

OPPRESSION OF DALIT WOMEN IN PATRIARCHAL CASTE RIDDEN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Being Dalit and women, Indian Dalit women experience the triple jeopardy of caste, gender, and class. They are not only exploited, tortured, and harassed by their men and but also subjected to a series of atrocities by the upper castes Hindus. They are treated as men's possessions, properties, and sexual objects. Dalit men often imitating the Hindu patriarchy subordinate women and treat them inhumanly. As Dalit women are denied equal rights, they often suffer the pangs resulting from utter poverty and become the victims of men's lust when they struggle to earn their livelihood. Dalit women are exploited, tortured, and harassed by Dalit men as well the upper castes Hindus. The upper castes Hindu women become the victims of gender prejudices in Hindu patriarchy, but Dalit women suffer the triple jeopardy of caste, gender, and class. The present paper aims at analyzing the caste, gender, and class oppression the Dalit women are subjected to. The attempt has been made to explore the plight of a Dalit woman before and after her husband's death.

Keywords- *casteist, gender, suppression, patriarchy, humiliate, torment, and constitutional measures*

Introduction

Baburao Bagul is one of the prolific Marathi Dalit writers from the earlier generations of the 1970s. He projects the ghastly social realities and evils of the age-old customs like casteism, sexism, and poverty. He has authored five novels like *Kondi* and the two short story collections such as *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* and *Maran Swasta Hota Aahe* and a collection of poems, *Veda Aadhi Tu Hotas*. The majority of his writings deal with the poor Dalits from the countryside small villages and metropolitan slums. He highlights Dalit women's oppression. He exposes the casteist and gender-based conservative societies. The social, cultural, economic, political, and religious barriers in women's growth and development are strikingly highlighted in his short stories.

Dalit Women's Oppression:

His short story, "Aai" is one of the most appreciated short stories. It is about a Dalit mother who is subjected to humiliation, exploitation, segregation, and

agony. In this story, he voices the unheard voices of Dalit women and exposes the conservative Hindu culture. He explicitly highlights the issue of women's suppression, oppression, exploitation, and subordination to expose the hypocrisy of the so-called cultured Hindu religion.

Sukhdev Thorat rightly states, "Dalit women face deprivation and discrimination as do their higher caste counterparts in terms of the predicament of gender discrimination." In his view, Dalit women are often "the victims of violence, sexual exploitation and religious and social superstitions." (6) This is true of Baburao Bagul's traditional women. In *Aai*, he presents the deplorable state of Dalit women in Hindu society. Hindu patriarchy glorifies women as goddesses on one hand; and degrades, devalues, subjugates, and exploits them, on the other, in the name of religion and its customs." The ingrained patriarch and Brahminical values at all levels in society," according to Sayantika Chakraborty, are the root causes of "the high level of exclusion, invisibility, and structural and domestic violence" which ruins and dooms the lives of women in Hindu society. (35)

Dalit Women as Slaves of Slaves in Caste-based Patriarchy:

The unnamed mother in "Aai" represents the Dalit women. She is confined to the social norms in patriarchy and the caste institution. She is independent and self-reliant but confined to the social norms governing the women's lives in Hindu society. She is a woman and again a Dalit and hence she is the slave of slaves. She is uneducated and works as a

menial laborer at construction sites. As her husband suffers from tuberculosis, she shoulders the responsibilities of the household duties, her husband's medicine, and her son, Pandu's education. Despite her dedication, she remains an outcast in her own family and her husband tortures her mentally and physically. She is thus a slave of a slave.

The "suspicion-ridden eyes" of her husband make her sad and she stands victim to the heartless cruelties of her husband. (Mother, Trans. Manvi 41) She tolerates his abuses, heartless brutalities, and slanderous comments reducing her social stature to a prostitute. Though she earns the bread, brings medicine to her husband, and provides school education to Pandu, she remains powerless and helpless in the home sphere as the laws of patriarchy relegate her position to a secondary being and inferior to her husband. Even though she is not at fault, her husband blames her for "his disease, his failing strength" and "his joblessness" which are the ultimate results of his suspicious nature. As a woman, she stands victim to patriarchy in the domestic sphere. She is confined to the traditional role of a wife and a mother. When her husband inflicts violence and wants to brand her body, with the hot iron, she begins to fear for her life and starts demanding him, her conjugal rights even when she knows he is critically suffering from tuberculosis.

Dalit Widow's Exploitation in Patriarchal Caste based Society:

After the death of her husband, it seems that the unnamed mother

protagonist is set free from the troubles and liberated from the imprisonment of her husband, but it is not so. Though her torture ends in the marital relations, it begins fresh in the crudest form in the outside world. So long as her husband is alive, she is subjected to violence, abuse, and torture inside the home but after her husband's death; she is brutally tormented and harassed in the sexist patriarchal society. As a Dalit widow, she is regarded a plaything by men. Dagadu, the men in the neighborhood, and the overseer victimize her. Nandy and Pal confirm, "Being a woman she is exploited in her private life and also in the public domain by her husband, by the overseer and is severely criticized by the members of her community. As gender is a socio-culturally constructed idea, she becomes an easy victim at the hands of the patriarchal society." (Nandy and Pal 89)

After the death of her husband, she lives the life of a widow. Though she practices celibacy for a decade after her husband's death, she becomes a victim of Dagadu and the men in the community. She is abused, humiliated, and tormented by them. She confines herself to the traditional notion of motherhood by the laws of which women must oblige to the duties of a mother and this is exactly what happens in the case of Pandu's mother. She restricts herself to the role of a traditional mother and the morals of widowhood and looks after her son, her prime duty. Sayantika Chakraborty rightly comments,

The traditional notion of motherhood is constituted around the upper caste women. After spending ten years of widowhood,

when it is difficult to survive in the hostile world and to provide food, clothes, and education to Pandu, she rejects the traditional notions of widowhood by the laws of which she is not allowed to indulge in lovemaking. To provide the necessities to Pandu, she takes a lover, an overseer, and falls prey to his lures. As she does not succumb to the advances of the men in the neighborhood, they harass, torment, and assault her physically and view her as a sex object to be devoured publicly. She does not witness the cruelty of the men only, but the women also envy her beauty and regard her, a threat to their nuptial ties and spread rumors about her. She witnesses a hostile world that does not permit her to live life decently and makes her life a living hell. Mantra Roy precisely remarks,

The women find her husband less.....

.....dependent on the mercies of her community. (Roy 88)

The Unnamed Protagonist's Rebel: Her Decision to take a Lover and Her Humiliation-

As her decision to take a lover is against the religious conventions, the women envying her beauty take her existence as a threat to their nuptial ties and talk nasty things about her inside their houses before their children. The same information is later exploited by them against Pandu in the school to humiliate and torment him openly. It bridges the gap between the mother and child. Even though she sacrifices her life for Pandu, he fails to understand her sacrifices. Pandu believes the gossip of the women and the

classmates about his mother and begins to hate her. She accepts her folly of going against the social norms and calls herself “silly” and offers him new clothes, she has purchased for him but the moment, the sight of new clothes reminds Pandu, his harassment by his classmates and Dagadu’s assault, he utters the words, “Whore! I spit on your clothes” and runs outside the house. (Mother, Trans. Manvi 43) Hurt with Pandu’s violent attack of the abuse hurled at her, she cries in grief and stands extremely helpless.

As a wife, a woman, a lower caste Dalit woman, she does not get respect. She is betrayed by everyone in society. Her husband tortures her inside the house. The men harass and torment her in the street and the contractor exploits her for appeasing his lust. She is looked down upon as a sexual object by all but still, she endures the torture just to rear her child. Chaya Nikam rightly comments, "She is betrayed by everyone. Out of her love for her child, she induces herself to a lusty desire and endures the harassment by neighbors to rear her child. She surrenders her body to the overseer. (96) (Trans. by the Researcher) As her son finds her in the embrace of the overseer, he runs away from her. She tries to run after her son "But as a person stuck fast in a quagmire," she finds her "release impossible." (Mother, Trans. Manvi 44)

Conclusion

The unnamed Dalit woman protagonist is exploited, humiliated, and destroyed in a patriarchal caste-biased society. Being a woman and again a Dalit, she becomes a victim of caste and gender

oppression, and poverty. Though she rebels against the patriarchy by taking a lover from the upper caste, she largely remains suspended in the traditional society. At last, her struggle against society ends in her separation from her son who leaves her forever and she remains imprisoned in the overseer's arms, just only a means to gratify his lust. She is born a free human being, but the society governed by men confine her in traditional roles and sanctions her life imprisonment which she suffers throughout her life. Thus, by exposing the Hindu patriarchy and the caste institution, Bagul has invited the attention of the thinkers, intellectuals, academicians, and lawmakers to the problems of Dalit women, so that the policymakers would take strong steps to empower Dalit women through constitutional measures and also safeguard their equal rights in this male-dominated Hindu society that is antagonistic to their very being as Dalit women.

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