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## Traumatic Projection of Dalit Women in Dalit Male Writings

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### **Abstract:**

The present paper aims at exposing the misrepresentation of Dalit women in Dalit male writers by highlighting the position of Dalit women in literature written by the people of their own community only. It also cast the view that women are vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment not only in the hands of upper caste but also by their own men. The domain of male dalit writers is controlled by the caste discrimination which often binds them to the lowest category of the society. The intricate play of caste and gender seems to be absent in their writings.

### **Keywords: Harassment, Purity, Humiliation, Suffering, Victimization**

Most of the male dalit writers' world is torn apart from the horrified consequences of caste system. It is a province in which women represented as the strugglers to find a suitable place in the society. From his birth, a dalit male always cursed by the society and people but on the other hand a dalit woman left on the corners to suffer. The domestic violence, inequality etc never enters into their vision. The obvious outcome is that the portrayal of dalit women in the writings of dalit male writers suffered from surfeit and insufficiency- excess of caste questions and conventional images of dalit women. Dalit autobiographies revealed as an essential mechanism to co-relate with the society. They depict the dalit women and also position them free from the clutches of the societal discrimination. As Kancha Illiah in "*Why I Am Not a Hindu*" argues, "*Dalit women are democratized due to their communitarian background and do not have gendered lack of other caste women*". (65) But by mere shifting them from private to public domain does not mean they are liberated from the matrix of patriarchy. Smita Patil in "*Dalit Assertion in Society, Literature and History*" said:

However these questions needed to be addressed in an open ended manner rather than focus on the essentialism of their identities. Is a Dalit woman really more liberated than other women? Or is it legitimate caste- Hindu structural society which forces Dalit women to be in an oppressive system and suppresses their voices? Or did poverty and the question of livelihood push them to remain silent in the constructs of patriarchy? (146)

Thus, a dalit male writer's portrayal of dalit woman, though successful in bringing the caste exploitation drawn upon her, still suffers from some palpable handicaps. On the one hand, male dalit writers focused on her identity as a Dalit woman but on the other hand, try to project them in certain stereotypical images reflected by the patriarchal framework of the upper castes of the society. In both the cases, a dalit woman's own concern as a human being and as a gender subsumed in the bigger reality of being a Dalit. Here, it is not to say that her being a dalit is not

at all important, it really plays a very essential role in bringing upon her a whole mass of deprivations and exploitations. But still it is a fear that her projection as a dalit is exploited in some or the other way and thus she becomes a victim of upper caste ideology of seeing her only in the form of a 'mother' image not in the rebellious form. It is resulted in the broken images of Dalit women in the works of male Dalit writers who fail to present them as 'convincing' image.

In '*Kolhatyacha Por*' written by Kishore Kale, the author's life surrounds around the life of an illegitimate 'Kolhati' child. Kolhati is a community in western Maharashtra. It is a story of Dalit male who narrates his struggle to become a doctor and in this how he endures the trauma and humiliation. Dalit women in this novel projected as 'tamasha' girls performing dance and music and entertain the upper castes people. Even author's mother is also one of these women. The people of the community trained their daughters and sisters to adopt this low profession just to be breadwinners of the family. The male members of the family never undergo any hardship or struggle in their whole life. Dalit women often sexually harassed in the process of fulfilling all the necessities of their family and this is easily accepted by the males of their family. The virginity of a dalit girl is highly prized in this act of patriarchy. There is also a reference of a ceremony named '*Chira Utarana*' in which a virgin girl would be given to the richest landlord with a pre-fixed price. Gradually, a man can visits her family and pays her generously as long as he is getting all the sexual favours. But once the girl is pregnant then the patron leaves her alone in her house. In this stage when she is both mentally and physically weak, she has to perform the dance.

Even the title of the ceremony itself shows the miserable condition of dalit women in their own community. If a girl gives birth to a baby girl all welcomes her as they will get another breadwinner of their family. It clearly represents the stereotypical images of dalit women that their minds already set up. But no one is ready to take the responsibility of the child and call her/his illegitimate. The plight of Kolhati dalit women becomes a part of cyclical deprivation due to their stigmatized labour. Another analysis of the text can be considered in the sub-text of this autobiography as to how the economical transactions of property are controlled through male members of the family. The portrayal of 'Jiji', aunt of Kishore Kale gives a vivid view of the several nuances of the domination within Dalit families. Jiji is the owner of the house and land of the family but according to her brother as she has no children of her on then she has to serve her brother either with her own wishes or forcibly. But as she grows up, was paralyzed from the waist down, then the brother who was under her care left her alone. She was neglected by her entire family and left to die. She was kept on insisted to transfer all the property of her to her brother.

In this way, Jiji as a character shows us how tradition binds these women and they themselves get trapped in the masculine identity of the community. The traditional repression binds dalit women in slavery as completely as they believe strongly in blood reinforcement which is also a construction of patriarchy. Kishore Kale dedicated his novel to his mother Shantabai, who according to him a very unsuccessful mother. Thus even his viewpoint regarding her mother shoes a patriarchal vision of him. One can say that the dalit male also has the same expectation, like any other non-dalit, that a woman should be best in all the spheres of her life, without challenging the society and the position of Dalit women in it. Therefore, this text in a way re-fashions patriarchal rule through its manipulated and as well as epistemological twists.

Another example can be taken into account from 'Balut' written by Daya Pawar. This autobiography exposes the diverse textualisation of dalit experiences. It also talks about the sexuality of Dalits and non-dalits. His father Dada, was an alcoholic and never took any responsibility of the household, thus his mother went out to earn money for the family. Dalit women used to work day and night to collect waste paper for the survival of their families. Dada used to hide the scythe order to exploit these dalit women. When women asked him about it, he blackmailed them and forced them to sleep with him. Thus, there is a sexual exploitation of dalit women shown in the novel with the help of the portrayal of Dada. Some of the young Mahars worked as a bonded labour have to go out of the village to earn. During this, some Maratha women utilized by the upper caste men as a sexual object.

Even Daya Pawar elucidates the plight of Dalit women by telling his decision of leaving his wife Sai as he suspects of her in a relationship with a muslim boy called Mahboob. In another episode, once a relative of Daya took him to the prostitutes' area and introduced him to Maushi (mother's sister) whose name was Jamuna. She was very beautiful and it is the reason why her husband always ill-treated her and finally one day sold her. These lines clearly indicate how the Dalit male used to dominate over their wife with a form of suppression and also refers to the imbalance in the relation of husband and wife.

Another consideration of the text is 'Angaliyat' written by Joseph Manwan is a narration of a dalit community of weavers in Gujarat. The novel unfolds a story of the life of two friends Valji and Teeha who have to face several hardships in their lives due to oppression of upper caste Patels of the village. Though Methi, the beloved of Teeha is the major Dalit woman shown as a handicapped person on the novel. The writer's view about Dalit women always portrayed as stereotypical in feminine terms. The major weakness of the novel is the inability of the writer to expose the subjugation of Dalit women. Even women characters seen in the mirrors of the patriarchal norms of purity and impurity. This traditional framework of the novel, on the one hand neglect the revolt of Dalit literature and on the other, present dalit women inadequately and under the Brahmanic literary tradition. Achyut Yagnik rightly observes in the introduction of this novel: "*In an interesting and paradoxical way, the assertion of a dalit identity takes place through physical valour in the men and through 'purity' as far as the women are concerned. However, an adoption of these upper caste categories also unwittingly pushes into a symbolic Brahmanic order*". (xxviii)

Methi, the most significant dalit female character in the novel introduced when she carried a pot which was broken by Patil boys. It was already informed in the novel that it was not a new incident; it shows the problematic behavior of upper caste people. Despite the discomfiture felt by Methi, she revolted and abused Patil boys: "*Bastard, which mother produced such an evil man*". (15) Ironically, the language used by her made a sarcastic remark not on the father of the perpetrator but on their mother, a question on the modesty of a mother. Methi further exposed the humiliation drawn upon Dalit women by saying: "*This was an age old misery. Not only were pots broken, wrists had been held publically. Women were raped even on the eve of their wedding day*" (25)

Methi's love for Teeha seen as a spiritual between two pure beings beyond the tales of physical attraction. The truth is that Methi is the wife of Teeha's best friend. Though he is truly in love with her but still after the death of his friend refused to marry her. Before this only, Methi already declared her love in front of all the people of her community. As a consequence of this

refusal, she herself invited social criticism for her illegal behavior. There is no choice left on her part. Finally, she decided to marry an alcoholic person Chunthia. It shows the pathetic destiny of Dalit women. They cannot think of a life without any male person. It also justifies the thinking of Simone De Beauvoir. Her note of acceptance of her husband as Methi thinks is her final destination and along with the notion of 'grah-lakshmi' as the final achievement of a woman's life can be noted here:

Your penance has borne fruit, ben! Wherever one is, one has to respect one's husband's wishes. It is not worth feeling bad about it. I have locked up my desires, bhabhi. No of course this is my house, and this is my kingdom... Don't mention that name to me anymore, bhabhi. I have nothing whatsoever to do with him. All connections are snapped. You think I am unhappy. How can one forget the heart's misery, ben! Oh, one can forget anything. One just curbs and banishes feelings, they stop bothering you. (160)

It clearly indicates the absence of identity of dalit women. They cannot even have a proper name of themselves, lack of recognition in their families; problematize the whole position of Dalit women in Dalit male writings. Later on when she was ill-treated by her husband made her feel despair:

Her lamentation unfolded the history of her sorrows. Sitting and smoking in the evranda outside, Khusla Khont's hukka turned cold. In his vendetta against Heera, he had destroyed the life of a woman, a woman whom one would have been proud to be born to. He was witness to the fact that she had transformed even a beast like Chunthia. She had granted life to the children of an age old enemy. She had fought the wrong-doers, and supported the good. If her aggrieved heart let out a curse at this moment, it would devastate him and his family. (164)

In spite of being sexually and physically exploited by her husband, she continued to keep her household well. But when Chunthia called his son as illegitimate, she lost her temper and tried to knock him down. The psychological reasons behind Methi's violence against her husband revealed her repressed anger and hatred caused by her forced marriage with Chunthia. Later on she decided to commit suicide. This seems to be a consequence of her disillusionment with her life, unbearable beatings that she got from her married life and as well as her disappointment from her own people of the community.

Another dalit female character of the novel is Kanku who plays a crucial role. She is very independent, self-esteemed and powerful lady but even though not able to control the constraints of a Dalit woman. She tried to make two very important persons back in her life but as it is always shown that males dominate over the female not vice-versa. It is visible in her statement:

How much suffering for a vanished life! If these two had turned their faces away, snapped all ties with her and lost themselves in their little worlds like everyone else, what could she have done? On what basis could she have claimed anything? In fact she was obliged to them and if both of them were to go on in this fashion, the obligation was going to be so heavy that some day she would be crushed under it. (121)

The thinking as well as behavior of the people towards Methi and Kanku clearly shows the traditional approach of men towards women. It also indicates not only the subjugated image



of Dalit women in the eyes of their own men but also in the hands of upper caste people. In 'Angaliyat', both the female characters are stereotypical in image who remained confined in the conventional thought of 'pure' and 'virtuous'. Despite the narrator's attempt at the contrary, they exemplify 'accepted' notions about women who are there merely to spread kindness and virtue in world torn by caste hatred.

Dalit male short stories also cultivated into misrepresentation of Dalit women in their writings. The theme of the story focused basically on the everyday lives and desires of landless Dalits who are bonded labours but economical exploited and paid less. The harvesting of the story begins at dawn but suddenly the arrival of senior bureaucrats and senior police i.e. upper caste people overstepped to recover all the grains. Though Women tried to hide some but they were helpless in front of upper caste men. They resisted against this act which ended in a severe lathi charge against them and as well as the arrest against them. The harvest is lost and dalit women left suppressed. This story also illuminates a number of points made in the first section of this essay on the dominance of upper castes and powerlessness of lower castes in India.

While treating women characters, Mogalli Ganesh's story 'Paddy Harvest' exhausted the conventional societal norms and conventions. Lower caste women presented in terms of labours and their harassment shown through economic rather than sexual exploitation by the upper caste landowners. Sexual exploitation of dalit women by the upper castes become a trope in literature which make it appear that inter-caste rape is the single axis along which lower caste women are exploited. It also presents women suffers victimization from upper caste male. Males rendered as agents of the seduction of dalit women. Even women finally not able to recognize the nature of exploitation they confronted. It is then left on their men to comprehend the full range of caste and class exploitation as well as determine the nature of their resistance but unable to understand them.

Another instance of Dalit women's subjugation inherent in Laxman Gaikwad's 'The Branded'. It is not just a personal narrative of the author's life but an anthropological account of the Uchalya community to which Gaikwad belongs to. His community referred as a thieving community by the so-called mainstream society. The caste-ridden society always doubts these lower caste people and sees them with evil eyes. Since these people not able to get nay regular job, poverty has become their great companion. Unable to sustain their livelihood, they continued to succumb to their situational pressures and ultimately harassed by upper caste people. He even criticizes his community too for being rigorous towards women of their own community. He also made satirical remarks on Panchayat for its crude ways of delivering justice. He remembers that when he was a child, his community panchayat deliberate upon the lineage of a girl who was to be married soon. The issue was that whether the girl is legitimate or not. Different proposals were suggested like let the girl's mother eat faeces, others a fine rupees of two thousand, while some proposed that her nose should be cut off. Finally, it was decided that bride's mother's hair be shaved off. It shows the humiliation that women bear even in their own community which refers to a safer place for outsiders.

'Joothan' is another remarkable memoir of Om Prakash Valmiki which can justify the misrepresentation of Dalit women in Dalit male writings. *Joothan* is also a remarkable record of a rare Indian journey, one that took a boy from extremely wretched socioeconomic conditions to prominence as an author and social critic. The Hindi word *joothan*, explains Mukherjee, literally means food left on an eater's plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle class, urban

home. The author attempts to terms with humiliating experiences of Chuhra community. The autobiography deals with the process of growing up of Valmiki and trials and tribulations that he endure throughout his whole life. There are only few female characters and concerns in the text about whom the author deals in oblique manner.

Gender specific abuses are connected with caste highly in the novel thus relegating dalit women to the margins. The Headmaster Kaliram makes Valimiki sweep the entire school and playground. When he slips into the class, Kaliram abuses him using gender invectives: “*Abey Chuhra Ke, mother fucker, where are you hiding...your mother...*” (5) The use of such gender specific words including the female sex reinforces the impression that sex in a patriarchal society used as a powerful tool of subjugating dalit women. The terminology connects sex with brutality and degradation objectifies women and downgrades them to the level of beasts. Even the narrator’s mother is depicted as a loving and caring woman who shares all her ambitions with her son. She frequently turns into tears at the condition of her son, but regret to show her miserable condition in front of upper caste men. He talks about an incident when her mother confronted with humiliation at Sukhdev Singh Tyagi’s house on the marriage of her daughter. She waits for a whole day just to get something for her children. But in return she gets only abuses: “*You are taking a basketful of Joothan. And on the top of that you want food for your children. Don’t forget your place, Churi. Pick up your basket and get going*”. (11)

Valmiki narrated an incident depicting the emotional and magnanimous nature of Dalit women who have to face daily the deprivations due to extreme poverty of their household. His ‘bhabhi’ who was a widow and without any means forced to sell her ornaments to continue the studies of Valimiki. The episode is full of irony and pathos for an uneducated woman. Even the helplessness of a mother can also be seen in these lines:

Ma was crying as loudly as ever. Bhabhi opened her tin box, took out the anklet and put it in Ma’s hand. ‘Sell it and get lallaji admitted. All the women were overwhelmed by her affectionate gesture. I embraced bhabhi and cried...Pitaji had tried very hard to dissuade bhanbhi. ‘No, Bahu... don’t sell it. I will arrange somehow to send him to school. Don’t you worry... You have just the one ornament...How can we sell that too... Go on keep it.’ But bhabhi wouldn’t listen to him and insisted on putting it in Ma’s hand. (14)

The internal patriarchal forces of the society are very much apparent in the novel by blaming dalit women alone for all the pains. Dalit women become the embodiment of guilt and on whose shoulders the honour of the family is supposed to rest. The writer castigates and satirizes the custom of ‘salaam’ prevalent in dalits whereby their own men disrespect and demean their own women. According to this custom, every newly bridegroom and bride had to go to the houses of the upper caste people for paying their respect and asking for alms and money. The narrator finds this custom as hard for dalit women to face humiliation even on the first day of their arrival in a new home. “*When an illegitimate girl from a poor family comes to live among strangers, she is already feeling overwhelmed. Taking her door-to-door for salaam makes it excruciatingly painful for her*”. (33)

Another incident that should be taken into consideration regarding the plight of dalit women in this novel is Master Vedpal and his companion’s indulgence in sexual exploitation of a dalit woman. It is also a sad reminder of the compromises that a dalit woman has to make as a result of caste and gender biasness in this society. Though there is no name given to this woman

in the novel but still her sexual exploitation and harassment stir in the mind of the narrator: “*The woman’s image, seen for barely a second, appears repeatedly before my eyes, along with the two wolves that kept tearing at her all night*”. (55) The questions troubling the adolescent mind of Valimiki “*what helplessness had brought her to them?*” (55) vividly brings out the ordeals of dalit women who have to undergo to the image of a slave to keep their bodies and soul together.

Therefore, it is noted that this novel focuses basically on how caste becomes a stumbling block in the growth and development of dalit male’s attempt to lead a dignified life. But the major weakness of the novel is that the writer does not get time and energy to explore the female characters in the novel and in respectable way. Even his marriage with Chanda becomes possible due to his hatred for the schemes of his mama. There one cannot find any romantic angle. Dalit women always remain the shadow of their husbands and all their efforts to search and identity for themselves remain futile. In this way, Joothan gives a sketchy view of women on the margins along with his hatred for caste-ridden society. Thus, it can be concluded that dalitism in one or the other way gets priority over feminism and the images of women remain fractured. In dealing with the ‘caste’ factor, suppresses the ‘female’ factor and the result of this is that women are seen only as a narrow prism with unexplored sensibilities and sensitivities.

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