

A Critical Study of Caste and Gender Discrimination in the Work of Dalit Women Writers

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ABSTRACT

The work of Dalit women writers reveals how their narratives powerfully articulate the concept of intersectional. The paper highlights the unique 'triple burden' of oppression based on caste, gender, and class. These writers critique both the dominant upper-caste society and patriarchal norms within their own communities, using their writing as a political act of resistance and self-assertion. Dalit women writers such as the autobiographies and testimonies of Dalit women authors emphasizing the intersection of caste, class, and gender in the context of social exclusion came through this movement. Dalit women authors, such as Bama, Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble, have written extensively about the complexities of caste, class, and gender in Indian society.

Keywords: Dalit, poverty, gender, caste, society, narratives, feminism, discrimination and patriarchal

INTRODUCTION

Geeta Nagabhushan is far ahead of many other Indian dalit women writers and she has never cared about what others thought of her. She also boldly admits that dalit female writers have less opportunity compared to dalit male writers. The majority of modern Brahmin hove narratives of upper caste women It is this self chat claims to held modern unmarked by caste through its journeys of comp manage, modern institutions and marital discord. Caste is other the modern discrimination as if it belongs only to Dalit women. This claim of the upper caste women's autobiography to symbolize modern Marathi women serves, on the other hand, to render imperceptible their complication to privileges of brahminical patriarchy, and on the others, Islamic the narratives of women whose self-definition is located explicitly in cave as a relational identity, as if it were the other of modern and feminist

Geeta Nagabhushan is one of the most outstanding and prolific short story writers. Her width of knowledge can be perceived in her various short stories and she exhibits every layer of dalit society in her stories. Geeta Nagabhushan's two collections of short stories entitled *Jwalanta* (Intense Burning, 1989) and *Avva Mattu Itara Kathegalu* (Mother and other stories) are stuffed with different types of short stories which depict caste and class conflicts and exploitation of dalit women. Marginality is a term applicable universally to the people of the world who are living in conditions of abject poverty and are from the general luxuries of life. These depressed groups are mea suffer several deformities because of their caste, class, race or sex India, Dalit people or the so-called untouchables are the most neglected groups. Within these depressed sections of the society, women are the worst sufferers. They are said to face double or triple marginalize because of their gender apart from their discrimination out of cam class or race. Dalit women need special attention than their male counter parts, as they are the victims of Dalit men's patriarchy also. Scholars like Sharmila Rege have argued that "Dalit women's testimonios present alternative perspectives to mainstream historical narratives within both Dalit and women's movements and that these narratives can be understood as expressions of protest, resistance, and identity formation, asserting the subjectivity of marginalized individuals and communities" (Mukhopadhyay, 2020)

Within this paradigm Dalit women's autobiographies though their articulation of caste based inequalities traced the hidden history of hurt and humiliation" (Rao 2003: 3) and as gendered norms was on initiative to engage with Dalit and social patriarchy. Writing of resistance brought to forefront gendered subaltern alternative historical was of politicized activist Dalir women and underscored the epistemological disadvantages of unmarked feminism (S Anand 2009).

Dalit autobiographies through their struggles and literary representation have questioned the genealogy of Indian feminism where the caste has not been articulated and drew attention to the complex relationship between feminism and caste's complex

The paper also focus on Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2008) and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) as narrative of resistance, which project voices of previously silenced subaltern women to create emancipator spaces. As narratives of resistance they are small voices located on the margin of social and cultural imagination traversing the realm of Dalit literature and women's autobiographical writings. Baby Kamble's text can be located within the existing neurof protest writing in Marathi. According to Maya Pandit the transmits of Baby Kamble's autobiography, this autobiography is probably the fem autobiography by a Dalit women in Marathi. Most of the Dale autobiographies written by men were for a mixed readership. "One of the major portions of the book articulates caste and gender discrimination and multilayered violence suffered by Dalit women at the hands of the upper caste and Dalit men" (Chaudhary, Satvik 2020)

Dhalu' (Shield) is another story which portrays the alertness of a dalit woman who protects herself from landlord in the absence of her husband by acting herself as a woman obsessed by sprit. Once, landlord kills his servant when he comes to know that his servant has an illicit relation with his own wife, and attributes this murder to Kareppa who is ultimately put into jail. Maagi, his wife protects herself by acting as a possessed woman. Kareppa becomes a victim to the chicanery and fraud of his landlord. How the life of poor innocent people is exterminated because of the chicanery and selfish nature of landlords is beautifully delineated in this story. Life of poor people does not have the value to Jamindars, who make use of poor dalits, and throw them away like a waste thing. The story deals with quest for social justice and raises its voice against dalit woman's insecure life.

'*Kappu*' (Black) story describes the life of dalits who work in factories. Though they are prompt and sincere, they could not boldly resist injustice. When Dyami goes out to work in her father's helpless condition, she is abducted and seduced by unknown men. Helpless mother commits suicide on hearing the shocking news. The story shows the impact of industrialization the sexual exploitation, helplessness and pain of dalit woman.

It is the general belief of all dalits that the lower the caste, the higher the level of obedience, the higher the caste of a person, the stronger the motivation. Touching an untouchable has been regarded as bringing impurity upon oneself and this impurity is considered to be transmittable from person to person. '*Hinse*' (Torture) story depicts how dalits are tortured under bureaucracy. Lakki is blamed and her husband Baramya has been severely beaten up by being tied to a tree. The only reason is that she pours water in the mouth of dying Hiregouda in the field. Apart from this, Lakki has been seduced and tortured and both Lakki and Baramya have been exiled from the village. Again caste plays an important role in the life of dalits. Though Lakki has done a humanistic thing, she and her husband have been treated inhumanly. The landlord's three sons think that their father has been polluted because of Lakki's pouring water into his mouth.

'*Karulu Ballia Kudigalu*' (Tendrils) story deals with Rupli's life. Rupli, who belongs to Lambani caste, is married to Tulasiram, who is a robber but stays in Tanda. Due to his bad habits of robbery, he is in jail for six months in a year. Rupli sells firewood and makes her living. When Tulasiram returns from jail he sells his baby for the sake of money. Rupli protests the cruel behaviour of Tulasiram with coarse words. The innocent Rupli suffers for one or the other reason in life. The story '*Belakinedege*' (Towards the Bright Light) throws light on numerous feministic problems, like sexual assault, illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, and proclaims that Geeta Nagabhushan is a true feminist. The story reflects the bold behaviour of Bhavani, who revolts against the landlord, for the sake of her daughter. Dalit women have been trapped into the unavoidable conditions in the feudal society. Though Bhavani lives with landlord virtuously like a housewife, her status is that of a keep, and her children are not accepted whole heartedly by the landlord. Ultimately she stands strongly against the landlord, determines to educate her daughter hoping that her daughter's life would not be paralyzed like her life due to illiteracy and resolves to leave the village, thinking that the mistake done by her should not be repeated in her daughter's life also.

In contrast to high caste women, dalit women's sexuality has been constructed as easily transgressable and because she is constructed as sexually more promiscuous. Bhavani is a victim of sexual abuse and violence. Ultimately, she rebels against the system. In desiring to seek ways of being alive and creative amidst suffering and death like despair, Bhavani's answer to her daughter's question, i.e. "They are going towards bright light,"³ gives us a glimpse of compartment which illuminates lives in treacherous oppressive unjust world.

Urmila Pawar's autobiography titled "The Weave of My Life (2008) has been categorized as a "A Dalit Woman's Memoirs" and the metaphor of woven things runs throughout the narrative. Woven together the text is made up of several texts and inscribes a complex notion of the margin. Wandana Sonalkar writes that the title of the book "The Weave is a metaphor of

the writing technique employed by Pawar, "the lives of different members of her family, her husband's family, her neighbours and classmates, are woven together in a narrative that gradually reveals different aspects of the everyday life of Dalits, the manifold ways in which caste asserts itself and grinds them down" (Urmilā Pavāra 2009)

The trajectory of Urmila Pawar is very different in terms of modern education; salaried employment and involvement in women's movement which takes her away from the world of physical labour and struggle for livelihood. "*Aaydan* (The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs, 2003) by Urmila Pawar: Pawar compares her act of writing about her life with her mother's weaving of bamboo baskets, representing the suffering and agony of their experiences" (Hemangi, Hemangi 2016) Dalit autobiography as literary and cultural genre as pointed out after "The Prisons We Broke were narratives, which brought out struggles of shudra (low caste) and *atishudra* (Dalit) men and women but one perceives the emergence of individual identity, which was in contrast to one's community and represented success stories resulting from affirmative action of the state and the onset of neo-liberal programmes during the 1980s to 1990. "She has described how her community lived in the centre of the village, unlike Dalit communities elsewhere in the Presidency that were usually expected to live at the periphery" (Rege, Sharmila 2006)

Narendra Jadhav's autobiography is representative of a life story of a de caste Dalit. But at the same time atrocities against Dalit still continue Pawar's autobiography traverses a range of positions, representing graded marginalities and can be read as a "complex narrative of a gender individual who looks at the world initially from her location within de caste but who also goes on to transcend the caste identity from a feminist perspective" (Pawar 2008: XVII). Pawar's autobiography is both continuation of the tradition of Baby Kamble of portraying the inhuman condition of the community, but it moves forward where caste identity morphed into a larger human identity influenced by Buddhi philosophy. The dialectics between self and community finds a larger articulation with Pawar re-defining the category 'Dalit to include a radical humanist category. In Bama's *Karukku*, she illustrates the sufferings of Dalit women and children. Once she witnessed a fight between the Pallars and Parayari in her village and it were the women folks who suffered the most because of all these fights.

The men-folk after the fight want hide in forests and would not go for work. In order to keep the living the women of the family were forced to work at very low wages. The police humiliated the women-folk to the maximum extent. They are also constantly vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse in the world of work. The girl child of the family was responsible to do the menial tasks of the house like cooking, collecting firewood and to look after their young ones, while their mother and all elder women went for work. It was always the girl children who had to look after all the chores at the home. "*Karukku* (1992) by Bama: This Tamil work, translated into English with the same title, highlights the issues of caste, class, and gender as important markers for social exclusion. Bama's writing has been praised for breaking taboos, challenging social conventions and representing the experiences of marginalized communities"(Dasarathi, Amala 2017)

"The older woman would come home in the evening after day work, and then see to the household jobs. If there were boy in the house they would graze the sheep and cattle. When they grow older they'd go off to work in the fields like the older men" (Urmilā Pavāra 52).

Bama used to collect firewood and do other works in the fields during her school life also. The Dalit children accept the humiliation and sufferings as their fate without any hesitation. Bama say that times have changed by now and the children no longer accept whatever they are told by the elders. The divisions of labour within the home hood women have to suffer more from the lack of access to water, fuel sources and sanitation facilities, exposing them to humiliation and violence For Dalit women, access to schools and education is minimal. There is also discrimination even in drinking water. At public water sources, Dalit women face humiliation and are even deprived of water because upper castes assert their privilege in respect of drawing water. Unequal relations are compounded from the lack of equality in access to resources. The inequality is reproduced when, in exchange for permission to draw water from a public source, Dalit women are forced to perform various menial tasks for upper caste women. Even the everyday act of collecting water invites many abuses.

In *Karukku*, Bama brings forth many social issues that destroy the everyday lives of Dalit women. Streets are typically gendered spaces. Men and youth inhabit and use streets naturally and forcefully with a sense of belonging, but women often sidle along pavements fully conscious of its being alien, unfriendly territory. The only women who are relatively easy on the streets are vendors, prostitutes, and other women for whom the street is a site of work. When Dalit women step onto the streets in protest, they are seen as transgressing their limits. When upper caste women were taken to the streets in protest, their sense of wrong and their appropriation of public space is immediately legitimate. There it also yet another serious issue, where a woman is being paraded in the streets with the use of force, which signals her availability, it is also a statement made about the character of women, the character of her seen as the bearers of tradition and protectors of the honour of the caste. A caste is chastised not just by the exercise of force or violence on the women of that caste but also by the use of violence on children. It is also a violence of patriarchal structured society.

Conclusion: Dalit literature is a protest against the gender discrimination and suppression of Dalits. The graded inequality within the patriarchal society is much more dangerous to women than the one which it outside their community or caste. Although the women's issues of patriarchy and inequalities are much debated issues in the present scenario, problem is not yet solved and women always are in the threshold. The true emancipation of women is possible only in a patriarchal socialist democratic society. Dalit women should come out of the boundaries that were made by the patriarchal society in order their assertion. The true assertion of Dalit woman is not as a Dali as a woman, but as a Dalit woman.

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