



Voices of Dual Marginality of Dalit Women

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Abstract

In Indian society, Dalit woman has double disadvantage- one being Dalit and another being woman. Dalit women suffer all deprivations which their caste groups as a whole suffer. Besides they have to undergo additional hardships because of their gender. They have to struggle harder to secure basic necessities of life- food, clothing, fuel, water and education. The depiction of Dalit women narrate the double oppression faced by them as a dalit and as a woman. This paper intends to study some women characters in the works of some Dalit writers like Baby Kamble, Laxman Mane, Narendra Jadhao. The study is limited to women depicted in some noted works of these writers to throw light on the pains and sufferings of the margins in the margins.

Key words: voices, dual, marginality, dalit, women.

In Indian society, woman is always given a lower status. She is oppressed by the patriarchal order sanctioned by Hindu religion and laws of Manu. Dalit woman has double disadvantage- one being Dalit and another being woman. Dalit women suffer all deprivations which their caste groups as a whole suffer. Besides they have to undergo additional hardships because of their gender. They have to struggle harder to secure basic necessities of life- food, clothing, fuel, water and education. The depiction of Dalit women narrate the double oppression faced by them as a dalit and as a woman.

Baby Kamble in her autobiography 'The Prisons We Broke' (*Jina Amucha*) depicted the real and pathetic condition of Mahar women. This work is perhaps the first ever work that comes in Dalit literature which is written by a woman. It deals with two major problems of women- Firstly, the oppression, suppression and exploitation of the upper class and secondly, the discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. Maya Pandit, the translator of the Marathi original '*Jina*

Amucha', writes in her introductory note: "Baby Kamble's autobiography 'The Prisons We Broke' is a direct self-assertion of a Dalit woman but it also went two steps ahead. It was head-on confrontation with Brahminical hegemony on the one hand and patriarchal domination on the other. In one sense, it is more of a socio biography rather than an autobiography". Baby kamble's '*Jina Amucha*' is purely a Dalit feminist critique of patriarchy. She describes the physical and psychological violence women have to undergo in both public and private life. As Mahar community is 'other' for the Brahmins, Mahar women become the 'other' for the Mahar men. Kamble portrays how Dalit women were the worst sufferers of superstitions, hunger, poverty and the exploitative patriarchal order of Dalit men as well as the men from upper castes. The custom of keeping women at home, behind threshold was prevalent among Dalit men. It was rather a pride of the Mahar men to keep their wives behind threshold. Her own mother was locked in a house by her father to keep male 'honour' intact. This honour

was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house.

Child marriages and exploitation of daughters-in-law were prevalent in the community. The Dalit women were not only exploited by the caste system but they were also suffered by Dalit women. The mothers-in-law were not behind the men. They used to torture their daughters-in-law to take revenge of the tortures they suffered by their mothers-in-law. It gives them satisfaction and pleasure they could at least dominate someone else. The practice of chopping off the wife's nose with the instigation of mother and to fix her foot in a wooden piece weighing around five kilo with iron bar was prevalent among Mahar community. The women were the enemies of their counterpart. In most cases, the mothers-in-law act as the agents of exploitative system against their own daughters-in-law. This was a very unjust system prevalent in Indian society where patriarchy crushed the womanhood under its strong foundation. Women were regarded as Goddesses but in reality they were not treated as the human beings.

Mahar women had to pay respect to the man of higher caste, may it be a child, and if failed, they had to undergo a great humiliation not only by the people of the higher castes but also by the Mahar men and women. When men from upper caste came close, Mahar men had to say, 'The humble Mahar woman fall at your feet master.' This was like a chant which they had to repeat innumerable times. This was because the slave mentality was deeply rooted in the psyche of Mahar men and women. Double marginality in the work of Baby Kamble showed through the oppression and exploitation of upper class and violence of domestic life towards women in a patriarchal society.

Laxman Mane, in his autobiography 'Upara' (An Outsider), depicts the miserable life of his mother Anwari. She too was the victim of patriarchy. She belonged to Kaikadi community. She helped her husband gather canes, cut it and in weaving baskets. She would sell those baskets to the village women for food and clothing. But her husband abused and beat her. She begged for food in order to feed her children. Sometimes in the

absence of her husband, she managed the family on her own earnings. As she was deprived from the education, she did not understand the value of education first. So she protected Laxman from his father's wrath and welcomed the beating from her husband. Beating a woman was a common thing in the reign of patriarchy. From that moment, she never came in the way of her son's education. The equation changed later on and the father wanted Laxman to stop learning and earn for the family. But the mother motivated him to continue education and pacified her husband. She was very furious to know Laxman's inter-caste marriage. She refused drinking water at his place and cursed him. Laxman Mane has imparted many individual traits to her in the depiction of her character and has thus made her role in his life very clear.

She used to wander from one place to another in search of livelihood following all the customs and traditions of patriarchy. She delivered a baby by the side of the sea without any proper arrangements. In Kaikadi community, a woman is treated as a cow, a donkey. Sometimes, she is like footwear, a shoe etc.

Mulate says, "A Dalit woman's body, mind, emotions, passions, maternal instincts are not even worth a penny". According to Urmila Pawar, "Dalit men fight the battle of humanism. Yet they do not know what humanity is. Their treatment of their woman is not human".

Thus, the Dalit woman's exploitation is physical as well as mental. She is doubly crushed as a Dalit and as a woman. She suffers in the family first, because she is a woman and then has to face the society as she is a Dalit.

Narendra Jadhao's 'Outcaste: A Memoir' delineates the life of women at length. In this, Jadhao depicts the life of four women belonging to four different generations. His grandmother-Rahibai, his mother-Sonubai, his wife-Vasundhara and his daughter-Apoorva represent these generations. Rahibai and Sonubai were deprived from the education and are the ruthless victims of patriarchy.

Rahibai spent most of her life in the hardships of villages. She was a very hard working woman. After her husband's death, people were ill-treating her children. So, she changed the place and moved to Mumbai. She managed to find work mowing grass and pulling out weeds for 12-14 annas. Though she was the victim, she too had a patriarchal mentality towards her daughter-in-law.

Sonubai, Narendra Jadhao's mother was a victim of patriarchal mentality. She was also deprived from education. She marries at a very young age of ten. She had to face the same patriarchal hardships in village life. She had to work in a match-box factory to support her family livelihood. She was a very traditional woman and maintained the patriarchal system. She would not eat or drink before her husband. She was very timid but shouldered the responsibility of the family in times of need by working in the factory and by selling fruits and rearing animals. Her mother-in-law was thinking of remarriage of Damu as she did not conceive for about eight years. The mentality of slavery is so deep rooted in her that she was not ready to throw Hindu gods away from her house at the call of Dr Ambedkar though the Hindu religion rejected their human rights.

The treatment given to women in Dalit society is very pathetic. A woman has always occupied a secondary position and is treated as an object. It is as if she is devoid of any will, desire, or thinking power. Her life is restricted to her hearth and family. She is born to suffer, suffer silently the atrocities committed upon her, harassment and agony. Her life is almost a living hell. She is victimized both at home and in the society. She is an object of passion for the upper caste men. She toils day in and day out to make both ends meet and for the welfare of her family.- a shattered, poor, starving family most of the times. She works shoulder to shoulder with her husband and sometimes, she works harder than him and yet ironically, she is paid less in terms of labour charges and less importance in terms of patriarchy. Narendra Jadhao aptly says, 'The economic exploitation of the Dalit woman is based on caste. She is denied the proper value of that labour.' There are many other unfortunate women in the Dalit society and unfortunately they are more

in number in comparison to their blessed and fortunate sisters. They are born and destined to suffer injustice, atrocities, humiliation, degradation, exploitation, torture and affliction.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's untiring efforts for the emancipation of women made her somewhat free from the bondage of slavery from the upper caste. Some women are trying to be free from the first margin though the number is very less. But the second margin that is the margin within the margin is still in practice in the strong patriarchal social order. If we want to eradicate this margin, the sole responsibility falls first and foremost on the educated people especially men. Dalit men should change their mind as to consider their counterparts as equal human beings having all sorts of rights and freedom. They should begin with themselves and convey the same message to others especially to illiterate, traditional and orthodox people. Through the literature, silver screen and such medium and in reality we come to know the sufferings and pains of the lives of Dalit women. They are our mothers, sisters, wives, daughters. Their love towards men, their sacrifice, their commitment and service towards the family should be taken into consideration with the same feeling.

As introduced in the beginning, the paper intends to highlight the issue of dual marginality of Dalit women. The violence against Dalit women provide ample evidence of their wide spread exploitation and the discrimination to which they are subject, subordinated both in term of power relation to men in a patriarchal society and in terms of their communities on the basis of caste. The condition has not changed so far. Even now discrimination is not completely wiped out from our society. There are a lot of villages which should be brought into the light of main stream. To combat against this violence needs a holistic approach to state, national and international intervention. These efforts can form the foundation for Dalit women to become equal citizens living with human dignity.

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