasy that is too idealistic to achieve) while diminishing the identity of non-normative women, such as, *devadasis* to prostitutes. The underlying assumption in such imposed norms/regulations is that 'female subject'/women's sexuality is necessitated to be 'systemically' controlled and regulated. Therefore, the women whose sexuality cannot be regulated (through the institution of marriage), tends to fall under the construct of 'bad women', who are thus perceived as a continuous 'threat' to the society. Hence, there exist systematic processes, practices and strategies through which these women are marginalised and excluded, not only by and within the society but by the law as well.

However, separated women are emancipating themselves out of this trap by crafting their lives through various negotiations, contestations, resistances and sometimes through capitulations. The case-study of Shobha presents woman who is already considered 'bad' still care about what society thinks about her, and therefore keep her 'non-normative' relationships secret in order not to be labelled 'bad'! Thisexhibits that the category of women is provided and restrained by the power structure. In addition, the 'lesbian masquerade' performed by Shobhaleads to the subversion of identity and at the same time comes as a relief as it eases the compulsion to 'act straight' (Butler, 2006 as cited in Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.464).Durga'sself-representation as 'victim' is an attempt for regaining the identity of 'good woman'.This enunciates that woman as a victim is considered 'good' (worthy of dependency) vis-à-vis a desiring woman. This is seen in

Kamla's story, who decided to become a sex-worker and thus stood as a victory of a 'human agency' over heteropatriarchy. These stories exemplify the complexity in considering women as a stable category. It also underlines that the notion of 'good women' is too idealist which creates 'hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion and proliferation' (Butler, 1990, p. 31 as cited in Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p.462).

Although, separated women are using their agencies to craft their lives, there are heteropatriarchal structures such as social customs, practices, normative constructs of 'good women'-'bad women' and laws that obstruct them from making choices of their own. In order to challenge these power structures, collective action, resistances and struggles opened up an entire new spectrum of opportunities. The single women's movement in India, in the first place, gave them the shared identity of 'Ekal', through which they overthrew the stigmatised labels and related connotationsthey were living with for years. This was an emancipatory experience for each of them. ENSS offered separated women the space of their own – to share their loneliness, sorrow, happiness and desires. Through the creative use of these spaces, they are challenging their stigmatised identities and producing counter-representations of their lives and identities.

Collectives are the epitome of confronting, contesting and challenging the heteropatriarchal constructs of 'bad' that is expressed in the connotations of notions such as 'inauspicious', '*rand'* and*dayan*. The primary challenge in contesting these constructs is first – creation of a discourse around these heteropatriarchal constructions and second – to begin the process of unlearning the embodied myths of considering oneself as 'bad'. ENSS is actively doing this in the shared spaces such as monthly block level meetings. One of the effective ways in which these constructions are challenged is by taking collective action such as enabling separated mothers to actively perform the rituals in their children's marriage. The label of 'rand', slut is challenged through direct encounters from the perpetuators, involving family, community, police or court as and when the need be. Being organised, these women are taking creative initiatives to redefine 'family' and thus taking radical stand to

challengeheteropatriarchy,by introducing the concept of *'nayasasural'* (new home/family).

While the most powerful way of contesting the stigmatised identity is reclaiming the shared identity, however, this raises the concern of presuming a collective and shared experience of all separated women, thus essentialising the discourse and experiences. This is apprehensive as on one hand 'essentialism' negates the creativity and potential and on the other produces another set of normativities. The paper yet again raises the associated complex question that if 'essentialism' is a concern than how to achieve solidarity across differences, which is mandatory for a movement to sustain. The movement is also challenged for excluding the non-normative category (lesbians and sex-workers), based on the use of the sexual agency by the individual member, thus reproducing the normative categorisation among itself.

The experiences of widows, separated, divorced, never married, unmarried mothers, those who are lesbians and who are sex works are all quite different from one other, yet ENSS somehow manage to create an overall meta identity category politically. This is a creative process – the process of creating the identity of *Ekal*. Further, collectively, separated women are carving and sharing a picture of strength and solidarity, with which they are challenging the hegemonic binary of 'good women' – 'bad women'.

Glossary

Ekal	Single
Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan	Association of Strong Women Alone
BhartiyaNaari	Indian Women
Devadasis	The women dedicated to deities of temple
Dakan	Witch
Dayan	Witch
Naya sasural	New family
Parityakta	Separated woman
Rand	Slut
Randi	Slut
Sati	Widows immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre
Suhagan	Married woman

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