



ANGER AND PROTEST AS THE SYMBOL OF DALIT FEMININE CONCEPT

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The attempt has been made in the present paper to discuss anger and protest which is widely observed in dalit feminist literature.

Manusmriti says:

“The wife should even treat the husband as God though he is characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities. . . . If the wife disobeys the husband when he is given to bad habits or becomes a drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away. . . Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males of their families . . . her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.”¹

These norms laid the foundation for strict rules by men for their selfish desires all over the years. Mrs. Bansode complains against this kind of rigid Hindu orthodox society, “This complaint of mine is against the orthodox culture...

We are rejecting this
Unclean, poisonous life
And to escape from these cruel curses
Will you give me
A bright and auspicious moon?
My countrymen, to your court
I have brought a complaint
Will you give me justice?”²

Feminist movements as well as dalit feminist movement in India are mainly based on the experience of oppression and discrimination. Brutal patriarchy, gender disparity and sexual violence are the important causes for these movements and they also find place authentically in the writings of dalit women as they emerged to the forefront in giving expression to their experiences from women’s point of view around 1980s. Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar in Marathi, Geeta Nagabhushan in Kannada, P. Shivakami, Bama in Tamil have



occupied national level consideration. Dalit women had been trapped in the hands of upper castes, raped, insulted, abused. It is found that they are insecure in the society as they have been cruelly exploited. Their feeling of insecurity is the central theme of their writings. Dalit women writers have come forward to express their ideas, their experiences in social violence as well as in domestic violence and thus they protest their traditional existence with anger and anguish. Geeta Nagabhushan's dalit novels, Bama's *Sangati* (2005), P. Shivakani's *Grip of Change* (2006) are initial waves of dalit feminism. Dalit feminism challenges the conventional way of writing. Their experiences, expression, method of narration are extremely different from those of upper caste women writers. It is obvious that all women in the world have been degraded to second class citizenship. But dalit women in India suffer more because of their dalit identity.

Feminism continues to be a strong inspiration for the contemporary dalit women writers. Individual identity is central to almost all dalit feminist writing. They challenge the traditional values and call upon all dalit women to recognize their inherent powers and lead an authentic life. They even raise query regarding social organizations, dalit male writers and activists who discard dalit women in every field and complain that dalit men activists talk about humanity but are not humane towards their wives. Dalit feminists struggle to change the base of the society by publishing their radical thoughts. As dalit feminism is a new phenomenon, no strong voice is raised against social injustice so far. Dalit feminism has deep concern for and commitment towards humanity; and it raises its voice against any kind of narrowness, violence, vengeance on any dalit women and liberation of entire community. Dalit woman is considered cheerful and satiated as she never raised her voice against injustice done to her. But her anguish is bursting out from her heart. Sukanya Maruti bursts out....

“Enough of this life on earth
The blame and the humiliation.
Why does the roaring ocean not
Open its belly and swallow me?”³

Dalit feminist writers are exhibiting their fury in their writings. They give priority to liberation of women. Dalit feminists oppose Marxism as caste and gender have not been included in it. Dalit feminism is the outcome of dalit woman's experiences. Atrocities and social discrimination are forcing women to express their fury. The atrocities committed on dalit women in the name of religious customs, cultural and social norms are the main concerns of dalit feminists and are poignantly depicted by dalit women in their writings. Vemula Ellaiah points out, “Where there is oppression, there is resistance. Oppression in a way is counterproductive. Since dalit women are oppressed, they will find their own forms of resistance and dalit feminism is a form of resistance.”⁴ Compared to upper caste women, dalit women's life is stuffed with ups and downs. While upper caste women have been



suppressed by their husband, dalit women's life is flooded with suppression from all direction. Sexual humiliation of women is the worst kind of humiliation for any community. Caste system and patriarchal subjugation are mainly responsible for sexual humiliation. The irony is that, though dalit males disapprove Manuism, they are the followers of Manu in real life so far as dalit women are concerned. Dalit women endure maltreatment, oppression by their husband and in-laws. Writings by dalit women are the apt examples of this ill-treatment. Tayavva and Tali in Geeta Nagabhushan's *Aasaregalu*(1996.Props), Soni in B.T.Lalita Nayak's *Gati*(1986 Plight)are the representatives of many embittered dalit women who are suffering sitting in the dark corner of the society. Neither Tayavva, nor Tali, nor Soni get support from any men, either in parental home or in their in-laws' houses. They struggle too hard to lead the life and are the symbols of all dalit women who are suffering day in and day out. They hold the opinion that they suffer only because of their husband and in-laws.

The central theme of Dalit literature is to highlight women as victims of sexual exploitation; she is stripped naked, molested, raped, assaulted and burnt for no proper reason. Dalit women have rejected their traditional image and have raised their voice against their exploitation. The upper caste people forget caste or untouchability while imposing corporal punishment or while indulging in lecherous activities or while committing rapes. If she accepts lecherous activities of men, she does not remain an untouchable. Treatment of Sohini by Pandit Kalinath in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*,(1988) exposes the ill-treatment of dalit women by high caste men. In Bama's *Sangati* (2009) Mariamma escapes from village chief who tries to molest her, but is eventually harassed in front of Panchayat by the chief. There is an upsurge of such incidents in dalit women's writings. Gender and caste legacy is widely prevalent in modern period in India. In some case, gender discrimination is allowed and even justified on the grounds of caste. Thus, the violence against women is institutionalized. Whenever there is an incident of caste clash, the high castes Hindus suppress them by destroying their crops, burning their houses, raping their women. Raping of dalit women is a sharp weapon of high caste Hindus. Dalit women live in the atmosphere of constant violence in the society. They do not have social status and their problem is grave, because of caste.

Literature written by dalit women is vociferous because of their hardships. Anguish against Hindu religion, culture, divine laws reflect constantly in dalit feminist writings. Joti Lanjewar, a Marathi dalit woman writer, expresses with roaring voice,

“Begging won't get anything here
Not sympathy, not love,
A suit in court wins injustice,
Tears are of no value,
Getting water is a struggle,
Wrapping yourself in smoke from a dead fire won't work,



You have to plant the cinder of revolt in your own body”.⁵

Dalit feminist literature anticipates that, all women should be respected and treated as human beings irrespective of their caste. Rebellion, revolt, anguishes and agonies are commonly found in dalit feminist literature that craves for equality and justice, rejecting Jamindari system, illiteracy, atrocities, suppression and sexual exploitation. They revolt against existing conditions and express hurdles of their life in their writings. They have worked as village servants, cutting wood, carrying messages, bringing fuel, dragging out dead carcasses, etc. Large portion of their writing represents such menial work. Nevertheless, experiences of oppression, dispossession, exclusion, subjugation are also widely visible in their writing. Dalit feminists believe that promiscuity is the result of injustice inflicted by savarnas on dalit women. Gayatri Spivak argues that the voice of the subalterns is not heard properly:

“It is not so much that subaltern women did not speak, but rather that others did not know how to listen, how to enter into a transaction between speaker and listener. The subaltern cannot because their words cannot be properly interpreted. Hence, the silence of the female as subaltern is the result of failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation.”⁶

In the Post-Independence period dalit women appeared in cultural arena by breaking the silence. This is visible in Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon's *Aamihih Itihas Ghadawala*. (Even We have Made History, 1978).

In dalit feminist literature, dalit women express their conditions authentically. Historically, there is no evidence of protest and resistance of dalit women against exploitation. They led such a life that they had never been allowed even to perceive and think of their misery. After a long period, they have now become the subject of writing, appearing as a child widow, child bride, married girl, suffering mother, suffering daughter-in-law, left at the mercy of the in-laws. Different images of dalit woman, who is crushed by the joint Hindu family, have found place in their writings. Science and technology has created new environment and encouraged dalit women to portray their real conditions. The sorrows, miseries, servitude, misfortunes, sexual exploitations and assaults of dalit women have occupied central part of the literature. Though their writing has appeared in different languages there is not much difference in sensibility articulated by dalit women.

Dalit women's writing, which has emerged from the womb of anger, pain, and inequality, gives a detailed description of dalit society, exploitation of dalit women by their husbands at home and by their landlords at working place. Dalit feminist writing protests the established social system which is based on injustice. Dalit women writers express their sufferings in different voices and these voices are explosive and violent, which is the only



way of resisting extreme physical violence, frustration and sexual dominance. Poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, question of livelihood all have pushed them to the state of anguish, and make their voice explosive. Therefore, one should not think that by mere shifting from home to public life and going to work place does not mean that they are liberated from the matrix of patriarchy. Dalit woman's pain is more compared to dalit men's. It is clearly visible in the autobiography of Urmilatai and Shantabai Kamble.

Even in western countries woman was never considered an independent moral agent, but one dependent on husband, father, son, brothers. Immanuel Kant and J. J. Rousseau believe that the principle object of man is to become more perfect as a citizen, and the principle object of woman is to become more perfect as a wife⁷. Dalit women have limitations for leading even moral social life. The policies and legislations contributed to some extent to the liberation of women. Many scholars agree that there is a strong correlation between low status of women and low cultural levels of society. Some dalit women have improved their socio-economic conditions through their individual achievements, but their status remains the same. Education plays an important role in maintaining one's status. Though dalit women are working in various Government offices, in recent days, they are still bearing the burden of triple standards. It is the need of the hour that dalit women's organizations ensure security and create surety to all women in the society.

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