

Torture and Gender Discrimination Faced by Dalit Married Women in the Autobiography Novel of Baby Halder

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ABSTRACT

Dalit women are the worst suffered gender discrimination that are framed to be particularly disadvantageous to them. This paper depicts a Dalit woman who has been silently suffering oppressions by gender and caste for ages at the hands of society. The present study is an attempt to bring out the changing image of women in Baby's works from upper gender suffering to caste suffering of Dalit women. She has deep concerns about the problems being faced by Dalit women in male dominated society and caste discriminated society. The Dalit women can fight endless battles to uplift her position and survive in society. The theme of this paper is the struggle of Dalit woman elevate her position in the society where the dalits women are still slaves to upper caste, customs, parents, husband and children. It highlights the physical, mental, and psychological aspect of the Baby Halder during her married life. It also depicts the miserable condition in her life of how to live and exist in her society. It shows the gender discrimination of dalit woman faced during her married and domestic life.

Keywords: Torture, Dalit Education, Violence, Struggle, Exploitation, Oppression

INTRODUCTION

Dalit women of India have been living in a culture based on silence for centuries. Which is the main reason for their remaining mute spectators towards exploitation and barbarity. They have no control over their body, earnings and life. The violence against them does not just stop at the level of exploitation but beyond that it also causes hunger, malnutrition, physical and mental torture, rape, illiteracy, ill health, unemployment, insecurity etc. The collective forces of feudalism, casteism and patriarchy have created their own heaven where women suffer hell. Most of the women are living in an era of savagery even in the modernity based era.

Gender discrimination is when someone is treated unequally and unfairly based on their gender identity. Like all discrimination, gender discrimination is a human rights violation, though the distinction between "gender" and "sex" is a more recent development. Take the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an example. Article 2 reads: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex [emphasis added], language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (emphasis added)." Article 2 covers sex discrimination, but it doesn't mention gender. This is most likely because when the UDHR was written, gender and sex were considered the same. Times have changed. The phrase "other status" has been used to expand the rights given in Article 2.

Gender discrimination occurs when a person is treated negatively or unequally based on their gender. It includes restricted access to education, jobs, and healthcare; unequal pay; sexual harassment; and much more.

When a girl grows up in a male dominated society, her father becomes very worried about her because now she has grown up, she has to get married and marriage does not happen like that. She needs a lot of money for marriage because her father has to give a lot of dowry. Then who knows, his daughter will be accepted.

Her father scolds her on every small thing. He gets angry because her mother has left the house. She is not at home. Now all the responsibility is on the Father. How will he get married to his daughter? He has become irritable regarding this. Then one day his daughter ask:

"Why do you keep scolding me all the time" Baby Halder herself faced harassment at the hands of her own husband. She points out her harassment as:

"One day, Shashti's mother called me to their house. When I arrived there, I realized that my husband had followed me. He did not wait to ask anyone anything. Silently, he picked up a stone from the ground and hit me on the head with it. My forehead split apart, and blood gushed out. I just stood there without moving. Shashti's mother began to shout and curse "Can you see a man standing here talking to her that you need to hit her like this?" she yelled. "We're all women here, and she's just a slip of a girl. She's barely arrived here and you show up to split her head open?" Then she turned to me and said, "I don't know how you can bear to live with this man. Anyone else would have walked out on him long back."

Quietly, I took my child in my arms and came home. All I asked my husband was what I had done to be beaten like this. The words were barely out of my mouth when he picked up a sturdy piece of wood and began hitting me on my back. A short while later, I felt a piercing pain in my stomach. By the evening it was unbearable and I lay whimpering and crying for my father and mother. The pain was so severe that I could not sit or stand or do anything. I howled in agony all through the night while my husband slept on without a care in the world. Either he did not hear my cries or couldn't be bothered to do anything about them. I was now shouting saying I was going to die, but he was utterly indifferent. I begged him to call someone. (84)

I told him I had not felt like this even when I gave birth to my child, but he just said, "Who can I call at this time of night?" turned over and went back to sleep. In the end, I took my child with me and, clutching my stomach and crying in pain, made it across to the house opposite where I asked the owner, Mahadev, if he could go and inform my brother of my condition. I pleaded and pleaded with him, saying I was in so much pain that I could not bear it, that if he did not go I would die. "But I don't even know where your Dada's home is," he said.

"Take my son with you: he knows the way." So, poor man, he held my son's hand and went in search of my brother. Once he got there, he told him I was in a pain and asked him to hurry back.

"But what is Shankar doing?" Dada asked him.

"What do you think?" he replied. "He's fast asleep." My Dada came and put me in a thela and took me away. (85) Torture against women has been happening in our society for centuries. If you look back at the pages of history, be it the Ramayana period or the Mahabharata period, you will find torture against women in some form or the other. In Ramayana, Ravana showed violence towards Mother Sita. In Mahabharata, disgusting acts like kidnapping of Draupadi were done in front of her husbands. Where a man is removing a woman's clothes in front of another man. What could be a greater violence than this? Our history is colored with stories of violence against women.

In this male-dominated society, it is the man who commits the mistake and the woman who gets punished, just as it is shown in the children Baby Halder "A Life is Less Ordinary" it show that Ajit commits a mistake and the punishment is given to Haldar. Ajit make a mistake Instead of punishing Ajit, Baby Haldar was also insulted inside the Panchayat. What judicial system is there in India for justice for women?. One incident describe here: one day Shashti and her mother called Ajit to their home and asked him why he was constantly after me like this. "Can't you see," they said, "how much violence she has to face because of you?" cannot imagine," he told them, "how much I love Shasht her."

"But she is married' and has a child, So what?" he said. "I still love her."

The next day Shashti told me all this. I said, "I see. He says he loves me, and this is what love means for him does it? That The can watch me being beaten, be the cause of it, and still think nothing of it? Is this what love is all about? Does he have any idea at all what love means? I hate him and I spit on him! Please tell him this Shashti: I don't even want to set eyes on his shadow!"

But instead of backing off, he became even more persistent. Everyone tried talking to him, but he was adamant. Some people even took it upon themselves to beat him up but the result of this outburst was that the whole thing became a public issue and even those who knew nothing about it, were now in the know. They began to debate who was more at fault, Ajit or I. Some would say it's the girl, others would say it's the boy. The whole thing became a real tamasha.

While all this was going on outside, I locked myself within four walls of my home and wept. I began to think that was something wrong with me after all: maybe the whole thing was my fault I knew everyone would be gossiping, and I now hesitated even to leave the house because I didn't know how I would face them all. But of course, I had no choice. I had to get out of the house: there were all sorts of things to be done. All the time I told myself that if life was going to be like this, it would be better for me to go away. I'd think these thoughts and another day would pass by. My son was three years old by now and I was four months pregnant with my next child. It was hard enough to bring up one child amidst all this, let alone deal with the prospect of another on the way. (83) Torture against women has taken the form of incidents like rape. Thousands of innocent girls have been raped by criminals. Those who survive are forced to live an anonymous life. And some end their play by themselves.

The biggest reason for torture against women is that in our society, those who commit torture are not given any strict punishment. Women victims of violence do not get justice quickly. In most of the cases, the criminal is not punished and if he is, it is very serious. There has also been death sentence here.

The main reason for increasing torture against women is the internet which is misused by girls and boys. It is very good if internet is used for studies. But unfortunately that's just not the case in India. Secondly, girls expose themselves excessively. Following the culture of western

There is another case and it has been mentioned that Shashti's Sister has three sisters, the eldest sister Shitla middle number Tulsi and the youngest sister Pratima, all three are married but unfortunately none of them live with their in-laws. All three sisters live in their parents' house. Their husband have left them and they have not come back and someone has married someone else and left them like this, then what is their fault in that? People consider them wrong, do not treat them well, tell them their status is not good, everyone looks at them with bad eyes. Pratap comes to their house every day to meet them and people consider Pratap is good. If seen, Shashti's girls and Pratap are wrong equally but our male-dominated society considers girls are more wrong comparatively.

That's why Baby Haldar's husband never allowed Baby Haldar to go to Shashti's house. If he came to know about her going there, he would beat her badly because he also thought that he should not look at his wife in the same way. Look at the way cheap girls are viewed. One day she goes to Shashti's house and She says:

"I grabbed my child and rushed home full of fear. He did not say a word when he saw me but roughly caught me by my hair and started kicking and beating me. Then he began to south and curse: "you bitch , he shouted, "I told you not to go there and you won't listen."

The social system for women in India is complex and varies across regions, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Traditionally, it has been patriarchal, with women expected to fulfill roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers. However, there have been significant changes over the years, with increasing opportunities for education and employment for women, as well as legal reforms aimed at addressing issues such as dowry, domestic violence, and gender inequality. Despite progress, challenges like gender-based violence, unequal access to resources, and cultural norms persist in many parts of the country.

Without dowry in India, newly married women would experience several negative changes in their lives.

Baby Haldar tells another story in this autobiography, which is of Vibhuda's and Nisha. Vibhuda is a married man and being married, he has an affair with Nisha. Vibhuda's wife, she is very nice and But Vibhuda does not take care of his wife at all and he secretly goes to meet Nisha and loves her very much but one day Vibhudha's wife catches him red handed and sees both of them which makes her unable to bear it. She gets it and commits suicide. Someone said,

she was all right till that morning; someone else insinuated that she had died because of Nisha... She was a good woman. Whatever the reason for her death, however, it did nothing to change Vibhuda's feelings for Nisha and he continued to assiduously woo her and the two of them met frequently.

In that times, if a married woman didn't bring dowry, she and her family might face various consequences depending on the specific cultural and societal norms of the time and place. The woman and her family could face social stigma and ostracism within their community for not fulfilling the customary expectation of providing dowry. This could lead to a loss of reputation and social standing. The absence of dowry could strain the relationship between the woman and her in-laws, leading to marital discord, harassment, or even abandonment. Without dowry, the woman might lack financial security within her marital home, making her dependent on her husband and vulnerable to exploitation or mistreatment.

Consequences: In some cases, the absence of dowry could result in legal disputes or cultural repercussions, such as divorce or the woman being returned to her natal home. Overall, not providing dowry in ancient times could have serious social, emotional, and economic consequences for the woman and her family, reinforcing the importance of dowry in many historical societies.

Halder's story is not unique. It is the story of thousands of women caught in similar situations across the world. What makes it different is the fact Baby's strength and resolve, her determination not to stay in an abusive situation, to escape, to make a life for herself and her children, and in the end, her absolute commitment to the one thing she had always held close to her heart, education and learning and desire to read and write.

Baby Halder's autobiography serves as a testimony to the grim situation of so many women whose voices and words remain unheard and unread, whose sufferings are undocumented, whose childhood and innocence are short because

they are expected to fulfill and conform to archaic rigid roles that systematically subjugate them to the higher authority of men.

It describes the Dalit woman who realizes that her identity is heavily mediated by her identity as a Dalit. It depicts the discrimination in gender, caste both within the house and the outside and this is more tough as a woman. It also describes the oppression and exploitation of Dalit women by their father and husband. It also portrays the discrimination towards Dalit women in the patriarchal society. It also depicts protest against the inhuman condition of existence to which the Hindu Caste System has subjected the Dalit for thousands of years. It gives the detail of what daily life problems and how to live without mother and to live abusive father. It weaves the pain, suffering, and agony of many places in her life when she was abandoned by her mother. It describes the long journey from the Murshidabad to Gurugram, she finds employment as domestic help but casteism soon makes it ugly appearance. It describes the Baby's marriage at twelve to an abusive man twice her age and mother at fourteen her life was marked by overwhelming challenges. It also describes she faced staggering workload that often left her no time to care for her own children.

Making education compulsory for girls is crucial for several reasons:
Empowerment: Education empowers girls by providing them with knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed decisions about their lives, careers, and health.

Economic Opportunities: Education opens up economic opportunities for girls, enabling them to pursue higher-paying jobs and contribute to their families' and societies' economic well-being.

Gender Equality: Education promotes gender equality by challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes, empowering girls to strive for equality in all aspects of life.

Health and Well-being: Educated girls are more likely to have better health outcomes for themselves and their families. They are more likely to marry later, have fewer children, and make informed choices about their health and nutrition.

Social Development: Educated girls contribute to the social development of their communities by participating in civic and community activities, advocating for social change, and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Overall, compulsory education for girls is essential for promoting gender equality, empowering girls, and fostering social and economic development.

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