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Dr. M. Vinoth Kumar & S. Kulandhaivel
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Postmodern Feminism in Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* and *Gently falls the Bakula*

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Abstract

Postmodern Feminism is an amalgamation of postmodern ideas and feminism. This theory declines to extend one elucidation for this striking theory to confirm the code. Postmodern feminists never give importance to all the feminist ideas that give a distinct clarification for women's maltreatment and there are no biological differences among the critics. Sudha is a famous writer in Kannada and the English language. She is also a philanthropist and a distinguished leader in the computer sector. She is credited with the most respected Padma Shri award for her social work and the notable R.K.Narayan award for her literary works in the year 2006. She has also received the Lifetime Achievement award for her talent. Sudha Murty's novels Mahashweta and Gently falls the Bakula give a grand picture of the mental and physical agonies of the female protagonists. Mahashweta tells about the superstitious beliefs and sufferings of Anupama and later how she created a new happy life for herself. Gently falls the Bakula portrays the protagonist who was trapped in a loveless and sophisticated life. Both of them discuss the sufferings of women in society and their incarnation into a brave and strong minds to face tribulations in their individual life. The protagonists of her novels are ordinary women who effectively handle extraordinary responsibilities and problems and emerge as new beings with western education and culture. Hence, this article decodes the thirst for knowledge in women and the anxieties in women's life that make a way for a new feminine literary tradition known as Postmodern Feminism.

Keywords: Postmodern Feminism, Sudha Murty, *Mahashweta*, *Gently falls the Bakula*.

Introduction

Indo-English fiction has been called "the twice-born fiction" by Meenakshi Mukherjee because it has two parental traditions, one is Indian and the other British. The word 'Fiction' is derived from the Latin word 'Fictum', which means "created". Indo – English fiction prefers to take some of its subjects from peripheries itself. Indian women were living under the circumstance of Indian tradition and they were unaware of the real world and they kept silent against injustices done by others. Sudha Murty has produced a distinct, space for her meticulous concentration to the dilemma of women and social prejudice. Sudha Murty shaped a new form of writing throughout the patriarchal is replaced by matriarchal. The last few decades have observed an enormous leap in feminist writings in



Indian English literature.

Postmodern woman Sudha Murty became the foremost female engineer to be hired TATA engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO). As an only female, she did her B.E in Electrical Electronics Engineering from B.V.B College by breaking the restriction. The paper portrays on the sufferings and sorrows that the protagonists have faced throughout the novel and to some extent, they emerge as brave and bold characters. The women characters grow up intellectually and psychologically. By emanating Arundhati Roy's thoughts Sudha Murthy's fiction is her individual experience.

Postmodern Feminism

Postmodern Feminism is an incorporation of postmodernism, post-structuralism and French feminism. It first appeared in the work of Judith Butler's 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. Postmodern feminism opposes feminist perspectives which give a single explanation for grand theory; it refuses the progress of Feminism. Postmodern feminism has emerged developed from the thoughts of Michel Foucault, Simon de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan and Kate Millet. Postmodern feminism refuses to develop one comprehensive explanation and emphasizes plurality and multiplicity. The purpose of postmodern feminism is to unstable the patriarchal norms rooted in society that has led to gender inequality. Many women in the postmodern era chose their careers over housework, and marriages were delayed to make them economically independent. Economic independence helps many dissatisfied to lead their life courageously without any support and independence.

Mahashweta is a stimulating and eye-opening novel for modern Indian women. The title, Mahashweta is taken from the Sanskrit novel "Kadambhari" by the great scholar, Bana Bhatta. In the Sanskrit version, the heroine is named as Mahashweta. She is the only daughter of King Gandhara. Pundarika, the herp of the novel meets with an untimely death. Mahashweta tackles the situation herself with a penance by wearing a white saree in the jungle. Through her effort and heart-rendering love, she gets her lover, Pundarika back to life and is reunited.

Implication of Postmodern Feminism in the Novels

Mahashweta (2007) is one of the best works of Sudha Murty. The novel picturizes a young beautiful and bold girl named Anupama. She gets married as in a fairy tale and later she was affected by leukoderma and her life became very tragic. The novel begins with "the female child is stronger than the male child at birth, as adults, it is the man who becomes the oppressor, and woman who suffers. According to Simone de Beauvoir "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". The meaning of being a woman in society is created by a man for his benefit. The woman is strong enough to man in society. Contrary to the earlier opinion that women are considered a burden to their families, Anupama enacts some historical dramas for her personal needs and from her savings, she sends some money to her father and supports her family.

Anupama marries doctor Anand and leads her life happily. Like Rohini to Chandra, like Lakshmi to Narayana, am I to him. As a representative Indian woman, she yields herself to Anand, without considering education and knowledge. She lives for the love of her



husband without caring about the career. Radhakka, Anand's mother accepts their love half-heartedly for the sake of her son. Radhika was proud of her daughter-in-law's prettiness while Anand's sister Girija was jealous and thinks as a rival. While performing the pooja the burnt incense fell on her leg and created a wound. The wound was in the white spot it slowly develops bigger. It is named leukoderma, the illness is considered inauspicious.

Anupama compared her life to Girija's clandestine relationship, was not loyal and leading a happy life but the miserable happened to Anupama was not her fault. A woman leaves her husband's house she does not have a place to live. Anupama is enforced to depart her husband's house. A woman without her life partner has to face much humiliation in the society. Even the parents also consider her a bad luck. Anupama suffered a lot because she was in her stepmother's house. Anand's silence affects her mentally. "So husband ought to love their wives as their bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." –Ephesians 5:28. Anand fails to be a good husband and forgets her vows taken during their marriage. If he loves Anupama as his flesh he never allows her to suffer. Due to leukoderma, her stepsister Nanda's marriage was stopped by their in-law's family because they doubt it was a hereditary problem. Anand's silence also makes her sad. The moment Radhakka found out, she sent the daughter-in-law packing. Now she is searching for a new bride for Anand. (M-74). Anand fails to rescue his wife. She could not bear that agony so she thinks to end up her life. Anupama tries to obtain the rights when it fails and she goes to search for her individual identity. She creates courage and resoluteness and prays to the goddess,

Give me the courage to live no matter what happens! (M-79).

You should be ashamed of yourself. You have called me your sister ...will you behave with your sister like this? I have always considered Sumi as my sister and I will certainly tell her all about your edifying qualities. Get out of my way; I want to go out. (M-88)

Vasanth proposed to her, as a mature girl, with a determined voice she rejects the idea and tells him that she didn't want herself to commit again to any relationship. Anand apologizes after knowing his sister's secret affair and Anupama's purity. They have remade their lot having reconstructed the traditional culture, changing the discriminatory and patriarchal concept of the past and creating the new concept of the present which is completely free from all prejudices of the past. Anupama proved her talent and lead her life better than in her past is denoted here as postmodern feminism. In the final stage, she shows her steady immersion in modern culture without leaving her cultural identity and teaches Anand a lesson. Women are both breadmakers and breadwinners. Anupama emerges as a new being with western education and culture.

In Sudha Murty's nonfiction *Wise and Otherwise the vignette "A Wedding to Remember"* makes the person repent for his mistake by reading the novel *Mahashweta*. It becomes a thought-provoking fiction and it helps Malati to retain her life from misery. 'We came to know that he read your novel, *Mahashweta*,' he said.

'The situation of my son was similar. It seems he read this novel at least ten times and understood the plight of the girl. He took a month and decided he did not want to



be like the man in your novel, who shed his responsible only to regret it later. Your novel changed his thinking.’ (Wise and Otherwise -108)

Gently falls the Bakula portrays the drudgery life of the female protagonist, Shrimati, who seems to experience the pain from her marriage but her husband Shrikant fails to realize the sacrifice of her life. The Bakula flower is considered a souvenir of their love, even though it would dry up, its fragrance will be the same as their love. *Gently falls the Bakula* is the story about Shrikant Deshpande and Shrimati Shrikant Deshpande, the protagonist is a hyper-intelligent girl. She was very much fond of History subject. It helped her to have good knowledge of Indian history and its architecture. Shrimati stands first in the essay competition. Shrikant's friends could not tolerate his defeat, so he tried to console his friend Ravi by saying

“History is not a great subject.....real intelligence is scoring in science” (GFTB-5).

Hence to prove Shrikant is not correct, Shrimati attains state first rank in the SSLC board examination. While hearing his rival’s rank Shrikant could not tolerate it, as a man he is not ready to bear his rival, a female. Shrikant’s mind went numb. Mr Kulkarni’s chatter continued, but Shrikant did not hear a word. Had a thunderbolt struck him or had he touched a live wire? (GFTB-21). To repay Shrikant’s educational loan, Shrimati plans to work for money to repay as soon as possible.

“The day we send the last instalment, I will stop working and pursue my studies”. It doesn’t matter if I am late by a year. Can you please find a job for me? (GFTB -77)

Indian woman sacrifices her intellectual longings and supports her husband as a submissive wife. Shrimati gives up her passion and ends up as a dutiful wife to her husband, after marriage. By doing this she approves and accepts him in his good and bad. Here the litterateur resembles Shrimati with the character of Bhamati; who sacrificed her whole life to support her sage husband without expecting anything from him. When everyone praises the sage’s achievement and failed to notice Bhamati’s sacrifice, the sage says as follows:

No, Shri, I am perfectly all right, but don’t you think we should have children now? We are well settled financially. Both of us are over thirty, and thirty is late for a woman. (GFTB -96)

Shrikant gives all the happiness to his beloved but fails to give real happiness. A woman’s life is fulfilled when she bears a child. Society expects a married woman to care for her home and she has to give an heir to his family. A childless woman is considered a social stigma. Love and marriage between them sustain when there is mutual trust and respect. Shrikant’s dedication to his work made Shrimati feel lonely and also put barriers to her desire of becoming a mother. Shrikant does not spend his time with his beloved rather he concentrates on his work even in the house. Shrikant’s love for work makes her feel lonely. Their marriage is based on loveless life and rather based on the mechanical process. As an Indian woman, she is afraid of her mother-in-law about “being barren”. Shrimati remembered telling Shrikant a few times that his mother always bought the cheapest of gifts for her, but for Rama, she would buy things worth thousands! (GFTB -151) Shrikant’s



mother shows discrimination between her daughter and daughter-in-law. When Shrimati tells Shrikant he comforts her and is not able to understand that a gift has a measure of love in it. It shows the value of recognition towards the person. Shrimati did not agree with that belief. She felt that there was a limit to which one could be obedient and subservient, but once that limit was crossed, the individual's happiness became more important. (GFTB - 157). Earlier women identified themselves with the sub-name of wife, mother and daughter. They accept this identification willingly because they are not financially independent to lead their life individually. But now time has changed and women reject this relational identity. Now she can understand the dishonesty of this identity that is thrust upon her by society, so that she may control herself as a being. Postmodern women are the women of sensibility and consciousness of their low position in the family and society. They are educated and mentally strong to lead their life in prosperity and now woman wants to stand on her feet as a full human being, equal to man in society. The guests insult her favourite subject which makes her burst out in emotion. Shrikant feels sorry for the inconvenience because of his wife's behaviour and insults Shrimati before the guests. It stimulates a sense of anger and bursts out her inner feelings. Shrimati shares a deeply affectionate relationship with her husband and it becomes very hard for her to take a decision. She decides that she would not tolerate any more humiliation being of Shrikant's wife. She realizes that her life is her own which she has to shape as well as face the events of her life.

“Your silence will not protect you”- Audre Lorde Shri, I am leaving and I don't have any plans to return, I am handling all the responsibilities of the house to you. (GFTB -160)

Shrimati gains the courage to leave the house where respect is no longer being served. She does not want to be in her husband's shadow with a luxurious life without self-respect. It is better to create a place in a society, instead of living a discriminated, suppressed and sophisticated life. She finally finds a way out of the dilemma to seek her own life. To turn out of this boredom and meaningless life she decides to have a peaceful life by concentrating on her studies.

Money is one thing which rarely unites and mostly divides people”-Sudha Murty. Shri, you told me the other day that I am more intelligent than you and I can decide what I want. This is what I decided. (GFTB-162)

Shrikant lost his lovable wife Shrimati. She understands that she is going to get her identification. So she decides to go to the U.S for doing a Ph.D. By doing this she tries to defeat men and breaks all the chains and norms propounded by patriarchal society on women. Now Shrikant realizes the sheer love of Shrimati and has felt, before seventeen years he had lost his meaningless first rank and now the most precious Shrimati. However he tries to divert his mind to work, but he cannot stop thinking of Shrimati. Their love metaphorically symbolizes the flower 'Bakula'. It blooms, withers and falls to the ground, and so does the romance and love of this couple eventually.

Conclusion

Hence, the novels *Mahashweta* and *Gently falls the Bakula* are not only about the



nostalgic love for the past but also about a reformation and reconstruction of new life. Postmodern women have broken the walls of restrictions and traditional prejudices. Anupama and Shrimati typified the life of the postmodern world, even though they face tribulation and humiliation like the female in the feminist world they are not kept silent. As postmodern females, they come out of their worries and built a new life which gives real happiness as well as an individual identification. Postmodern feminism acknowledges her as an asset and proves women are not helpless and dependent. To represent postmodernism the protagonist's life does not end but rather starts from her decision. Education helps them to take a decision. The woman is more capable than the man; it clearly expresses that in the present age women have to realize their capabilities. The suppressed protagonists get frustrated and try to prove themselves; in this process, a woman has to undergo a series of humiliation, and betrayals to make her life cheerful. Postmodern women perceived education as an asset and to make the world positive.

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A Sketch of Life: A Reading of Rasasundari Devi's *Amar Jiban*

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Abstract

In the history of every women's writing, there is a tale of struggle, sacrifice and self-discovery. Writing about one's life seems to be interesting but it becomes so astonishing when a nineteenth century woman in India had experimented it. Life writing has recently attained the attention of scholars from various disciplines and it has gone out various changes. Life writing is a narrative account of one's life and it is a self-conscious autobiographical writing. This paper tries to read a few chapters from Rasasundari Devi's Autobiography Amar Jiban (My Life). It is so curious to know about the life of an uneducated woman, who wrote an autobiography in Bengali and got her work published. The paper discusses the socio political situation existed in Pre Independent India and how Rasasundari Devi had overcome all those challenges to achieve her dream. Her voice is the voice of a subdued female. The process of writing her life made her to realize her self. The book is a reflection of all taboos that hinder the growth and self-development of women. Amar Jiban is a singular literary effort by a woman to bring her identity in the public sphere. Unlike other famous autobiographies by men, Rasasundari Devi's is entirely different as it portrays her original sketch of life and she is a representative of the whole community of subdued women. This paper analyses her work from a feminist lens.

Keywords: Life writing, Private life, Self-narration, Women education.

Introduction

'Life writing', a term that is broader than the concepts of Autobiography or biography. It covers a broad area including personal narratives, profiles, ethnographies, case studies, wills, anecdotes, dispositions and diaries. If someone tells a life story means that the life is worth telling as well as they establish a kind of identity. Moreover life writing offers freedom even though it is definitely private and interior. Life writing is based on one's experience in his own life that was shared by others. Julia Novak, in her Experiments in Life Writing says,

Life Writing stands for a range of writings about lives or parts of lives which provide materials out of which lives or parts of lives are composed. These writings include not only memoir, autobiography, biography, diaries, autobiographical fiction and biographical fiction, but also letters, wills, written anecdotes, dispositions and court proceedings...marginalia, nonce writings, lyric poems, scientific writings and



digital forms. (1)

The term 'Life writing' is originated from biography which is in Greek means "bios" means life and "graphia" means writing. It is Virginia Woolf who first used the term Life writing in her memoir "A Sketch of the Past" (1939). It has been a favourite topics for feminists or Gynocritics as their concentration on the lives of women who write about their self. Life writing is a form of non-traditional literature. It provides the reading of previously neglected texts of women as they are considered as non-canonical. And even women's autobiographies were considered as low cultured personal narratives and excluded from the literary canon. Life writing gives an opportunity for women to define herself. Apart from other forms of literary texts that make a notion that the author is absent from the text here the narrative becomes the most original genre. These narratives are written in the perspectives of a first person viewpoint.

Amar Jiban - A Life Sketch

Unlike autobiography, the literary history of life writing wasn't seen as a womanless history. so there is a need to re-read the autobiography of a nineteenth century woman writer like Rasasundari Devi. Though she was born into an aristocratic family, she was denied of education. From a very early young age, she cherished the desire to read, write and learn. She lost her father in the childhood and she was brought under her mother's care. She was married to a landlord at the age of fourteen and the rest of her life was spent in her husband's household. She had all the responsibilities of a wife, daughter in law and a mother. She was busy with her domestic duties and responsibilities. She started to write something when she was 88 years old and it is astonishingly a wonderful achievement. She writes about her childhood, accounts of her personal life. It can be considered as a woman's struggle to articulate a female voice.

Most of her compositions begin with an invocation to God, the Almighty and throughout her autobiography she continues her strong faith in God. She thinks that God is always with her and everything in her life is predetermined by him. Rasasundari Devi lost her father when she was a four years old and she was grown up as a mother's daughter thinking that her mother was unmarried. She was very much attached to her mother and all her beliefs and thoughts were moulded by her mother's ideologies. People used to call her as a golden doll.

The society that she portrays in these life narratives is of a woman in the nineteenth century. She is an aristocratic Hindu woman and yet she was denied of education and freedom. She was grown up as timid and fearful. She was abused by other boys in her locality and sometimes beaten by them. She did not resist them but only but she prayed to the God and thought that he would punish them. She was also afraid of kidnappers in her village. Like her mother she always seems to be patient and forgiving. In fact her mother taught her the ways of God. Unlike other boys or her brother she was not allowed to attend schools. They had a teacher in their locality to teach the boys and she eagerly wished to attend classes but that remained unfulfilled and later the school was burnt in a fire.

Her childhood was carefree and happy because she had got a very wonderful mother



in the world. The day of her wedding was the most painful day in her life. She was only fourteen then. For the first time, she realized the pangs of separation. She had to leave her home. She wonders why she has to leave her own home and there is the most heart touching and emotional scene in her autobiography; “Don’t give me away mother”. This moved everybody into tears. My mother picked me up and tried to explain, “You are good girl. You understand everything. God is with us, so don’t cry. These scenes are taken from her memories. It is remarkable that she can remember things that happened many years before. She was handed over to her husband’s family and she did not even know that where she was going to. After many days travel, she reaches her husband’s home and she was utterly broken and often missed her beloved mother. But time has soothed all her pain and her mother in law became her good friend. She was so lucky to get motherly affection at her husband’s house. But she was not allowed to talk with other people as she was the new bride. She had to cover her face and look down at her feet only.

Rasasundari’s mother in law had lost her eye sight and soon all her happiness had gone out. She was assigned all the household chores and responsibilities. She had also children to look after and also serve guests and servants. The entire responsibility was fell upon her in the early youth. She had no other choice except fulfilling her duties and becoming a good daughter in law, wife and mother. She was the apple of the eye in her own home but she began to feel like a slave. She had nothing to do and think about. She often wishes to go back to her mother but she was rarely sent to her home for some family festivals and asked to come back within a couple of days. She prays:

Blessed is your mercy. Blessed are your laws,

Blessed is your Maya, which covers the entire world. (Amar Jiban 1999)

There are many widowed women in her family house and Rasasundari Devi in her childhood thought that they were unmarried. Their condition was so pathetic so they had to end up within the four walls. Her mother gave her a lot of courage to overcome all the obstacles in her life. Girls were not allowed to go out alone or attend schools. She had to only please the people around her with her responsibilities. She had always wished to read and write especially the Holy Scriptures like Chatatinya Bagavatha, which had cast a spell on her when she was a child. Her brother used to read Chaitanya Bagavatha and she was uneducated and not allowed to even look into it only because she was a girl.

Rasasundari Devi, though she was born into an aristocratic family had no freedom to mingle with the outside world and she could not even visit her mother in her death bed. She was so sad that she was that much attached to her mother and she was useless to her mother. She says if I were a son, I would have flown directly to my mother besides I am helpless, I am a caged bird. She had to serve others needs and there was none to understand what she actually needed. She worked day and night in order to maintain her family and sometimes she did not eat well and careless about her health. She praises the value of motherhood and felt happy that she had been given a good health to take care of her family yet there was something missing in her mind, the utmost urge to read Chaitanya Bagavatha. It was not only her singular experience but also the fate of women in the particular age in which she



lived. The condition of women was no better than animals. She tells the fears and failures in her life, she is never reluctant to shed her actual emotions and responses. The paper wants to analyse her personal narratives in order to understand the way she deviates from the popular notions of self/other public /private and reading/writing. These accounts give her a space for recording her secrets of intimate life. While writing about one's life, it is a way of disclosing one's identity. Perhaps these experiences are not born out of fancy or imagination as they are the true products from her real life.

Once she had a dream of reading the Chaithanya Bagavatha and she thanked God when she woke up for giving her an opportunity to read the book at least in a dream. That dream came true when her husband left the book one day to be read by her son Bipin and she managed to get one sheet of paper from it and hid it in the kitchen. She was so sad because she could not read it without the help of someone. Rasasundari had to do all the household chores and most of the time she was busy with them so she also did not get time to even look into the page. She was also afraid of being caught. Later she managed to get one of the palm leave that her son used to practice alphabets and tried to work it out. Printed books were not easily available in that time. Years had gone, her physical and mental states were changed. She became strong and brave. She went to primary schools and sat with small children to practice reading. She started to speak with some of her maid servants. She had three daughter in laws and she used to have discussion with them about many things common among them. Her daughter in laws were amused by her ability to read these Holy Scriptures and she used to sing it for them. Fear is our great enemy to pursue our dreams and she had overcome it and finally achieved her dream. She seems to be very religious almost dedicated her life to the God. She believes in God's power. She blames on men who simply eat drink and waste their time and she says that all lives will be reduced to dust. Rasasundari had written a few accounts from the sixty years of her life and she believes that the rest of her life will be written by someone else. She feels also happy that today parents take initiative to educate their daughters. Amar Jiban is not about her personal accomplishments but true accounts of her own life. The self that creates here is extremely religious. It creates a bold statement that a tremendous power in a woman. A woman who is not associated to a form of sequential religious significance cannot claim any astounding powers.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, the book is about of her life, overwork loads, responsibilities of motherhood and even the sufferings of widowhood. The main focus of this book is about the need for women education. Her tone is what Virginia Woolf could describe as "special pleading" characteristic of much of women's writing.(Sarkar, Tania 223) Rasasundari Devi has woven an extremely inspiring life story with a strong woman personality.

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The Subjugation of Muslim Women as ‘other’ in Qaisra Shahraz’s *The Holy Woman*

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Abstract

*The research probes the anguish of Muslim women through the character Zarri Bano from “The Holy Woman” which represents the socially constructed norms under the name of religion to supply assured directions to women. The study scrutinizes the patriarchal norms that govern cultural and religious practices to maintain male hegemony in Pakistani society. It also depicts the role of women and their objectification in the society of Pakistan. The research examines how women’s stature is confined to the role of mother and daughter in Pakistani society, however, when they detract from the established standards, their bodies are forced into slavery and identities are disfigured by power mechanisms. Patriarchy uses a range of methods to control and vanquish women, particularly comparing honour and dignity with a woman’s body and trusting chastity as the ultimate good. The study targets to determine how Zarri Bano survives social and sexual domination by opposing the existing norms under the name of culture and religion. Simon de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* initiates to analyze the tussle between women and the society where a woman is subjugated as ‘other’ taking into consideration the theory of gender and sex.*

Keywords: Muslim women, Suppression, Sexuality, Patriarchy, Marginalization.

Introduction

Qaisra Shahraz has treated the real status and the struggle of women in the society of Pakistan in the novel *The Holy Women*. Her novel depicts the intricate emotions, dilemmas, and constant struggle of women in dealing with oppression in the form of marginalization, sexual exploitation and patriarchal subjugation. *The Holy Women* represents the struggle of women in Pakistan through the prominent female character, Zarri Bano. The novel brings forth the theme of suppression, sexuality, dominance and patriarchy. The concept of ‘*Shahzadi Ibadat*’ discusses the sexuality of women and questions the orthodox and fanatic norms that benefit men to perform the power and control their partners. The suppression of sexuality is usually analyzed within the institution of marriage but the ritual of *Shahzadi Ibadat* typified how the women are forced to adopt to be the heir of the family to safeguard the wealth in the absence of any male heir. Zarri Bano, as the representative of various Pakistani women, exemplified the plight emerging through the socio-cultural conventions of ‘*Shahzadi Ibadat*’. In Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq’s regime had imposed various restrictive



rules on women making them marginalized. Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is used as the lens to study the suppressed sexuality of women and the socio-cultural practice of 'shahzadi ibadat' in Qaisra Shahraz's novel *The Holy Woman*.

Research Objectives

- To converse the themes such as subjugation, sexuality, patriarchy and gender disparity.
- To scrutinize the sexuality of women and social and orthodox conventions that stereotypes the stature of women as the 'other'.
- To study the oppression of women and the powerful status of men glorified by the dominant cultural practices and social value system that designed the certain framework for the proceeding of women in society.
- To scrutinize the men-women relationship in the society of Pakistan through the binary opposition of self and other, master and slave, superior and inferior.

Women as 'Other'

The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir posits, "What is a woman?" and answers woman is mere 'a womb'. De Beauvoir argues that there is no such thing as a 'woman's essence. No inherent or universal trait characterizes 'woman'. Her identity is formed through social interactions. Men, a culture that sustains ideological frameworks prescribing her subjection, and women's participation in those systems have all contributed to the construction of 'woman.' This condition restricts a woman's freedom and shapes her plans. Beauvoir discusses the antagonistic binarism of—man-woman, which is merely a linguistic convenience. The male-female relationship allows for distinct differences in terms of personality but it is the woman's individuality that is denied. Men are individuals as subjects, while women's differences from men are biological facts, beginning with anatomy and the foundation of a collective identity. Beauvoir argues that 'Woman' is a sexual object, a reproductive body whereas a man as a subject can be anything he wants to be, anything within his ambition and imagination. Women always had a subordinate place in respect to men throughout history and cultures, being relegated to the position of 'other' that is adjectival to man's significant subjectivity and existential activity. Whereas man has been able to transcend and dominate his surroundings, always expanding the area of his physical and intellectual achievements, a woman has remained imprisoned within 'immanence' as a prisoner to the circle of maternal and reproductive functions. Concerning to this idea of subordination, at the religious, economic and social levels, represented by historical interests of men, she remarked:

She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the absolute, she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. (De Beauvoir 26)

According to Beauvoir women become the 'other' because men are escaping what is natural. Man professes himself the 'one' or 'self' whilst woman identifies herself as the 'other'. The 'one' is the yardstick, the criterion. Any divergence from the usual distinguishes others. It's crucial to remember that the 'self' simply cannot exist without the 'other'. The other, on the other hand, is granted its existence by the self: it is specified.



The Holy Woman provides instances of how women in Pakistan have been restrained and constrained by patriarchal norms and cultures for centuries by oppressive traditions under the name of religion, heritage, and the pragmatism of state authority. The social status of both men and women in Pakistan has succumbed to patriarchal dogmas as tradition, ideology, and culture generate a set of beliefs that influence masculine and feminine identity formations of 'self' and 'other'. A Pakistani English writer, Qaisra Shahraz, draws attention to Pakistan's feudal-cum-patriarchal society, in which an educated woman is forced to live conservative life of sacrifice. The traditional conceptual framework of 'izzat' is used to mute Asian femininity. This group is forbidden from speaking out against the patriarchal circle in their families. Shahraz tackles feminist issues, debating these topics as well as the dominant structure of hegemony which suppresses the identity of women.

The Holy Woman takes place in rural Sindh, one of Pakistan's four provinces. The main storyline revolves around Zarri, a modern educated lady from the new era, after the death of her only brother. Zarri Bano, an educated female character is forced to undergo the ritual of marrying to the Holy Quran. Shahraz examines the silence of Zarri and how after knowing her rights, she is forced to quit her sense of individuality. Haq Bakshish or Shahzadi Ibadat is common practice in rural Sindh Pakistan, when a family does not have a male heir to their estate, the elder daughter is proclaimed a legal heiress in a pretend marriage ceremony, and the girl is wedded to Quran. Haq bakhshwana (Marriage to the Quran) is a practice that entails the formation of a patriarchal order that is rationalized through the use of religious sentiments so that it is not called into question. (Fatima 7) According to Hadia Khan, Shahraz alludes to this religious exploitation by claiming that the patriarchal structure legitimizes the ritual of 'shahzadi Ibadat' that constantly oppressed women by misinterpreting key religious ideals. The ruling system, she claims, has modified religious ideals to fit its own goal. (Khan 6) Zari Bano's marriage to the Quran is a concept that has no place in Islam. (Ishaque 5) Hence, the traditions and culture are misinterpreted in such a way that can hinder a women's growth making her passive to be dominated easily in public and private realms. The existence of patriarchal power and its influence on the lives of 'others' is the subject of gender and sex critical discourse. The patriarchal culture supports the male dominance in every sphere of society keeping the women at subordinate positions and providing the power to men to regulate women's bodies. The issue of hegemonic masculinity is also explored in Shahraz's narrative, as it is reflected in many characters.

Hegemonic masculinity has complete control not only over how power is exercised but also over the institutions that propagate power. The practice of Haq-Bakshish is one such instance of power politics formed by patriarchal structures and using religious sentiments to legitimize its operation. The only option for the feudal father to keep his property and name is to revive an old practice of turning his beloved daughter into a Shahzadi Ibadat (a rural custom in which a lady is compelled to marry the Qur'an) and she has to remain unwed and childless throughout her life. *The Holy Woman* depicts a dichotomy between the self as 'oppressor' and the other as 'oppressed'. Zarri's character represents the 'oppressed' as she succumbed to her father's wish to become 'holy woman' by practising shehzadi ibadat to



save few acres of land after her brothers sudden death. And she suppressed her identity of a liberal feminists and turned 'holy' and accepted another identity which was socially constructed by feudal powers. She falls prey to the inhumane practices and patriarchal culture which benefits men. For Habib Khan, her father, the only way to save their land is by turning his daughter 'holy' in a ritual where she marries Holy Quran. Habib Khan depicts the 'oppressor', who forced Zarri only to preserve his lands and remain unwed and childless for all her life. Thus, Zarri Bano becomes the victim of oppression by oppressive hegemonic masculinity and sheer patriarchal culture. This makes women 'other' secluded by men because they are unable to express their feelings and desires. The novel questions the state of women in a society where she is asked to become 'holy' surrendering herself completely to religion. Can a woman become 'holy' by submitting herself to socio-religious practices? The novel is the representation of gender stereotypical notions toward women and their chastity. The feudal power controls the sexuality of women and declares them chaste and virtuous. Even though, she resists these tyrannical imposition on her. One is persuaded to evaluate the word in terms 'holy' of its binary opposition 'unholy'. The former is defined and qualified by the latter.

As a result of Habib's emphasis on her daughter's desire for marriage or man, Zarri is acutely aware of becoming 'unholy' in her father's eyes. Indeed, it is her fear of the 'unholy' that leads her to choose the life of a 'holy' woman. Zari becomes victim to the fear of being labelled as 'unholy' in the minds of her father. After the loss of Habib's elder son, Zarri Bano is cast in the role of a holy woman, as mapped out by her father. This performativity irritates her a lot. She frequently informs her father that she does not want to be a holy woman since she is unfit for the position. She explains:

There is no way I will become a holy woman... I know what it entails, and I am not cut out for that role. As you know, I have hardly ever covered my head properly. I know very little about religion. I am very much a worldly woman. I cannot become a nun" (Shahraz 79)

She adopts the position of the holy lady to prove to her father that she is an independent self after his blackmailing attack on her sexuality and that she wanted a man in her life. (Bukhari et al. 8) Because the Pakistani feudal families' policy is to withhold the inheritance through their male successors, Habib Khan consults with his father Siraj Din, before making his decision. In the absence of a male heir, the entire estate burdened the elder girl of the family to restore the property of the family (as Islam gives property rights to women). Zari Bano is now a 'shehzadi ibadat' or saintly woman. Unfortunately, all of this is accomplished in the name of tradition, which unjustly conspires with patriarchy under the guise of religion. As a result, Zari's wedding with the Quran is seen as the culturally respectable way Habib may keep his ancestral estate from slipping away from him. (Ishaque 4) Habib understands how to suppress her voice and restrict her sexuality by putting her in a humiliating predicament. Zari Bano submits herself to her father's direction owing to their ethical laws. Marital life serves as a backdrop for 'holiness' that Habib instils in his daughter. Habib blatantly imposes his sexist and chauvinist order on his daughter's body,



psyche, and character. He effectively attaches the concept of dignity to the discard and denial of his daughter's bodily side either because of his position as a father or authority as a feudal lord. By undermining her psyche, he uses the power of masculinity on her daughter's womanly self. Thus, she succumbs to her father's wish.

Shahraz's *The Holy Woman* is primarily a narrative of female sexual politics that are twisted and perpetuated against women's bodies, particularly in rural Pakistan. This is done on both a personal and a public level, as seen in Shahraz's novel, where the men in Zari Bano's family are all trying to control her sexuality both before and after her marriage to the Quran. After her marriage to Quran, Zarri becomes 'holy' and highly conscious about her sexuality to remain pure. In her journey to become 'holy woman', Zarri goes through two phases, initially, she was obligated to follow what was imposed on her by her father, though she was forced to control her desires. Later, when she becomes a scholar of Islam, she restrains herself from conjugal bliss. Habib Khan also repents for his decision of making Zarri succumb to his wishes, so now later he wishes to make amends and asks Zarri to restart her life and to get married even. She restricted herself from worldly happiness as she had pledged not to get married after becoming 'holy woman'. But, due to the untimely death of her sister Ruby (wife of Sikander), she has been requested by her mother to marry Sikander because of her nephew, Haris. And Zarri being the victim of circumstances does the same and marries Sikander. Even after getting married to Sikander, Zarri's vigorous control over herself remained the same and she only shows reluctance in having a normal marital relationship with her husband as she is scared of losing her 'pure status'. She prays to Allah:

Allah Pak, please heed the prayers of a weak woman, a sinner. Guide me back Onto Your path of peace and religious devotion. Tear out this ugly human emotion that is renting me apart and torturing my soul. Douse this longing, that fire that is engulfing my body. I am supposed to be a pure woman. How can I be that while I harbour such base feelings? Enfold me in Your holy mantle of female modesty. Rid my mind and heart of this man Who haunts me at this moment. Show me Your path; for that is the path I seek." (Shahraz 186)

This also reflects that the psyche of a woman has been manipulated in such a way that she voluntarily chooses to devoid herself of the happiness and conjugal bliss that she always wanted. Formerly, she makes a choice to resist the oppression of the patriarch, however, in her later life she chooses silence and learns to control her sexuality, due to instilled fear of ethical laws and ideals.

Conclusion

The Holy Woman by Qaisra Shahraz illustrates the plight of the 'other'. The patriarchal system has victimized the women, resulting in their suffering. The novel focuses on how the power structure utilizes practices to construct and perpetuate a preferred identity of women to control their sexuality. The concept of 'honour' is attached to a women's identity and how she is enforced to keep it intact, devoid of all her happiness. The novel underlines that the socio-religious practices are harnessed and sustained to promote the patriarchal agenda, instead religion endorses them. Zarri, not only exhibited her father's



domination, but also hostility as a girl and struggles in the authoritarian labyrinth woven by feudal social conventions camouflaged as religion. Through the feminist analysis of the text, it is evident that women in Pakistan live under the subjection to a patriarchal system, they are the extraneous, the inconsequential, and the other, whereas the subjects are the 'absolute' and 'self'. Gender is interwoven in all institutions in these societies, as the books reveal and hence the places for women and men are well defined.

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Gender Consciousness in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe

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Abstract

The paper is a study on gender-specific issues about the patriarchal society. Anita Nair is a well-known Indian Feminist writer in English. She became popular through her novels A Better Man, Mistress and Lessons in Forgetting. "Ladies Coupe" (2001) is a story of Akhila who is travelling alone to Kanyakumari for the first time and communicates with other five ladies in a ladies' compartment. These five ladies Sheela Vasudevan, Prabha Devi, Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Paulraj and Marikolanth reveal their stories to Akhila which teaches her to determine a life of her own. Being a spinster she was always haunted by a question 'can a woman live herself?' and finally, she finds answer to this. Hence, this paper pursues to ponder over the glimpses of gender consciousness found in the novel "Ladies Coupe"

Keywords: Gender Roles, Feminism, Patriarchy.

Self-knowledge is no guarantee of happiness, but it is on the side of happiness and can supply the courage to fight for it.

-Simone de Beauvoir

The study takes up a point that how women are subjugated and oppressed in the male dominated society like India in picturesque manner. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* has been the source for of inspiration and the perfect novel that have dealt with the women centric issues. In *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila is a spinster who hides in dab moth tones and does exactly what others expect from her. She is brought up in a traditional family and constantly she was scrutinised by her sister. Niloufer a friend of Akhila booked a railway ticket for her to Kanyakumari. Akhila who lived the life of a recluse is travelling alone for the first time in a crowded ladies' compartment. But it sets a life-changing turn in her life. When she entered the coupe she had her theories in mind which were ingrained from her childhood "A woman can't live alone. A woman can't cope alone". (LC 16)

Janaki an elderly lady narrates her orthodox story first. She had a long married life of forty years and was clueless about independent life. She acknowledges, "Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like a princess. And because of that, we look down upon women who are strong and who can cope by themselves." (LC 23) She was married at the age of 18 and was preached by her elders to follow her husband who is the master of her life. Prabhakar turned out to be a good caring husband who was always there by her side even in the kitchen. But she realizes her marriage and the importance of her husband only



after her son's marriage. When she witnesses a lack of understanding in her son she thinks he is selfish like her. She is shaken when her son treated her badly and takes the decision to leave his house the next day. The boredom in marriage had made her drift from Prabhakar and she had turned towards her son. But when her husband took her side and scolded her son she was shifted towards him. Janaki had felt captivated in her marriage and wanted to emancipate but she comprehends that "Now I know that even if I can cope, it wouldn't be the same if he wasn't there with me." (LC 23) Akhila is remembered for her mother after hearing to Janaki's story who had said "It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife, no disharmony. It is when one wants to prove one's equality that there is waving and sparring all the time. It is also much easier and simpler to accept one's station in life and live accordingly. A woman is not meant to take on a man's role." (LC 14)

The next story is said by Sheela who is just 14 years is travelling with her father to witness her grandmother's final rituals. Her grandma had warned her to be careful and that she is smart. She is aware of Celine's incident that was raped and impregnated by her friend's father. Even she had stopped going to her friend Hasina's house after her father Nazar displayed bad touch. Sheela's grandma was a feminist "you must not become one of those women who groom themselves to please others. The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror, your reflection should make you feel happy" (LC 68). Though she is young Sheela is aware of her father's intolerance and hatred toward her speech. As a young girl, she was allowed to speak like an adult but when she is growing up and wanted to speak her mind, she is objected to by her father. Her father wants to prepare her daughter in accordance with the acceptance of society, "teach her to swallow her words, make her mouth nice and pleasant, innocuous things kill her spirit and tame her tongue." (70) Sheela displays her free mind in doing what she feels right for her grandma. She had dressed her well even on her deathbed as she was very keen on her looks and she had aspired for graceful death.

Margaret who is married to Ebe thinks that woman doesn't need man, "That is a myth that men have tried to twist into reality" (LC 95). She had taken revenge on her husband in a different way and had come to drop him to health care to manage his weight. Margaret and Ebe's was a story of love at first sight, and even with the approval of their parents got married easily. Ebe was vice-principal of the school and handsome, and Margaret was an MSC gold medallist and pretty lady. She was infatuated and attracted to this thinking man. He was her life and it was easy for him to make her puppet in his hand. He took her decisions whether it is her education or eating Bhelpuri, going to Church or her haircut. It was his choice to do B.Ed, not a doctorate. She was shattered inside when he aborted their baby. He wanted a wife with whom he can sleep and boss her around, never caring about her feelings. But after some time it was very difficult for her to live with him. She was very unhappy with him but their family history had no cases of divorce and her mother had advised on her marriage day that a woman should put double efforts as a man to make a successful partnership. Margaret had tried her level best to cope with her. Her



nagging or her silence never made any difference to him. He was a very demanding and tough man. Margaret after much thought found her way from the only weakness he had which was towards 'food'. She cooked delicious dishes and made him eat, a year later Ebe was slow and became a fat man, a quiet man and an easy man. He became dependent on her for everything and a baby girl was born. Margaret confesses, "I, Margaret Shanthi, did it with sole desire for revenge. To erode his self-esteem and shake the very foundation of his being" (LC 97). Her life changed after he became overweight and she took utmost care in not changing him to his previous self. Margaret's piece of advice to Akhila before she got down is, "Once you stop worrying that the world will think of you, your life will become that much easier to live" (LC 136). Margaret's love-hate story reminded Akhila of her love for Hari. Their love did not consummate into marriage as Hari was five years younger than Akhila. She broke up with him but was tortured by his memories. After her mother's death, she took a transfer to Bangalore as her sister was living there. She wanted to live alone in her quarters but her sister the Padma without her invitation came along and stayed with her family.

Next, is the story of Prabha Devi who looked confident and content in her life. Prabha hesitates to say that she was not like that before. She had ventured a long way and configured herself to be a confident woman. Prabha was born in a rich merchant family with four brothers. She had suffered gender discrimination from her father who thought a 'daughter is a bloody nuisance' (LC 169). Her father made a business deal through her marriage to a diamond merchant Jagdeesh. She was married at the age of 18 years and for many years she waited for her husband to come home, her unborn children to come. A business trip with her hubby to New York was an eye-opening for her. She changed herself moulded to a western style in her looks and attitude. As a result, Jagdeesh's Tennis friend Pramod tried to become close to her physically. This incident made a drastic change in her and she wanted to have babies. After Nitya, Vikram was born. She wholeheartedly devoted herself to her kids. After Vikram became 15 years old she decides to learn swimming and lies to her husband about that. Her husband was not so dominating but she allowed him to dominate. Simone de Beauvoir remarks that "women are complicit in their oppression; that is women internalize the consciousness of the male gaze and the expectations of gender roles". After learning swimming Prabha realized what she had made to her and her life. The encounter with Pramod had shaken her as she was afraid of losing her husband and secured life. Only when she conquered her fear of drowning she was able to learn to swim. This changed her perspective towards life and aids in restoring her 'self'.

Akhila describes herself as stiff and restrained, "I wasn't always like this, so stiff and restrained. I had to grow a shell around myself. To protect myself, To deflect hurt and pain. If I hadn't I would have gone insane" (LC 41). After her father's death, she became the breadwinner for her mother, two brothers and a sister. After his post-graduation, her elder brother decided to marry and nobody thought about Akhila's marriage so she made her younger brother also gets married on the same day. Next, she saved money for her sister's dowry and married her off but when also she was 34 but nobody asked her to marry.



Everybody had taken her for granted that she would remain unmarried and look after them. Even Akhila had never thought about her life unless she met her childhood friend Karpagam. Karpagam was a widow but never shed her symbols of femininity like kumkum, colourful clothes or jewellery. She strongly believes some man who couldn't bear the thought of his wife being attractive to other men after his death would have made the rules for widows. She does what she aspires to do, "I have as much right as anyone else to live as I chose" (LC 202). She lived alone and even her 23-year-old daughter was independent. Akhila determines to buy a one-bedroom flat for herself and never would she save money for Padma's daughter's marriage.

The sixth passenger is Marikolanthu and hers is a very tragic story about who had suffered a lot and worked from her childhood. Hearing the stories of other ladies she thought they were making unnecessary agitation for little things. Marikolanthu was raped by a rich male chauvinist Murugeshan and when she became pregnant nobody believed she was raped and wanted her to accept it as her fault. But Mari never felt ashamed of her any fault but she knew nothing could be worse than a man raping a woman. Though she tries to move away from the Chettiar Fort her mother's death gets her back to it as her substitute. She worked for the mad woman and Sujatakka. She had even become a lesbian partner for her Sujatakka who had told how she felt about her husband's touch. She felt like a lizard crawling up her skin. She knew about her husband's infidelity and hated him but allowed her husband to use her body as she feared he would have a mistress. Her mother-in-law had become mad because of her husband's extra-marital affairs. She was allowed to suffer alone and was locked up all the time. When Sujatakka's relationship with Mari was exposed she put all the blame on Mari for casting black magic and was sent out of the fort without giving her salary. Mari was diagnosed with a tumour in her womb and for the treatment, she had mortgaged Muttu to Murugasen, she had felt happy by selling a son to his father. But Mari accepted Muttu as her son and showered motherly love only after her rapist's death. She was fed up with her life being a surrogate housewife, surrogate mother, and surrogate lover. She wanted to live a real life with her son now. Mari is having the spirit to emerge strong even from the most dehumanizing circumstances. She says, "Women are strong, women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that vein of strength in herself. It does not show itself naturally" (LC 210).

In conclusion, Anita Nair in her novel with six stories depicts how women struggle in male-dominated society in different forms in different sectors of the society. But what is noteworthy is that even though they are suppressed they all assert their identity as an individual. Chamanlal opines Feminism, "as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is dependence syndrome whether it is husband, father, the community or a religious group. When women will free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes". Travelling in a ladies' coupe is an epochal event in Akhila's life. Ladies Coupe is an empowering feminist novel which deals with feminism, patriarchy, sexism, misogyny and misandry. Anita Nair through her realistic stories gives an alarming call to every woman to make her life worth living. In



the words of Simone de Beauvoir “Change your life today. Don’t gamble on the future, act now, without delay”.

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Sensing the Unheeded Cries of Men in Bama's *Sangati*

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Abstract

Literature, being an influential medium of communication transfers feelings, emotions and the strong viewpoint of a writer to society and reliably aligns human life. It progresses the everyday essential abilities that life requires which may regularly contain great and terrible encounters. Dalit Literature in India usually portrays men and women characters as poignant and pathetic creatures that are peeved and dominated by upper caste men and women. Concerning the affliction of women, Dalit writers represent women as sympathetic characters who are tortured by society. At the same time, the agony of Dalit men in Dalit Literature has less focus and is not considered by the critics. For instance, Velutha in "The God of Small Things" and Kochuraman in "Kocharethi" who experienced different sorts of perennial problems in their lives because of their caste is being left unnoticed by focusing on women's issues. Bama, a promising Dalit writer is seen as a representative of all the Dalits, especially in Tamilnadu. Her language is informal and also colloquial in style through which she brings out the plights of the people belonging to the Dalit community Her "Sangati" talks about unheard archives of men and women of Dalit people. Through this work, Bama attempts to bob back the bifold persecution of Dalit women. Not only from the feministic point of view, but Bama also concentrates on the male victimization that leads the character to attain traumatization. Men's agony is usually hidden in this community as they are portrayed as the characters that show their emotional rage and affect with humiliation. The researcher tries to prove that it is not only the women who suffer in the Dalit community but also the men whose agony and cries are hidden and unheeded.

Keywords: Bama, *Sangati*, Upper-caste Dominance, Traumatization, Emotional Rage.

Introduction

India is one of the world's fastest expanding countries in the world, but it is also known for its severe caste system. Dalit Literature examines the socioeconomic conditions that surround Dalits in India, as well as their relationships with Dalits and non-Dalits. It looks at how the Dalit community fought for equality and liberty. Due to vigorous Dalit movements as well as thrashing on upper caste society through Dalit literature by writers and also by the implementation of beneficial projects by the Government, an affirmative approach towards equality is seen in the social life of the Dalit communities nowadays. This is a favourable



method for downtrodden people who quest for identity and social equality through their writings.

Dalit dilemma in India reads like an entire data sheet of tragedies. According to a 2010 report by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on the prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes, a crime is committed against a Dalit every 18 minutes. Every day, on average, two Dalits are murdered and two Dalit houses are burnt.

According to the NHRC statistics put together by K.B. Saxena, a former additional chief secretary of Bihar, 37 percent Dalits live below the poverty line, 54 percent are undernourished, 1000 children born in a Dalit household die before their first birthday, 12 percent die before their fifth birthday and 45 percent remain illiterate. The data also shows that Dalits are prevented from entering the police station in 28 percent of Indian villages and they are denied access to water sources in 48 percent of Indian villages because untouchability remains a stark reality even though it is abolished in 1955. (Ajit)

Review of literature

“Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people, who as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality” says Arjun Dangle, a Marathi Dalit Writer where he portrays that both Dalit men and women thirst to get freedom from the upper caste men and to get rid of their dominance and to retain their equality, identity like how men in *Sangati* craves to attain their freedom from upper-class people.

S.K.Paul in his work ‘Dalitism: Its growth and evolution’ points out how the Egalitarian institutions failed in his work “The experiences of Dalit woman in a variety of social institutions like the village, the family, the education system, the church and clergy. The caste system has been so deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche that institutions that ought to promote egalitarianism or awareness end up propagating the same distinctions. The stories of individuals such as these function as voices of entire communities of people who have undergone similar experiences of discrimination.” (66-7). In Bama’s *Sangati*, Bama’s husband is the only male who wishes his daughter to go for higher studies, because he very well knows the importance of education in every Dalit girl’s life. Men in *Sangati* hesitate to educate their daughter because they very well know that Dalit girls are not allowed to study after a certain period and they are with a mindset that when a Dalit girl grows, becomes educated and get married, there are many chances for them to get tormented and tortured by her husband and husband’s family. So to avoid such a pathetic state in their daughter’s future, the Dalit men in *Sangati* do not allow their daughters to get more education.

In May 2019 BBC records that, a group of upper-caste men at a wedding allegedly beat up a 21-year-old Dalit resident, named Jitendra, so badly that he dies nine days later because he sat on a chair in the upper-caste men’s presence and eats in the very same table where the upper caste men sit and eat. Likewise, there are still upper caste men who feel a shame to sit beside Dalit men. In *Sangati*, some men are not allowed to stand straight in front



of Dalit men and should bend themselves while standing and are not allowed to talk back even if the mistake is not theirs. Dalit men are helpless and at many times they feel inferior and are not ready to raise their point, losing their hope for identity completely.

The Outset of Dalit Literature

The term Dalit Literature is first coined in 1958, at a Dalit conference held in Bombay. However, as an identity marker, the term Dalit comes into prominence in 1967, when a group of young Marathi writers-activists formed an organization called Dalit-Panthers. The growing corpus of Dalit texts, poems, novels and autobiographies, however, seeks to rectify this phenomenon by examining the nuances of Dalit culture. Dalit Literature is one of the most important literary movements to emerge in the post-independence India. Research Scholar, Kavitha.K defines Dalit in her work 'Dalit Literature in India' as, "The term 'Dalit' literally means "oppressed" and is used to refer to the untouchable casteless sects of India. Dalit also called outcaste, is a self-designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as "untouchables". Dalits are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over India, South Asia and all over the world. There are many different names proposed for defining this group of people like 'Ashprosh', 'Harijans', 'Dalits', etc." (Kavitha 239). Along with Bama, whose novel *Karukku* portrayed Dalit life in the authentic language of the people, Imayam, whose *Koveru Kazhuthaikal* narrated the story of puthirai vannar (dhobies working for Dalits), K.A. Gunasekaran, a writer and a singer, former IAS officer P. Sivakami, Azhakiya Periavan, and many other writers, Dalit leaders such as Dr K. Krishnasamy, Thol Thirumavalavan and Athiaman have found a place in the collection in Tamil Dalit Literature.

Sangati - an identity for Dalits

Bama's *Sangati* is an important contribution to Dalit writings in India. It delves into the lives of Dalit men and women of Tamilnadu who face two-fold oppression due to caste and gender discrimination. Bama uses many narratives together to explore the social inequities, disproportions and proclivities suffered by men and women of the Dalit community. The novel is originally written in Tamil by Bama and there is no doubt that Lakshmi Holmstrom's translation in English connects the very same emotions and feelings which Bama reflected in this work. Professor Dr. Vignesh in his article, 'Bama's Sangati as a unique Dalit Feminist Narration from subjugation to celebration' states, "Through *Sangati*, Bama tries to bounce back the oppression of Dalit women. *Sangati* is more of a celebration of female identity." (Vignesh 92). There are obvious themes in this novel like victimization of women, upper caste men's domination of the Dalits, poverty, lack of education etc.

The secret agony and the unheeded cries of men in Sangati

Men in the novel face multitudinous amount of affliction and persecution which leads them to get traumatized in the society. But those miseries and agonies are not exposed to the public. Financial income in Dalit community is very degenerated and extraordinarily low when compared to other communities. Bama's grandfather leaves his family and works in Sri Lanka as he is the breadwinner of his family. Bama, the narrator in the work expresses her grandfather's plight:



It so happened that a Kangani, an agent from a tea estate in Sri Lanka, arrived just at that time to recruit a whole group of workers from our village. It was with them that Thaatha went away. But once he left, he was gone forever. He never came back. All the others who went with him returned within four or five months. They said they were treated like dogs over there. They said even life in our village was better than that. (Bama 4)

Bama's grandfather leaves his family to Sri Lanka to support his family financially. This situation is common in the Dalit community when it comes to the occupation of Dalit men. Dalit men accept low wages from their masters and are ready to do heavy work. The tea estate owners in Sri Lanka treat Dalit men like animals in such a way, that the men working there die because of mental stress and the torture imposed upon them by the owners. Some men return within four to five months because they are not able to bear the both physically and mentally which results in unemployment. Unemployment is a curse to the Dalit community. This automatically leads to poverty in a Dalit family. Dalit men in their workplace are unable to raise their voices against their masters who provide them work heavily but are not given proper wages because they are afraid of losing their jobs. This situation makes them dumb in their workplace. This is the main reason why men hide their emotions and agonies to the outside world.

Bama's father wants Bama to study in school and to reach out the world. Children of the Dalit communities usually stop going to school once they complete their fifth standard and they start earning money like getting daily wages from upper caste people just to serve and help their families with food and shelter. Bama's mother expresses the desire and mindset of Bama's father: "Her father won't allow her to stop off now. He wants her to study at least to the Tenth. He says, we didn't learn anything, and so we go to ruin. He says, let them at least get on in the world." (Bama 9). Bama's father, being a Dalit man is not allowed to get proper education and so he wants his daughter to get educated and he wishes that his daughter explore the world. He ruins his own life by not getting education and he is not allowed to go to school because of his caste. There he may not voice out his desire to go to school where his pain is hidden in society.

Dalit men are terrified of upper caste men. The first reason is they know the fact that once if they voice out against them, they would be fired out at work. Another reason why these men are afraid of upper caste men is because upper caste men abuse Dalit girls sexually. So, most of the men those who have daughters at home always are afraid to send their daughters outside because they know that their daughters would be trapped by the upper caste men. Bama expresses:

My Ayya won't take me anywhere, Paati. If at all, it's my elder brother who will do that. If I ask Ayya, he says young girls mustn't wander about here and there. . .If we go out at all, it's only to the church, and even for that you have to try really hard. All the same, if you look at it one way, what these men say makes sense too. Can we go



about as freely as they do, after all? Some wicked fellow or other is waiting to rape us. (Bama 13-14)

The Weakness and the Plight of Dalit Men

This is how Bama's father make sense through his words. He is afraid of sending his daughter Bama outside the house because he knows very well that some wicked fellows may trap and rape his daughter. This franticness is very common among Dalit men. They very well know about the evilness of upper caste men in abusing girls of their community sexually but are impotent and inefficacious in mounting up their voice against them because they are dependent on upper caste men for money. Bama further writes, "And our men are afraid that if anything indecent happens to one of us, it might end in a riot." (Bama 105) The men of Dalit community very well knew that if any kind of indecency happens to their community women with the upper caste men, then the problem is for them. Either they lose their job or gets shame in front of public. So, the Dalit men never allow their daughters or sisters to go to theatres or parks. As they are dependent on their landlords, they cannot develop any kind of enmity with the upper caste men. Thus, the upper caste domination is the reason why they hide their distress and anguish within themselves and it remains as a secret outside to the society. It clearly shows the vulnerability of Dalit men in the Indian society⁶⁶.

. A man cannot bear the pain of shame and even it is extremely cruel to be ashamed in front of public. It is very common for Dalit men who are disrespected by upper caste people and their children. Male victimization becomes stereotypical in the Dalit community. They get punishments and upper caste men blame them even though they commit no mistake. Naataamai of that Pudhupatti village blames Manikkam, a teenage man who is accused of behaving indecently with his aunt's daughter, Mariamma. The fact is both Mariamma and Manikkam just make jokes and laugh together and an upper caste man notices their laughter and complaints as if the boy misbehaves with the women. But it is he whomisbehaves with Mariamma and he is afraid because he thinks that he would lose his reputation once the news comes up and so to escape from this, he blindly blames Mariamma and Manikkam. The shame which Manikkam and Mariamma's father face is very contemptible and dishonorable. The senior Naataamai enquires Manikkam:

Ele, Manikkam, what do u have to say for yourself, le?" Manikkam folded his arms as he stood there, and spoke humbly. "What the mudalaali said never happened. That girl came away with her firewood bundle quite some time before I did. We spoke a few words in fun when we were in the woods. And that was when everyone was there together. I only joked with her because she is my athai's daughter. I never even saw her along the way, on my way back. (Bama 22-23)

Manikkam is not a victim at all who had a casual talk with his aunt's daughter but the head of the village blames him and he is accused of harassing her. He needs to fold his hands in front of them which is mandatory for a Dalit man in front of upper caste men. He cannot open up the truth because he does not get the opportunity to speak. Even if he opens up, nobody is willing to accept and nobody actually wants to know about the truth. The blame



falls on Dalit men though they are not the victims. So, here also their voice against the culprit is corrupted and the real identity of Dalit men is hidden.

The traumatization of Dalit men

Alongside the scourge of untouchability, the Dalits do not have the right to possess any sort of property. They eat the foulest food, including extras which are discarded by the higher caste people. The men are not permitted to draw water from the normal well and are banned from the right to schooling and information. They perform humble positions for higher standings. They are not permitted to utilize the basic cemetery. Indeed, even they are not permitted to live in the primary town which is possessed by the upper rank. They are denied of proprietorship rights to land and property, prompting the absence of admittance to all wellsprings of monetary portability. Consequently, Dalit men are exposed to both social rejection and financial segregation throughout the long term. In one way, men's circumstance proceeds even today in many parts of the country.

In Dalit community, Poverty is an inexorable issue. Definitions of poverty vary based on social, cultural and political systems. Understanding poverty from poor people's perspectives reveal that poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon. Poverty is one of the most significant social determinants of health and mental health, intersecting with all other determinants, including local and community conditions, race and access to neighbourhood factors and the built environment. The poverty which affects mental health is wide-ranging and reaches across the generation. The evidence is strong for a casual relationship between poverty and traumatization. However, the characters in the novel apply to exemplify that poverty would affect mental health and develop problems that in turn prevent individuals and families from leaving poverty, creating a vicious, intergenerational cycle of poverty and poor health. Geographically concentrated poverty often in urban areas is particularly toxic to psychiatric well-being and so this is how Dalit men also gets affected with trauma of poverty in their life. Poverty impacts both the physical and mental strength of Dalit men. They become baffled because of their landlord's destitution and disgrace, which prompts traumatization. They cannot impart their sentiments and feelings to anybody outside of their family, so they segregate themselves and show fury to their family to disregard their dissatisfaction in their workplace. Traumatization makes an individual to become very upset in a way that often leads to serious emotional problems. Dalit men react emotionally when they are beaten up by their masters in their workplace and they are humiliated everywhere. Bama writes, "Even though they are male, because they are Dalits, they have to be like Dogs with their tails rolled up when they are in the fields, and dealing with their landlords. There is no way they can show their strength in those circumstances." (Bama 65)

Hence, Dalit men lose their identity as a male and also lose their dignity as their landlords treat them as dogs in their workplace. Bama exclaims that because the men are Dalits they naturally have to be like a dog in front of their landlords. Those landlords never allow Dalit men to show or deliver their strength to the landlords because they know very well that Dalit men are dependent on them for money. This is the reason why Dalit men fail



to show their mental and physical strength to the works and it remains secret within themselves.

Conclusion

The Dalit men are the victims, subjecting to frustration, traumatization, oppression, upper caste domination, shame in the public, unemployment. Their identity as male is hidden and their identity is projected just as a Dalit man. Everywhere around the world, they get humiliated but the pain and the distress that they carry out throughout their mind and heart is hidden in the society. Bama's articulation of Dalit men's plight is obscurely visible when the readers pay specific attention. Through this article, it can be understood that it is not only the women, who suffer physical pain in the Dalit community but also the men, who bury their miseries inside their hearts and experience both physical and mental anguish. They sacrifice their desires and emotions just to support their family. Thus, one can blindly say that the Dalit men are not living, they are just surviving.

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