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**DECODING THE SITES OF HUMAN- RIGHTS VIOLATION IN
DALIT LIFE- NARRATIVES**

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Abstract:

We are all aware that India's secured future lies in making her a complete Humane Nation. The primary concern of any Government is to guarantee the Right to Education as a fundamental Right to every child and higher education to every citizen. This enables every Indian to free themselves from the shackles of ignorance responsible for the inequalities in the social fabric. However, the social, cultural and political systems of today are posing serious challenges and violation of human rights is one of the grave issues of today.

Key Words: *Dalit life, human rights, higher education, inequalities, violation.*

The winds of globalization and liberalization impacted a major part of the globe and as a result things are changing very fast around us. The geographical boundaries have already been broken down; the national identities have been redefined and restructured with the advent of globalization. The global human community has become more and more conscious about the basic human rights. They are raising eyebrows towards the onslaught of inhuman exploitations, terrorism, poverty, hunger and violation of basic human rights.

In fact, the pace of this violation began with the very beginning of human civilization and culture. The issues of human rights were discussed by great philosophers like Aristotle and Plato. The great Magna Charta of 1215 was a kind of Manifesto of human rights ever insinuated in the history of England. The French and American Revolutions were also inspired by a great need to reinstitute the human rights. In the Atlantic Charter of 1941 there is a mention of human rights, liberty and social justice. It is interesting to note that the international Human Rights movement was born in and out of the Second World War. It is ironic to note that Adolph Hitler, who was responsible for the terror and violence gave rise to the awakening of the conscience of mankind, opposing repletion of such barbaric and inhuman crimes and atrocities. The United Nations Charter is the landmark document which proclaimed the people of United Nations “re-affirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal right of the men and the women.” And in “universal respect for, and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”

In Indian context, it is a matter of great pride that the Indian constitution has enshrined and guaranteed to the people of this country, the fundamental civil and political rights. And the Directive Principles of State Policy speak economic, social and cultural rights, which are corollary to the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. Even the Supreme Court of India while dealing the scope and ambit of Article 21 of the Constitution has explained and pronounced that the expression “Life” does not mean merely physical existence but the right to live with dignity and all that goes along with it, namely, the bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing, and shelter over the head. The apex Court observed that “to the tillers of the soil, wage-earners, labours, woodcutters, rickshaw-pullers, scavengers and hut-dwellers socio-economic and cultural are their means and most

relevant to them to realize their basic aspirations of meaning right to life”. It is also said that the health and strength of a worker is an integral part of the right to life, and health implies absence of sickness, in that, it includes all sorts of medical care and facilities.

Despite the above facts there seems to be a growing phenomenon of mass betrayal or violation of the basic human rights by different people and communities in India. Unless the synthesis of political and civil rights with economic and cultural rights is properly evolved, there will always remain in the society, a sizable deprived section, and it is seen in almost of the developed countries. The most alarming thing is that the gap and disparity between the fortunate, less fortunate and unfortunate inevitably lead to disturbance, tensions, conflicts, caste and religion-based exploitations, instances of mass violence and commission of offences. Consequently, it has impaired peace, stability and progress of the country initiating forces opposed to the preservation of human rights. It is a matter of common perception and belief that violation of human rights invariably leads to the social chaos and warring situations. It must be noted that the wars produce hunger. But people seem to be less alive to the fact that hunger can lead to war. It is undebatable fact that hunger and peace cannot coexist. In other words while hunger rules, peace cannot prevail. Today the entire global community seems to be suffering with many such inhuman situations.

In the present context, it can be noted that many human communities have strayed away from the path of human rectitude and moral restraint. Every nation is undergoing such crisis and their 'think-tank' supported by NGOs, social scientists academics are left brow bitten. The present is an era of globalization, privatization, liberalization and modernization. The main focus, theme, concern and goal of all these global communities must lead to humanization. There is a need to humanize the globe to trigger-up and ensure all possible human rights. Moreover, these rights should be respected and obeyed touching the hearts and lives of the people, especially to elevate all those, the hungry, the disabled, the excluded, the destitute, the depressed, the voiceless, the persecuted, the sick, the subaltern, the subversed, the marginalized, the suffered, the children and women, the less fortunate and downtrodden.

In summary, we may enumerate the fact that human rights are those rights which every human being without any discrimination is entitled to enjoy and these human rights are expected to be universal both in their character and application. But it is very painful to note that powerful individuals and groups, hegemonic political groups have always obstructed the enjoyment of human rights.

It should be noted that the Dalit self- narratives have been emerged as an emergent mode Dalit discourses. These discourses are the concomitant results of the human right violation by upper- caste people. As Sharankumar Limbale succinctly claims, “Every autobiography is a representation of a caste, a group; it gives expression to the group's language, culture, traditions, the injustices of status quo, the suffering of exploitation”. (1995, 34) With it's sans polite attitude the Dalit autobiography has not only challenged the dominating ideological politics but also sensitized the upper-class privileged reader to their centuries of exploitation and violation of human rights. In his poem 'The White Paper' Sharankumar Limbale says,

I do not ask, for the Sun and Moon from your sky
your farm, your land,
your high houses or your mansions,
I do not ask for Gods or rituals, castes or sects,
or even for your mothers, sisters, daughters.
I ask for my rights as a Man. -(Trans. Priya Adarkar)

Given the fact that, the Dalit literature represents the collective consciousness of social, political, economic and racial discrimination suffered by Dalits for hundreds of years. This suffering is due to the violation of human rights right from the age old 'Varna System' envisaged by Manu that created caste-based hierarchy in Hindu society forcing the lower caste people to undergo humiliation and exploitation at

the upper- caste hands. So, basically Dalit Literature contains seeds of rebellion against the violation of human rights. “A feeling of rebellion is invariable accompanied by an extreme psychological commitment. As Dalit sensibility seeks to bring about compatible changes in the social consciousness, it is rebellious as well as fundamentally optimistic and revolutionary.” (1992: 267) Many Dalit autobiographies have received global acclaim for their proactive writing and emotional outrage and consciousness about human rights. These discourses have sensitized many non Dalit communities to look in to the serious social problems emanating from the violation of human rights as well as class and caste based discriminations.

Over the recent times, when social conditions have taken a paradigm shift for the worse, public morals became more corrupt, the mind and hearts of the men have grown hard. Hence, it has become imperative and urgent to command obedience to human right coupled with social harmonies corresponding to the duties by adapting all legitimate means. But the most effective medium is right education at all levels and at all places appealing to the hearts and elevating the souls to promote human rights and prevent their violations. In this regard it must be noted that education plays very important role in promoting the culture of peace, humanization, humility and human rights. Adam Smith, the father of political economy viewed education as a kind of capital which embodies acquired knowledge and skills, and formulates the basis of good economic activities and progress. Therefore, no civilized country can afford to ignore education of its people and it is a well- assumed fact that, “No nation goes bankrupt by investing money in the education of its own people.” In modern times education has assumed great importance and it is 'Sine qua-non' for progress and modern civilization. Education without compassion and human quality or sympathy suffering people fail to serve in all respects. Therefore, in the context of humanization, efforts should be made to convert education to make it socially useful and productive. It should not be commercialized. It should be free and have sociable and humanistic outlook in promoting human rights. Education can be used as passport for humanizing millions of minds and sensitizing them with the unprecedented significance of human rights. The universities and colleges should not be the places of conferring degrees and distinctions. Besides being places of learning, they should function as the centres of social service and human development. Over the years education has been proved to be an effective tool for the empowerment of human progress. Human rights education must emphasize on obligation towards others so that the blend of rights and duties shall do well in bringing harmony in the social set-up. Humility is a great human quality. Once Gandhiji wrote a letter to Julian Huxley in 1947, “I learn from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be observed and preserved come from duty well done. Thus, the very right to live accrues to us when we do the duty of citizenship of the world.”

In short, the 'Quintessence' of all religion is truth, peace, love humility, righteousness and human rights. Thus, the human rights are basic and inherent, equal and universal, inalienable and supreme in the democratic set-up. They are the integral part of human life and the very possession of these rights that distinguish human beings from other species. Any contempt or disregard of human rights always leads to somekind of barbarous act devoid of conscious of human being.

It is very well measured fact that Dalits in India are voiceless and marginalized. There are around 260 Million Dalit people worldwide. It is painful for any conscious thinker, social scientist, intellectuals and humanitarians to note that most of the dalits are still surviving under uncongenial and hostile atmosphere like subjugation, caste based oppression and discriminations. Even socially forward states like Maharashtra, where many Dalit movements have initiated, the condition of Dalit people have been reduced to subhuman standards. They are bound to live on margins of society and they are deprived of basic human rights. Much has been said and written about the social reformation movements and movements for the improvement the lives of Dalits, but the situation of the unprivileged Dalits has not improved substantially.

Amid this horrendous condition of Dalits, in the literary domain many Dalit writers and translators have been consciously contributing for the proliferation of Dalit Literary Movement. These writers have been influenced by Ambedkarite thought and philosophy. They have written much about the conditions of unprivileged class, about their exploitation and oppression at the upper caste hands. Their thematic focus is on the evils of caste and gender based discrimination. Significantly they have contributed very seriously about the age long battle of caste and creed through their writings. In 80's and 90's most of the Dalit autobiographical writers emerged on literary scene and raised big rebel and protest against the upper-caste communities. Dalit autobiographies were written as an emergent mode of Dalit Discourses with the collective consciousness of their assertions and perceptions about the exploitations. It is well assumed fact that this suffering is due to the age old 'Varana System' that created caste- based hierarchy in the contemporary society. The system was responsible to force the lower caste people to undergo great humiliation and exploitation. Therefore, basically, Dalit literature contains seeds of rebellion and protest against such heinous and inhuman practices, "A feeling of rebellion is invariable accompanied by an extreme psychological commitment. As Dalit sensibility seeks to bring about compatible changes in the social consciousness, it is rebellious as well as fundamentally optimistic and revolutionary" (1994: 267)

It is well assumed fact that the male Dalit autobiographical writers have succeeded in creating rebel against the social order. They have proved their mettle and therefore it can obviously be noticed that, with the arrival of many Dalit writers, the edifice of so called literary establishment and circle is already cracked and its mentors are left brow-beaten. It should be noted that much credit goes to autobiography as a genre and effective mode of self narration and expression in order to bring Dalit literature on its path of progress. In fact, Dalit autobiographies are microcosms of the world of subjugated and exploited people around us. These narratives have been considered as path breaking social experiments meant for the eye opening of the oppressors. Dalit self-narratives focus on everyday caste and class based exploitation that call for serious moral and social scrutiny. They anticipate restoration and social revamp of the oppressed community. The works expose many accounts of unspeakable horrors and exploitation of the Dalit. There are many stories of horrendous and inhuman treatment given to them by the privileged class. Moreover there is an inevitable discourse of troubled and rebellious minds that faces the condition of abject poverty, lack of education and difficult socio economic circumstances. Most of these autobiographies are written as a consequence of an age old slight that of being 'turned away' from the doorsteps of privileged people. Dalit autobiography is a new and significant identity of modern Indian literature. It is because of its tonality and straightforward nature of address, the autobiographies become symbol of distinctive Dalit protest and rebel. It implies the greatest caste-class based conflicts. Etymologically the word Dalit refers to its Sanskrit origins, it means downtrodden or exploited to marginal existence or living. This peripheral living seems to cause an extreme sense of alienation, revolt and estrangement among Dalits.

It should be noted that the non-Brahmanic movements seem to have paved way for Dalit movements as they challenged the upper caste hegemonies and succeeded in bringing sea change in their lives. The new movement initiated by reformists like Mahatma Phule and Periyar helped Dalits to get dignity and self-respect. It helped in many ways in opening eyes of the orthodox and conservative people. Dr. Ambedkar also played significant role in mobilizing Dalit women to be the major stakeholders of his rebels and movements. He condemned endocentric judiciary and patriarchal system. Many Dalit women's personal narratives emerged out of Ambedkarite thought and principle.

Significantly, in mainstream Indian English literature Dalit women have been portrayed with so called elitist sympathies, Raj Kumar succinctly puts, "Dalit women have invariably been shown as the victim of the lust of the higher caste men and never as rebels to fight against the injustices perpetrated upon them. Even in the novels of Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, Sivaram Karanth, Gopinath Mohanty and U. R. Ananth Murthy- to name a few- Dalit women are either molested or raped by the upper caste men" (Raj

Kumar:2010:219), further he ironically says, "By portraying such pictures in their novels, the writers have definitely gained sympathy for the victims but such routinely kind gestures from the progressive writers are not enough."(ibid.)

Through women's autobiographies, one can get an access into the socially paralyzed and in discriminated class of a community wrestling against all sorts of exploitation, gender discrimination, and deprivation at the upper caste hands. The situation of Dalit women seems to be more pathetic and tragic as they are doubly subjugated. They become victims of the exploitation and oppression of privileged class as well as they own. The autobiographies of Shantabai Kamble, Babytai Kamble, Kumud Pavade and Urmilla Pawar reveal the infernal living conditions and exploitation of the Dalit women in the contemporary situation. They record grim sense of human existence and sexual harassment of the Dalit women. Their self narratives have become famous for many reasons. The works were rather depiction and delineation of the social despair and gender and caste based hierarchies. It can obviously be seen that the women were the worst sufferers of the relentless oppression and sexual harassment. They initiate several forms of social evil done to the Dalit women over the years. The works have not only enriched the domain of Marathi literature but also expose the manifold structure of the conflict between privileged and unprivileged people in society. The genesis of Dalit women self narrative was with the objective of radically transforming Dalit women in to socially awakened human beings in order to make them to face the challenges posed by the endocentric society. Generally Dalit women are considered as being weaker not just in the double deprivation of privileged and non privileged based parameters rather as stakeholder of both social systems. It can obviously be noticed that these women are deprived physically due to malnourishment, educationally, culturally and politically. They have been denied systematically of their human rights to education, properly equal wages and employment opportunities. They are also deprived of gender equality which means both equality of treatment under the law and equality of opportunity.

The upcoming generation of Dalit women writers exploited autobiography as convenient sub-genre to contextualize their individualistic feelings of dehumanization, subjugation and exploitation with its wider ramification human rights violation. The self narratives focus attention on a number of conflicting issues like hunger, poverty, slavery and marital incompetence. Moreover, they focus attention on the need of basic human values like solidarity, fidelity and liberty for their existential claims like identity of self and individuality. These autobiographies carve a new image of Dalit woman far different from the elite class woman. They are the marginalized beings who are always in search of human rights, self respect, identity and esteem. The works expose the evils of how Dalit women and *Adivashies* are the objects of double exploitation. They are the victims of double social inequality. In this regard Dr. Waghmare argues, "Theirs is a double jeopardy. They face degradation and even dehumanization. Gender is at the base of their marginality. Husbands and wives are unequal partners in family life . . . They move under the dark phallic shadows of man's lust." (2001: 23)

Evidently, most of the Dalit women writers have made bold and uninhibited search of the self through narratives depicting the grim picture of poverty and caste based oppression as major themes. Among the published women's autobiographies the most acclaimed and prominent are viz, "*Majya Jalmachi Chittarakatha*' (*Kaleidoscopic Story of My Life*) by Shantabai Kamble, '*Jinne Amuche*' (*The Prisons We Broke*) By Babytai Kamble, '*Antaspot*' (*Thoughtful Outburst*) by Kumud Pawade, '*Marankala*' (*Deathly Pains*) by Janabai Girhe and '*Aydan*' (*The Weave of My Life: Dalit Woman's Memoir*' by Urmilla Pawar. In most of these works the women writers raise existential quests of identity. The women have realized the causes behind their subjugation and exploitation and the fact that they are bound to survive in the male dominated society which has religion, gender, social hierarchy and culture to keep them on the peripheries of human progress. The self narratives seek to unveil the evils of oppressions and exploitation. P. P. Ajaykumar remarks, "Autobiographies have always been a popular form of writing because the

unique experience of an individual has instructing values. The entire Dalit literature pretends to be autobiographical because Dalit writings refuse to soar on the wings of imagination. Yet, Dalit autobiographies retain their significance as a genre because they add to the growth and development of Dalit literature as a whole". (2009: 33)

Significantly, most of these women writers have relentlessly tried to find out meaning in meaningless existence of their life. Being a minority in both caste and class they moved about on the helm of their struggled existence and life. The Dalitist perspective in Dalit women's autobiographies meant for subverting the conventional epistemologies. The awareness of the self and the ultimate rebel against all odds are the common and inevitable experience found in these narratives. In fact the awakening and awareness of the self seem to be a corollary theme to the awakening of their social consciousness. Elaine Showalter succinctly express how vital this awakening is to the feministic movement when she says, "How much easier, how less lonely it is not awaken....yet we cannot will ourselves to go back to sleep". (1986: 179)

Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha was first published in 1983. The book is considered as the first autobiographical of a Dalit woman writer, where the protagonist of the story Naja bears the burnt of class, caste and gender. Naja is terribly exploited because she hails from Mahar caste, one of the biggest communities in Maharashtra. The writer raises many questions regarding the suffering of the Dalit women as well as the slavery, poverty, sexual exploitation and filthy conditions of their infernal life. It is a narrative of a socially subjugated woman and saga of a downcast woman, who nurtures an indomitable will power to raise rebel and protest against all oppression. She firmly believes that Dalit woman is always considered as a downtrodden among the downtrodden. There is a realistic narration of how the Dalit women are forced to do certain humiliating work. It depicts all forms of female exploitation. Therefore it is a tragic account of her painful and agonizing phase of formative years. The protagonist is borne in utter poverty and educated only up to seventh standard. She becomes victim of early marriage as per the tradition. After her marriage she hears shocking news from her husband that he is going to abandon her and marry another woman. In fact it is a matter of betrayal and deceit. However, Naja firmly reacts to this declaring boldly "I am not going to live here at any cost. Give me divorce I am going to my mother's house". And when such situation prevails, she leaves her husband and goes back to her maternal household. But later on her husband approaches her for negotiations she against scolds him saying "Now I will never accompany you. I think you better live with that wretched woman and exercise whatever your male domination upon her if you like. And for God's sake forget me for ever". The autobiography portrays narrator's hardship and struggles for existence. Naja faces all odds during her pregnancy. She becomes a school teacher in a remote village and stands on her own feet. When after the death of his second wife, her husband approaches her she forgives him and goes to live with him. The work not only enriched the domain of the Dalit and Marathi literature but also made a meaningful contribution to the feministic mode of fourth world literature. The work also echoes the burden of social, political, economic and religious restrictions led down on women by the privileged and unprivileged class. The work concludes with the protagonist retiring as an education officer with honour and respect. (1999: 191 to 192)

Babytai Kamble's *Jinne Amuche* raises a big protest against the rigid and established social order. It rejects the entire hegemonic tradition imposed by the upper caste people both covertly and overtly. It echoes the Ambedkarite discourse unlike most of other Dalit autobiographies blessed with ideological whirligig of the 80s and 90s. Maya Pandit, the feminist critic in her introduction to translation this narrative remarks, "Baby Kamble's narration reflects her love for her people without seeming to glorify their terrible condition. Outrage against the inhuman conditions of existence and love for her suffering people are organically fused to evolve a self-critical and yet humane and mature tone." (Maya Pandit: 2008:XIV) The work gives an account of the deep rooted superstitions, strange faith and beliefs among the Dalits. Here the

author seems to be disinterested about the hardships of her own life. However, she is more concerned with the age long perils of exploitation and oppression of the entire Dalit community at the upper caste hands. “Baby Kamble demonstrates how caste and patriarchy converge to perpetuate exploitative practices against women...she shows the remarkable dignity and resilience of the Mahar women in their struggle through which they have emerged as the agents of transformation in their community.”(ibid.) While commenting on her literary motive the author remarks, “The aim of this work is to awaken our future generations, our sons, and daughters' and grandsons about the pernicious and inhuman forms of social exploitation imposed by the upper caste people. And also to make them aware about our bleak past and grim realities about our animal like existence which rather is an affront to human dignity and rights”. (1999: 92) In her interview with Maya Pandit, Baby Kamble says, “I wrote about what my community experienced. The suffering of my people became my own suffering.”(ibid.) The work delves deep in to the psyche of exploiters and oppressors. The author is very much aware of the fact that gender is an exclusive base of her subversion and marginality. She is also conscious about different reasons and causes of the exploitation of Dalit women. Moreover, she is aware of the process of women empowerment which can only be possible in a congenial social environment.

The violation of human rights, racism, sexism and caste hierarchies signify the traumatic conditions under which Dalit women survive. Such systems and social realities have severely affected the life of Dalit women who are bound to face the atrocities of racism and oppression. In *Jinne Amuche* Kamble portrays a grim scene of ubiquity of sex, caste and class based exploitation which is probably the greatest source of oppression of Dalit women in India. Therefore the Dalit women have suffered a lot due to their lower status in society and often been regarded as powerless and marginal group in the social hierarchy. It also portrays in poignant terms the tragic condition of the Dalit in so called secular and souring India. The work also echoes the integrity of Dalit woman with her own community. It records many awesome experiences and instance of domestic violence. In an interview with Prof. Maya Pandit, the author remarks “Woman is the sole and easily available creature for subjugation.” Further she confides the truth about how she made sincere efforts to bring up her kith and kin amid good academic cultural environment created by her own efforts. The work is narrated from the perspective of a Dalit woman who is marginalized and subverted in an uncongenial atmosphere. Therefore it is an unflinching depiction of the seamier side of Dalit women who are pushed to the peripheries of society both by privileged and unprivileged people.

It can further be pinpointed that these autobiographies have universal presence of human right violations. They have been emerged as reactions and protest against many such sites. Therefore, the narratives received global acclaim for their proactive writing and emergent mode of human rights discourses. Moreover, they have foregrounded their feministic discourses with their existential search for identity that was denied maliciously by society. These discourses have sensitized many Dalit women writers to raise voice against the social evil emanating from class and caste based discrimination. The prime aim of these discourses seems to initiate a new human rights movement of Dalit consciousness and to bring about a phenomenal social transition, it also aims at building a homogenized and classless society based on the universal principles of human rights movement namely, liberty, equality and fraternity. In this regard Sharankumar Limbale argues, “Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature, it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarked as unique because of this consciousness”. (2004: 32) The Dalit women narratives discussed in this paper are only considered to show how autobiography as an emergent literary mode has empowered the global movement of human rights awareness and to project the subaltern subjectivity to break the shackles of caste and class and gender that are key-factors responsible for human rights violation. These narratives also bring to the fore the unprecedented transformative worth and power of the oppressed people to make the oppressors

aware about their inhuman behavior. They attempt to record the sites of dehumanization and violation of human rights.

Given the above sites and situation, in conclusion, it can be asserted that no civilized country can afford to ignore the preservation and significance of human rights. It is a very good sign that now a days a lot of emphasis is laid and attention is given on the literacy of human rights on various platforms and conducting nation-wide examinations which will educate the people and help to promote the culture of peace, humility and humanity. There is still some need of sincere and serious efforts with social and patriotic commitment and social concern to serve for the cause of the preservation of human rights. The enforcement of human rights and their preservation and enjoyment universally should be seen in action rather than a mere ritual of academic discussion. Hence, Dalit men's and women's life narratives can well serve as the trajectories of social change and the argumentation of human rights in any human society.

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