

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Representation of Indian Dalit and Diasporic Women in Select Literary Narratives

Pooja

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Patna, Bihar, India

Abstract:

This paper comprehends the representation of Indian women in select dalit and diasporic literary narratives. This is perceived in terms of the portrayal of women on the basis of gender relations and looks at the way social behaviours and roles are internalized by them. This pioneer study bridges the gap by relating the literary representation of Indian women of two diverse marginalized societies. The select literary narratives represent Indian women as dalit and diaspora, in India and the United States respectively. In spite of the cultural and social disparities, most of their depiction is identical. They appear as multiply jeopardized along various similar and different vectors of socialization. Their lives depict a transformation from rejection to resistance. But such identical similarities do not associate them relatively. The paper draws the attention to the unspeakable marginality of sisterhood between the dalit and Indian diasporic women. Such appalling existence and parallel helps to construct similar knowledge of survival among other marginalized groups on a global scale.

Keywords: Dalit, diaspora, gender relations, Indian women, marginalized, narratives, representation.

1. Introduction

Representation, as Hall (1997: 15) states, 'is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture.' The representation of women in literature emerges out of the existential experiences across societies and nations. O. (1989) asks 'What is a Woman?' A woman, as Moi states, is framed by her subjectivity and the way she acquires it. Moi views that this subjectivity stands in a dependent relationship to the body. The body significantly influences both what society and others make of a woman and her choices which she makes in response to the other's conception of her entity.

Literary narratives act as a medium to reflect the experiences of men and women across societies. They mirror the way society affects individuals. These writings also raise the relation between the individual and the social context within which the whole process of representation and interpretation continues. Raj(2007) opines that either due to ignorance or due to lack of critical thinking, human beings are subject to one or more form(s) of subjugation. Understanding the lives of the Indian women in specific social contexts, dalit and diasporic as in this work, may help to gain a comprehensive understanding on local and global grounds on the basis of their experiences. The select dalit and Indian diasporic writings reveal a woman's quest for her identity in relation to social vectors of caste, migration, ethnicity, and gender in relation to the society they live in. They, in the process of representing the women also represent the socio-cultural ties and the way in which they make and unmake them. The representation of the women characters helps to delineate the social life and reveal how they experience society. They unravel the way some marginalized women undergo a series of transformation which affects their voice, agency, and subjectivity. Behind such negotiations one of the forces which have the most powerful play is gender. Gender, as Butler, states, 'is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.' (2007: 34) It is internalized in such a way that it one performs even without being conscious about it. For Indian women, it denotes a unity of experience. The paper comprehends such experiences from a feminist perspective bringing the local and the global together.

2. The Study

When we look at the nature of studies made in both the genre, we find that while most of the dalit writings focus on caste, religion and patriarchy (West 2009), (Ferry 2008), (Beth 2007), (Ghosh 2003), the diasporic study focuses on migration and the issues of acculturation, and changes in the host land. (Paranjape 2001) and (Satchidanandan 2001) But both of them seldom tend to delineate the way women are represented. Drawing from Paranjape(2001) we can state that like the caste and the language factor which affects one's experiences in the writings, the gender factor also has an immense role to play. Paranjape (ibid) affirms that like any other narrative the diasporic experience is also a gendered experience. For instance, the writings of Indian women abroad, example Meena Alexander, Malati Rao, Sujata Bhatt, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee, Suniti Namjoshi, and Jhumpa Lahiri reveal the impact of gendered experiences.

Likewise, the issue of minority and majority also contributes to the feeling of alienation. In spite of the impact of gendered experience there is absence of focus on women from their perspective. Baluja (2003) talks of the absence of research on women in the field of international migration. Baluja (ibid) states that women's status not only includes the idea of gender inequality but concerns prestige, power, access to resources, and control of resources. Women, as Baluja writes, are viewed as passive participants in migration. This passivity gives them secondary importance in migration studies and the process of social transformation. Abraham (2005) writes that for most of the immigrants, including Asian Indians, gender, class, and ethnic relations get reshaped as women and men adapt to life in a foreign country. The gendered relations act as an important factor responsible in the immigrants' adjustment to the host land. The paper also looks at the way such shaping and negotiations happen. While we can study them by looking at the reality, another way of studying it is through representation.

Representation of women implies her roles and her presentation by the writer from the perspectives of her relationship to family, society, reproduction, sexuality; social and cultural construction of gender. Representation can be available in various modes. News, media, and literary narratives are some instances. Signposting, we have focused on their representation through narratives in this paper. The select narratives of both the genre draw from real lived and seen experiences. In doing so, it also studies the relationship between knowledge and existence. The way one lives and develops is the manner in which knowledge gets constructed. Therefore, the importance does not only lie in the existence of the individuals but also on their visibility. The task of making them visible raises complex questions of representation from a gendered perspective.

The select literary narratives are by writers of Indian origin. While the dalit narratives have been translated to English from Marathi and Tamil, the diasporic narratives are in English. The writings are woman centric and represent their lives in India and abroad respectively. The selected dalit narratives are Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (Marathi, 1984) translated as *The Outcaste* (2003), Bama Faustina's *Sangati* (Tamil, 1994) translated as *Sangati* (2005), and Baby Kamble's *Jina Amucha* (Marathi, 1986) translated as *The Prisons We Broke* (2008). The select diasporic narratives are Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), Iqbal Singh Ramoowalia's *Death of a Passport* (2003) and Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (2013).

Sharankumar Limbale is a dalit writer widely acclaimed as a poet, novelist, and a critic. *The Outcaste* became widely known after it was translated to English by Santosh Bhoomkar and published in 2003. This novel is highly acclaimed for bluntly talking about the dalit illegitimate children as represented through Limbale himself. Limbale exposes the way the dalit women were either enticed or forced into sexual relationships with higher-caste men. Such women as portrayed through the character of his mother, Masamai are half heard. Baby Kamble is a dalit Marathi writer and the first woman to have written her autobiography in Marathi. *The Prisons We Broke* is a Marathi translation of Baby Kamble's original work *Jina Amucha*. The work was translated by Maya Pandit and got published in 2008. As the title suggests, their existence comes into action only when they break the prisons around themselves. The prison is of ignorance, lack of education, caste, class, and gender. The narrative is an autobiography of the society rather than that of a particular person. Bama Faustina Soosairaj (1958) is the most distinguished dalit fiction writer in Tamil, and one of the most acclaimed of all dalit women writers. Her writings represent dalit women and society. *Sangati* appeared in Tamil in 1994 which later got translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2005. It is an extension of what Bama talks about women as oppressed, ruled by the patriarchal system, government, caste and religion in her first novel *Karukku*. It makes the women question, challenge and find out their true identity, worth and resistance in the modern world. It is the autobiography of the community on the whole.

Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian born American writer. Her writings focus on the themes of migration and the struggle the individuals undergo in the new land. She places her protagonists in diverse socio-cultural milieu where they find different races having quite different ethnic backgrounds. In such a multicultural and multi-ethnic social setup, her protagonists quest to find out their identities. *Jasmine* (1989) is the story of a widowed Punjabi girl in her early twenties whose husband gets killed in a religious attack in Punjab. *Jasmine* starts her odyssey from Hasnapur, a small place in Punjab to the cities of the United States of America. She not just moves beyond the geo-political boundaries but also re-roots in a new land in search of life, a new life, and a hope of love and fulfillment of desire. Iqbal Ramoowalia is an Indian born Canadian writer. He is actively involved in teaching and writing. He has written several poems and is accredited with one novel *Death of a Passport* published in 2003. *The Death of a Passport* recounts the tribulations of a girl Seema who leaves her husband, Anmol and six months old son, Amroz in Canada and moves her alone and strong. The theme of the novel is to represent the life of a separated woman and without a passport. Seema is left alone to cope with the burden of illegal immigration. Gaiutra Bahadur is a journalist and a book critic. She is interested in writing about culture and politics of global migration. Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* was published in 2013. It is an 'odyssey' of not just Sujaria, but represents all such indentured women from India to Guyana, and who have remained unheard. Sujaria, a young Brahmin woman at the age of twenty-seven and four months pregnant without her husband's details, migrated to Guyana as a coolie woman. Bahadur supplements the novel with real lived experiences as maintained in the records by the British officers, Grierson and Pitcher. While discussing about it, Bahadur brings to picture the lives of Indian women in colonial times with a backdrop of Indian caste, social, marriage, family, prostitution, and widowhood.

3. Conceptual Framework

Butler (2007: xxviii) refers to gender to represent a struggle of a collective group; the struggle is continuous in nature and as Butler states 'increasing the possibilities for a livable life for those who live or try to live on sexual margins.' According to her, gender is a set of signs internalized, psychically imposed on the body. It is a social attribute. Similar are the gender relations. Gender relations look at what are the male and female roles, attitudes and behaviours? How different genders interact? By analyzing these relations using Butler's examination of gender and roles, we aim to locate the 'women' of the marginalized societies. As Butler (2004: 12) states:

‘Certain humans are recognized as less than human and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life. Certain humans are not recognized as human at all, and that leads to yet another order of unliveable life. If part of what desire wants is to gain recognition, then gender, insofar as it is animated by desire, will want recognition as well. But if the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that “undo” the person by conferring recognition, or “undo” the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced.’

These concepts help to understand the life experiences of the Indian women and the struggle they indulge in to gain recognition with various sites which control them. Caste, ethnicity, and gender are such vectors which appear very prominently to control the women of the dalit and Indian diasporic societies. Through this paper and by making a comparative study, I aim to trace how the movement of dalit and diasporic women for emancipation represent them on gendered lines?

4. Procedure

The paper uses Fairclough’s (2010) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This method helps to study discourse and to understand social practices. Fairclough (2010) refers to the term ‘discourse’ as language use to be imbricated in social relations and processes which systematically determine variations in its properties, including the linguistic forms which appear in texts. The discourse underlying the select writings help to study and interrogate the human conditions and the problems and the way different social and gendered behaviours affect them. Discourses are shaped and formed by events as they occur and they in turn affect them as well. A change can be observed in the manner of discourse in a genre of narrative a decade ago and at present which indicates the change in power and hegemony of the people it talks about. This change as Fairclough (2010) opines may be due to forms of transgression, crossing boundaries, such as putting existing codes or elements in new combinations, or drawing upon orders of discourse or their elements in situations which conventionally preclude them in a way which gives a sense of struggle between different ways of signifying a particular domain of experience. It is particularly because of the presence of multiple discourses in a single narrative that critical discourse analysis is preferred in the analysis of the narratives sampled.

5. Analysis

Using the above method and based on the concepts as delineated in section above we have divided the analysis under four broad themes of experience, representation, emancipation, and identity. All these are discussed below with illustrations from the texts.

5.1. Experience

This section is divided into two parts. The first deals with the experiences they gain as children and the second deals with them as adults. The dalit and Indian diasporic women selected for the study have their grooming in Indian culture. Hence, their making along socio-cultural pattern is almost the same.

5.1.1. As Children

The making of ‘her’ into a woman (Beauvoir 2009) starts at her early age and is expected from her all through her life. I will not distinguish their childhood experiences as dalit and diasporic. The characters, chosen, stay in India and migrate only in their mid-twenties and do not return till the end of the narrative. Hence, they bear common Indian mooring. The only difference which exists is in terms of class and caste.

The major characters represented are Bama, Kamble, Masamai of the dalit caste and Jasmine, Seema, and Sujaria who migrate to become diasporans. While the narrative talks in length about the childhood experiences of the dalit characters, we hardly know much about the children other than Jasmine. Sujaria is an upper caste Brahmin girl. There is no hint given of the rest two if they belong to lower or upper caste. The thing common to all is their affiliation with lower middle class. In spite of the differences of caste and class, it is seen that their childhood did not differ radically. Their childhood is spent in Indian rural societies. They represent girls as burdens. Limbale (2003: 22) recalls an incidence where one of his sisters, Vani, could not collect anything to eat, and collected banana skins which people had discarded after eating. For the brother it was a demeaning act but the mother found it right and said ‘Let her eat worms and live.’ Her dehumanization is evident from the representation she is given. Dehumanization, to quote Freire (1996) does not merely impose choices but transforms the consciousness of the oppressed thereby affecting their thoughts and behaviours. Hence, we find that while Vani and her mother found nothing wrong in eating the discarded skins, it was a sign of disgrace for the brother.

Similar picture is seen when Bama represents her childhood. She is given the seed of the fruit and the skin, while her brother got the pulp. Discrimination in terms of food, play, and education is common for all these girls. While Bama and Kamble were never discouraged by their parents for education, still they felt such discriminations throughout. The lack of self-respect deteriorated their humiliated lives. Bama blames the women who have been treating girls and boys in different manners and have been putting them down. ‘It’s your folk who put butter in one eye and quicklime in the other.’ (Bama: 29) She questions the discrimination done. She resists the dehumanizing attitude towards women and asks: ‘What, Paatti, aren’t we also human beings?’ (ibid: 29) The desire to have a human like existence appears when they have been restricted from a human like existence for a time span.

When we look at the other genre as represented through character of Jasmine, we find a similar discrimination. In spite of Jasmine’s birth preceding a bountiful harvest she was never considered lucky as would have been considered for a boy. Although her childhood is not guarded on scales of caste but bears a close parallel to the dalit girls. As Mukherjee (1989) writes, a girl’s birth was but a bad luck and a sign of past sins and wrongs and for which the mother, again a woman was solely responsible. Her freedom would be curbed in all possible ways and if located playing or wandering she was commanded to: ‘Go join your sisters... A girl shouldn’t be wandering here by herself.’ (Mukherjee 1989: 4) They were not considered worthy of education. They are represented engaged in

house chores. In spite of her sound knowledge and good school grades she was discouraged to study higher. Her learning in school is compared to a lotus blooming in cow dung and is meaningless. Unlike Jasmine, there is detail given about the childhood of Seema and Sujaria.

Drawing from Butler (2007) these girls were taught to behave and perform in a fixed pattern. Their gendering, make them get one with the roles of their mothers without even becoming conscious of it, and helped their becoming an ideal woman for marriage. The narratives realistically represent lives of these girls unlike the fairy tale imagery represented in children books. These girls appear as 'little mothers' cleaning, cooking, minding younger siblings, and performing them as meticulously as their mothers do. Examples are seen scattered throughout. While the parents went out for work, young dalit girls like Mariamma (Sangati), Shewanta (The Outcaste) minded younger siblings and household chores. They are the 'little mothers' who internalize the roles they will likely 'perform' after their marriages. Their becoming, ironically, is 'prescribed' (Freire 1996: 29) by their own mothers. Hence, they are oppressed by both the men and women. Every prescription represents the imposition of their superior's (read, father/mother) choice upon them, which transforms their consciousness and confirms it to the prescriber's. They grow garbed in the culture of silence and fear to resist.

5.1.2. As Adults

As a woman, her place is considered to be behind the threshold of the house. Either single or married she has to confide to the set rules. As the writings represent them marriage intensifies it. Marriage 'inexorably locks her into a social system which denies her autonomy.' (Barry 2008: 136) The following line from one of the dalit narratives illustrates this: 'The honour enjoyed by the family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house.' (Kamble 2008: 5) The narratives reveal the dalit women restricted in the above manner. On the contrary, the Indian diasporic women as represented by Sujaria, Seema, Jasmine, embark their journey by 'moving beyond' the borders of home and nation to a new land in a hope of a better living.

A dalit woman's life is focused around her family and community, defying the socio-cultural laws is difficult for her. Even when rebuked and exploited they seldom leave their family and children. An instance is seen when Kamble describes the situations of wives in her community. The wives were many times locked in the house, 'like a bird in the cage.' (Kamble 2008: 82) The status of a daughter-in-law was that of slave to the slaves. The following lines of Kamble indicate her position: 'She was not a human being for her in-laws, but just another piece of wood.' (Kamble, 2008: 99) The treatment is what is given to animals and shows the dehumanization of women. They were married at a very early age and started to bear children when their bodies were too weak to bear that burden. 'A Mahar woman would continue to give birth till she reached menopause... Hardly a few of the babies would survive.' (Kamble 2008: 82) This reflects the poor neglected health conditions of the women who were made to undergo a number of deaths in a single life. The lives of the dalit women were shaped by the fires of calamities which made their bodies strong.

Jasmine, Seema, and Sujaria do not adhere to such strong relations. They are epitomes of "new women" who break the rules of marriage to grow and fulfill their dreams. Seema was married to Ajeet without her wish. It was her father's desire to marry her to a man who was an NRI. The marriage could not hold them together for a longer time, and she separates. The physical and emotional distance from her husband breaks the marriage. (Ramoowalia 2003: 62) Ajeet lets her move out but without any support in a foreign land. The decision taken by Ajeet represents a woman's victory to get what she desires. Concurring with Abraham (2005) such a decision taken by Ajeet is a result of the renegotiation of the patriarchal relations when a man and wife settle in a foreign land. Seema's independence can be comprehended as a result of such renegotiation, which would have been difficult if they were in India. She just not leaves Ajeet but her son Amroz as well. This image is in sharp contrast to Masamai, the dalit woman Limbale addresses as his mother. She was made to leave her husband and breast sucking child, nearly of Amroz's age. Masamai was forced to do so while Seema desired that.

Seema's representation epitomizes similar illegal migrants and their vulnerable conditions. For a stay, she works as an illegal in Rajan's warehouse where she is economically victimized. Her earning is controlled by Rajan himself and seizes her independence. After the police raid, she works at a restaurant owned by Patricia. Seema was trying to adjust to the work till she was physically threatened by Patricia's undesired moves. She leaves the place which adds to her vulnerable condition. Her losing the passport victimizes her again. She becomes a prey to Sodhi. He allures her to get a passport, and escape deportation for his own benefits. He exploits her physically for his sexual drive. It is the dream and desire for identity and independence that victimizes her.

Jasmine, too, came to fulfill such dreams. After her husband's murder in India, she comes to America to fulfill his dream. She is strong and meets two important men Taylor and Bud, both of whom admire her and love her. She works as the caretaker of Taylor's child. The narrative begins when she is pregnant to Bud's child. With her marriage to Prakash in India she is seen growing to maturity and independence. After she comes to America, as a widow, and single woman, she encounters changes and conflicts. She stays with Bud and carries his child, without wedlock. For her, marriage appears insignificant. She represents a new woman, Indian by birth but American in thought. Her pregnancy signifies her closeness with Bud, who sits paralyzed in a chair. She acts like a devoted Indian wife, caring for his food, medicine and other needs. While Seema leaves a marriage bond for independence, Jasmine enters for support.

Pregnant and without a husband, Sujaria migrates to the new land. She is represented strong and bold enough to support herself in the state of motherhood. Her marriage or relationship in India is not mentioned because of lack of any information. It can be taken as a factor which initiated her migration. A Brahmin woman in such situation was hardly imagined or spoken. The social customary rules made for women left them with no other means but to escape. But even after that their victimization did not end.

5.2. Representation of women

The experiences they gain and their portrayal represent them as marginalized. They are victims who are often heard and are exiled. This is discussed in detail in the following sub sections:

5.2.1. Victims

The dalit women are victimized on grounds of caste and gender, apart from many other factors. They carry the burden of caste, from the moment they are born. They are discriminated on this basis in every sphere. The diasporans, as the narratives represent, on grounds of ethnic concern and gender. The diasporans the narratives bring to picture belong to a particular ethnic group. They are illegal and coolies. They undergo a transition of 'being' and 'becoming.' They are treated similar to dalits in India in terms of labour, wages, and lived experiences. Although they are not born with it, rather are forced due to the circumstances. Once they become a coolie woman, they are not the same as before. They are treated more as untouchables. After they returned they felt separated from their own kinsmen and hence felt worse than the untouchables who were at least one like their kinsmen. The representation of the coolie women, by Bahadur, makes me trace a link between dalit women and diasporic women in terms of their existence and humiliation. 'Hundreds reported that they could not touch the village well, or share in smoking a hookah, or consider marrying their sons and daughters to anyone without the specter of pollution being raised.' (Bahadur 2013: 169) Their lives parallel those of dalits in India. The women are represented undergoing similar physical and sexual exploitations at the hands of the superior. After return, their lives got segregated in terms of pollution. Although both dalit and diasporic women carry the burden of self-modification, their interests vary. While the former aims at community, the latter's concern are individual and family. The language of victimization is used to invoke awareness. It further helps to comprehend their making.

Just like a woman is made, not born, coolies were made and not recruited by the officers. Kelly (1991) elaborates this. He says that the officers would take different groups of people with unique identities, roles and interests and would convert them into an indistinguishable mass where all were coolie. The bath which they took, before they left, at the bank of the river Hooghly seemed to add to this effect to making every emigrant as one irrespective of their castes and religions. They were given dress of same type which made it look more like a uniform. They ate together, slept together and with each other's wives. (Bahadur: 45) They were treated like prisoners and kept like birds in cages. Frequent physical and mental tortures were inflicted on them. On the ship the women were treated as sexual objects by the ship mates and the officers. 'Latrines on indenture ships served as bizarre portal to the women abroad, where "puddings" were occasionally left as sad enticements for sexual favours.' (ibid: 51) Similarly, foods and other stuffs which were not meant for the labourers were given to women for sexual favours.

The diasporic women are victims of patriarchy just like dalit women. They are targets of gruesome gaze and treated as sexual objects. Seema is molested by Ajeet and the priest at the Gurudwara, seduced by Patricia, and physically used by Sodhi. Jasmine, too, is raped by the half face man as soon as she comes to America. The coolie women are also raped numerous by the men on ship and in colonies. Physical exploitation in forms of rape, humiliation, and mutilation is a common sight for dalit women as well. Bama and Kamble present numerous cases of women being sexually exploited throughout the narratives. Masamai represents such picture even boldly. She is kept by an upper caste landlord and bears children to him, all illegitimate.

Apart from physical victimization, they are emotionally exploited. Jasmine is victimized by Indian women like Nirmala. She is often reminded of her widowhood through dress codes and living habits. Jasmine 'disguises' her widowhood (Mukherjee 1989: 145) in the new land through the American clothes, but is 'prescribed' (Freire 1996: 28) plain saris and salwar-kameez by Nirmala, another Indian woman. For example: '... a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude. If not, it appeared I was competing with Nirmala.' (Mukherjee 1988:145) Without the prescribed dress code for widows, Jasmine shared the same space with other unmarried girls. The fight for space and recognition is addressed with such conflicts. Jasmine appeared young and attractive with her disguised appearance. She appears as an opponent and so women like Nirmala prescribe certain rules. These codes remind her of the role she would have performed as a widow if she had been in India. Drawing from Freire (1996: 27) Nirmala's false generosity garbs 'the oppressor's violence, lovelessness' which Jasmine opposes with her act of love 'opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressor...' Similar lovelessness lies in the heart of Sodhi. He oppresses Seema by his false generosity. He guarantees her the passport but under the garb of a false promised marriage. Seema also contests for a space for which she submits her body but not her consciousness. Coolie women like Lachminia and Mariam also contest for a space of their own. They represent resistance to their superiors and are brutally treated.

Similar contestations are represented through the narratives of Bama, Kamble and Limbale where the women figure their existence in pain. Fiske (1993) states that any form of oppression begins from the pedestal of social relations find its representation through body and its behaviour and affect the conscience. The movement against the oppression, as discussed by Freire, springs from the conscience. It affects the body and finds its representation through social relations. Discourses which reveal Masamai's abusing Patil and throwing him out of her house, or Patti's roar at the men of the village, or Kamble's voice for women's education mark fight for a space of their own. It marks their 'moving beyond' the parameters of caste and gender. They demand for an agency. Independent women like Masamai, Bama, and Baby epitomize the resisting victims like the characters of the diasporic genre. Their resistance is seen in bits and parts and the cumulative effect of such is their getting education, a job and a better living, an identity of their own. The representation of these women characters present resisting victims who show undying courage and hope. Alienation, subjugation, exploitation, and loss of honour are some common features observed to both dalit and diasporic women as the narratives reveal. Due to such experiences their existence is similar to exile.

5.2.2. Exile

The dalit women are exiled from what the nature has given to man. They appear foreign in their own societies. They are not allowed to move unless the society needs them. They cannot talk nor can live as they want. Their food, voice, and reproducing rights are accessed by the social and patriarchal forces. Their alienation is mostly due to socio-cultural grooming and gendering. They are not just alienated from the society and upper caste but 'their own selves.' Their dehumanized existence, loss of pride, lack of voice, and identity indicate this.

Similar, are the diasporic women. After they 'move beyond' the geographical borders they sense alienation and loneliness. While the diasporic women feel alienated from their homeland and past, the dalit women feel alienated in their own family, society and appear as mere objects. The uprooting in terms of geographical location or cultural grounds and the relocation in a new land and culture affect the life and mind of the people. Women get the most severe effect of the uprooting. The alienation from family and society affects them tremendously. In dalit context they are alienated from the outside world which is purely patriarchal and considers women of no use for them. This induces pain and humiliation in them. Example: 'Anybody can shoot us ... without risking any resistance ... let alone a counter-strike'. 'But I don't think any strength is left in me ... to endure being trampled along any longer ... and rolled around like an unclaimed ball of rags.' (Ramoowalia 2003: 181) This broken discourse of Seema, with frequent pauses, represents her inner conflict. She questions her presence, her strength and the futility of life. But Sodhi at the end of the novel acted as a cause which grew in her the strength to face the world. The act of packing her belongings and moving ahead for a new life in the quest of a passport (a new identity) is her challenge to the deportation that awaits her. She does not go back to any of the people she has left behind and this is a gesture to her growing sense of self dependency which she inculcated after several experiences in Canada. She is confident when she says '... I can't let myself die a perennial death ... every day ... I can't.' (ibid: 181) The women challenge and appear as 'new woman', which Beauvoir (2009: 767) refers as 'The free woman is just being born.'

Both dalit and diasporic women gradually start getting distanced from their own selves. This distancing is due to fear of oppression and ironically pulls them in the oppression even more. The exploitation and alienation slowly makes them silent participants and observers. They were silenced by those in center and power was used for it. An example to illustrate it can be seen when we look at dalit women and men beating utensils and drums to ask for food and money rather than speaking. Kamble writes,

'If the men sitting down for their dinner heard the Mahar's voice, they would have to discard their meal and get up. But if they heard just the sound of his bell, they could finish their meal. His voice could pollute...' (2008:75)

They stay in exile and torment. Both dalit and diasporic women experience exile in their own ways. It affects them in a dual manner. While it creates a sense of disturbance and pain, it also gives them strength to liberate and resist the dominating forces. While for diasporans it is explicit in form of external exile, dalit women face it internally. Although Bama, Baby Kamble and Masami do not migrate to other places but feel alienation. They feel displaced and left out at their own homes, and societies. This is done by the men of their societies. The reason behind this exile has common threads, some being, socio-cultural grooming and gendering. They are unable to access resources, speak, and hence lack their subjectivities. Both their representations bear strong similarities at home and abroad.

5.2.3. Muted Voices

Silence symbolizes a whole existence which has a past behind. Silence is not indicative of any vacuum rather it has a history which precedes its becoming. An example can be seen the way Bahadur escapes any negative remark about Sujaria's character, her pregnancy, and her migration and so hardly seen talking about the past. The gaps that are unknown strengthen the silence. The reason behind can be gender roles and migration. Migrating for work was mostly a male enterprise and any woman who was found to be willing for such a thing would be exploited. Women did not tell their own stories except in an indirect manner and only when officials asked them for maintaining records. They hardly spoke of their past or would look into their testimonies. 'The relative silence of the coolie women in the sum total of history reflects their lack of power.' (Bahadur: 32) Their silenced lives epitome their desiccated lives and existence.

Silence is often mistaken with nothing to speak or a guilt feeling. Rather, on the contrary, it can contain layers of meanings and a truth of their existence. The silence of women is always mistaken as their weakness and passivity. Spivak (1988) truly says that subalterns cannot speak and even if they try and speak they are not heard. The way the women appear throughout the novels and are seldom heard leaves them with no option but to resist and break the culture of silence. 'Almost always during the internal stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors." The structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped.' (Freire 1996: 27)

The nature of female world from a woman's perspective helps to construct the lost voice. The study reflects at how the caste and masculine system very shrewdly traps the 'other' of the two genders and neglects space, voice and agency to them. The Indian women learning the foreign language and leading lives as the society demands parallels the dalit women's quest for education and attaining them and getting jobs. The future which Bama and Kamble carve for themselves is no less than what Sujaria, Seema and Jasmine do for themselves. It involves a break from the past and involvement in a new creation of their subjectivities. It marks an act of rebirth for them as well as their families and the whole society and rendering a new meaning to the historically conceived values and knowledge formation.

6. Emancipation

Agreeing with Freire (1996) in order to surmount this oppression, one needs to recognize the causes and discover the yearning to be free which he calls 'conscientization.' Facing humiliation, while some dalit women converted themselves to nuns (example: Sangati), some adopted Buddhism, (as in *The Prisons We Broke*). It provides them a space to exist and gave them an agency. It is only when one realizes the dehumanizing effect and tries to break the culture of silence, one resists for a better existence. 'We have to labour in the fields as hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. ...Born as women, what good do we get?' (Bama 2005: 7) Fiske writes that when power is induced it affects the society, body and then affects the consciousness. Once the consciousness is triggered one realizes the true nature of the way things exist and how can wrongs be undone.

The resistance of each character varies from time to time in each of the narratives. A common thing noticed is that it increases as the novel progresses. It indicates their desire for their voice, agency, and subjectivity. It is at this point these women challenge the dominant roles prescribed upon them and undo their gender. Butler (2004: 1) opines that gender is not just a kind of doing but also 'a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraints.' In order to be recognised as socially viable beings people (men and women) 'do gender.' 'But if the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that "undo" the person by conferring recognition, or "undo" the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced.' (Butler: 2)

Resistance is a way to challenge the oppression and undo such prescriptions which act as their catalyst. 'I buttoned up the jacket and sat by the fire... I was walking death. Death incarnate.' (Mukherjee 1989: 119) Symbol of 'fire' indicates the vigour and rage and a desire to burn the old burden. The image of 'death personified' intensifies the destructive nature of woman. Similarly, Sujaria acclaims herself the title of a hero through the resistance she shows. She performs a heroic deed by leaving her village behind. She was quite young, seventy-seven years old but during the customs of the period she was in her middle age. More so, she a high caste Brahmin woman was to undertake a 'forbidden' (21) passage without any male counterpart. Being a Brahmin by caste she was by nature and nurture declared unfit for such a work. The act has no womanliness rather makes Sujaria appear as the hero who is quite courageous, willing and masculine in his act. The endeavor that she puts in makes her the hero of the novel.

"She did, after all, leave a village in the most conservative corner of India. At that time, she was twenty-seven ... As a member of Hinduism highest caste, Sujaria had the most to lose by crossing the Indian Ocean." (Bahadur 2013: 21)

The journey marks an escape from the oppression and brutal socio-cultural forces. She resists all the patriarchal and cultural norms at that time and crossed the seas even when pregnant and had no support.

"This was a forbidden passage, especially for a woman, especially for a Brahmin woman travelling without a male relative. I like to think she claimed the decidedly masculine title of Bahadur of women, too, - and for the acts of valour that have more to do with crossing boundaries than with killing anyone in battle." (ibid: 21-22)

Seema's voice is heard for the first time when she talks to Rajan, the person who employed the illegal immigrants in his warehouse in Canada and helped Seema to get a shelter. In such a space she speaks, "... how long will I live in this miserable condition, hiding and running away from my own shadow! Running away from my own name, my own self ..." (Ramoowalia 2003: 97). Her raging voice is indicative of her conscience which still demanded her to be herself and independent.

7. Identity and its Negotiation

Throughout the diasporic narratives the shifting of identities becomes the catalyst for the embodiment of new roles. Jasmine and Seema find themselves contorting as the world around her changes. As they live out each of their different personalities, they gain more confidence and become more determined for the next journey. This enables them to continue growing as a person and to adapt to the changes in their lives in stride. These changes, however, are not comfortable. While Jasmine murders and recasts her out of the burnt house and starts a new journey just like emerging out of a phoenix-like cycle. Seema stays with the pain and fire till Sodhi dies and is left without any one any hope. Tearing the passport (unstamped) signifies her tearing off her submission and the garb of false hopes she had herself cocooned in.

The coolie women and the dalit women appear similar as far the fluidity of identity is concerned. Both of them are marginalized of the marginalized. They change roles, grow, and appear strong as the plot progresses but they do not change their names. Changing names is a common phenomenon in dalits to hide their caste identity once they step out of their villages for education or getting job but women of the narratives do not submit to this. They are very much attached to their birth names and cling to that their whole lives. They are reincarnated multiple times either with changing names or without it. They embrace all that comes to them and in this process they know their own being and reject the stereotypical overtones of patriarchy and gender roles.

There is a fear of the unknown that does not disappear until an acceptance of the new world is met. By understanding and implementing parts of the new culture, the immigrant is able to shift identities to a point of a hybrid understanding of their new place in the world. This embracing is seen very soon in case of Jasmine, very late with Seema and compromised in Sujaria's case. Women like Sujaria are left with no choice than to grow with the colonized existence and ambivalence emerging out strong and determined at last. Their identity always has a remnant of reaction to their former colonizer's view upon their status as humans. For some, this means rising to the occasion and trying to overcome the negative stereotypes by embracing what the colonizers claimed to be the right way to live. For others, it means doing anything possible to negate the influence of the West. Immigrants fight a similar battle as they decide whether or not to conform to the majority population's norms. Through the figures of the girls and women Bama (2005: 123) admires and applauds:

"... not only the traditional Tamil 'feminine' ideals of "accham" (fear), "naanam" (shyness), "madam" (simplicity, innocence) and "payirppu" (modesty) but courage, fearlessness, independence and self-esteem."

The writer wants the women to be shy but powerful, simple and innocent but independent and fearless. There has been a constant reference to images from myths. In both the contexts the women are represented as true inheritors of the virtues of "Sita". While Jasmine presents the myth of Kali and Shiva who are the Gods of destroying evil forces and illuminating the strength of women, Coolie Woman, Sangati, The Prisons We Broke, and Akkarmashi bring mythological images like Sita and Kunti. Sita was promoted as the role model for Indian women. (Anjum 2000) The images of Kali and Sita indicate the new woman's birth, which is born destructive and virtuous. Women as fighter and strong characters are indicated through the represented figures. They question the fundamental issues of human life, which embraces every question of society. The cultures of the community where dalit women make meaning of their everyday experiences cajole a culture of silence and domination from people and practices higher up in the social hierarchy. We must aim at bringing emancipatory consciousness (Lather 1986). To know is the first step in visualizing social change. We hope that our comprehension and advocacy will help women fight oppression in solidarity with other marginalized groups. "we have true power, because we have sheel, satwa and neeti, and they stand supreme in the whole world" but they remain crushed and no one knows the strength and power of their characters." (Kamble 2008: 62)

8. Conclusion

"One is not born a woman; rather one becomes a woman." (Beauvoir 2009: 295) Just like the *chaturvarna* system which created caste, pushed the lower caste people to dust and denied them the rights of existence, the patriarchal system created paradigms for women according to which they should work and conduct their living in a society. Each of them made women victims on multiple grounds. The system very shrewdly traps the "other" of the two genders and neglects space, voice and agency to them. Both dalit and Indian diasporic women share common gendered behavioural patterns and making. But there lacks a sisterly association on grounds of feminist concern. We associate dalit women with dalit men and diasporic women with their men. It is not so strongly perceived because sociologically their identities are separate. Rather both of their lives indicate a transformation from rejection to resistance. Their priorities may vary. As for example, while a dalit woman in her writings appears talking for her community on the whole. The general discrimination they feel according to caste is more pertinent over personal concerns. But for a diasporic woman, as seen through the narratives, the concern is to generate individual liberty and for family. In the contemporary world, we need to study the marginalized lots on grounds of "relative identity" (Beauvoir 2009). But both are discriminated on similar grounds, undergo victimization and humiliation. Their represented analysis helps to comprehend the unspeakable marginality of sisterhood between the two women. The unspeakable marginality of sisterhood which exists between dalit and diasporic women will help generate similar solidarity among other marginalized groups globally.

9. References

- i. Abraham, Margaret. 2005. Domestic Violence and the Indian Diaspora in the United States. Indian Journal of Gender Studies. 12 (2 & 3). New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- ii. Bahadur, Gaiutra. 2013. Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture. London: Hachette India.
- iii. Baluja, Kaari P. 2003. Gender Roles at Home and Abroad: The Adaptation of Bangladeshi Immigrants. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC.
- iv. Barry, Peter. 2008. Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary Theory and Cultural Theory. Second Edition. New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt. Ltd.
- v. Beauvoir, Simone de. 2009. The Second Sex. United Kingdom: Vintage Classics.
- vi. Beth, Sarah. 2007. Hindi Dalit Autobiography: an Exploration of Identity. Modern Asian Studies. 41(03):545 - 574.
- vii. Butler, Judith. 2004. Undoing Gender. New York: Routledge.
- viii. Butler, Judith. 2007. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge.
- ix. Chambers, Claire and Watkins, Susan. 2012. Postcolonial Feminism? The Journal of Commonwealth Literature. Sage Publications.47(3). 297-301.
- x. Espiritu, Yen Lee. 1997. Asian American Women and Men. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- xi. Fairclough, Norman. 2010. Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language. Second Edition. United States: Pearson Education.
- xii. Faustina, Bama. 2005. Sangati. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- xiii. Ferry, Theresa. 2008. Dalit Girl's Education in India. Washington D.C.: American University.
- xiv. Fiske, John. 1993. Power Plays Power Works. New York: Verso.
- xv. Freire, Paulo. 1996. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- xvi. Ghosh, Sagarika. 2003. Dalits in India. Social Research. 70 (1). Spring. Proquest Social Science.
- xvii. Hall, Stuart. 1997. Representation: cultural representation and signifying practices. London: Sage publications.
- xviii. Kamble, Baby. 2008. The Prisons We Broke. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- xix. Kelly, John. D. 1991. 'Coolie' as a labour commodity: Race, sex, and European dignity in colonial Fiji. Journal of Peasant Studies. 19 (3-4). 246-267. Taylor and Francis.
- xx. Lather, Patti. 1986. Research as Praxis. Harvard Educational Review. 56 (3). Cambridge: Harvard Education Publishing Group. 257-278.
- xxi. Limbale, Sharan Kumar. 2003. The Outcaste. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- xxii. Mohini, Anjum. 2000. Nation and Gender- Historical Perspective. Sociological Bulletin. 49 (1). March.

- xxiii. Moi, Toril. 1989. *Female, Feminine and Feminist* in Belsey, Catherine and Moore, Jane edited *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and Politics and Literary Criticism*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- xxiv. Mukherjee, Bharati. 1989. *Jasmine*. New York: Grove Press.
- xxv. Nijhawan, Shobhna. 2014. *Fallen Through the Nationalist and Feminist Grids of Analysis: Political Campaigning of Indian Women against Indentured Labour Emigration*. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. 21 (1). 111-133. Sage Publications.
- xxvi. Paranjape, Makarand. 2001. In *Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts*. New Delhi: India log.
- xxvii. Raj, Aditya. 2007. *Ethnographic Study of the Creation and Usage of Diasporic Capital for Education and Identity Construction of Indian Diasporic Youth in Montreal*. PhD Thesis. Canada: McGill University.
- xxviii. Ramoowalia, Iqbal. 2003. *The Death of a Passport*. New Delhi: Ajanta Book International.
- xxix. Satchidanandan, K. 2002. *The Third Space: Interrogating the Diasporic Paradigm*. *India International Centre Quarterly*. 29 (2).
- xxx. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. *Can the Subaltern speak?* In C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education. 271-313.
- xxxi. West, Mark Ralph. 2009. *Dalit dissent: Barefoot lawyers and the arts of caste resistance in rural South Asia*. Illinois: North western University.