

TRIPLE MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN IN MUKTA SARVAGOD'S MITLELI KAVAADE: CLOSED DOORS

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Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. In other words, Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society.

– (Dangle 265)

Time never stops for anybody and the most important feature of the time is that it constantly keeps changing and assuages our pains accordingly. Human beings are slave of time and time can make a king a pauper. It is generally considered that time and circumstance keep changing. Human beings just need to have a little bit patience in this context. Dalit women writers have revolted against the patriarchal set up and had to indulge in acrimonious arguments to create their own place otherwise there was no chance that the male-dominated society of India may happily provide them equal opportunities.

The doors of opportunities and rights were closed for Dalit Women even up to few decades back. Present autobiography *Mitleli Kavaade (Closed Doors)* by Mukta Sarvagod is a personal narrative in which she describes the bitter experiences of her life and community. The vicissitudes and pangs of her life come to the fore.

Dalit women started writing much later than men as they were deprived of their right of education. Any autobiography by dalit writer reveals the facts and events of a writer's life. Most of the dalit writers have written autobiographies so that people may understand their pains and may not do caste-based discrimination with them. In the autobiography *Closed Doors*, dalit women find their doors shut at every place whether it may be a school, college, office, hospital or a temple.

Mukta Sarvagod's autobiography satirises the social evils such as exploitation of dalit women, suppression of women, gender discrimination and untouchability. Dalit women's life has been the main focus of this autobiography. Mahar women's problems are neglected by other Mahars men and the upper caste people also do not pay any attention to them. These women have to face humiliation in their life due to their low caste. Dr Beena Agarwal writes, "Caste is a man-made institution confined to transitory ends. It can neither strengthen nor spoil the dignity of marriage" (Agarwal 87).

In her autobiography, Mukta Sarvagod depicts many problems she faced in her life. Her father worked in the Indian railways. She was admitted in a primary school in Puntambe when she was five-year-old. In that school, the teachers and students belonging to the upper caste always humiliated the low caste students.

Mukta describes that her teacher would teach all students equally on the blackboard but when she would check the spellings of words on students' wooden slates, he would call every student one by one but she was not called close to his table just because she belonged to an untouchable community of Maharashtra. She had to throw her slate onto the table from a safe distance so that any part of her body may not touch her teacher.

Untouchability is a social evil which is still rampant in the rural and urban areas of India. Many people get good education but they remain so conservative in their thoughts that they are

unable to understand that God has made all human beings without any discrimination. This discrimination is only the product of human mind which is unjust and condemnable.

There are many literary texts in English literature also which are based on untouchability. If we look at the works published in Indian Writing in English, we find that Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Tagore's *Chandalika*, etc. works deal with the same problem of untouchability. In *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai also tells the difference between the upper caste and the lower caste people, "A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different....The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen" (Adiga 26-27).

So far as dalit autobiographies are concerned, most of the dalit men and women writers faced this problem in the twentieth century because the people at that time were less educated and they never thought that education can help change their lives.

Though Mukta Sarvagod was very intelligent in her studies yet she had to face the inhuman treatment from her teacher. Her teacher would throw the slate on the floor after marking and she would collect it from here. Thus, a dalit girl was learning less the lessons of education and more the lesions of untouchability through her teacher. She would feel humiliated in front of other students.

Mukta as a child faced many caste atrocities. She could not touch the vessel filled with water in the school. Other students would sprinkle water on her wooden slate and then she would clean it. She describes in her autobiography how many Mahar and Mang community children were deprived of their education due to lack of resources, awareness and discrimination. It was considered a daring act to send their children in school.

It was a generally held notion in ancient time that the education is meant only for the upper caste children and the low caste children need not get education because their work does not require any education. The teachers belonged to the upper caste in those schools and they did not like the students belonging to the low caste.

The equality in the school and college education came when the faculty recruitment was also initiated on the basis of category of teachers. As soon as the teachers of low caste joined the educational institutions, they became the protectors of the rights of the low caste children and the upper caste teachers stopped humiliating the low caste children because now the teachers also had fear in their minds that they may lose their jobs also.

When Mukta Sarvagod's father was transferred to Agra, they had to vacate the railway quarters and they had to live outside. She narrates some social evils prevalent in dalit community. Dalit men would sit idle at home and the women had to work to run the family. These women would take care of their children, did all the household works and would go for work. Still the men would show regard for these women. Such men would quarrel with the women and ask money from them to drink wine.

Mukta Sarvagod describes that the other women were also not happy to see dalit girls going to school. The illiterate women of their communities would criticise and abuse her when she passed from the lanes. They considered that a girl should not study in school as she must get married in the early age and should give birth to children. Thus, she was harassed by the people of her own caste and the upper caste.

She was not only the only person who was suffering from this kind of problems. Urmila Pawar also writes in her autobiography that the women of her caste would go to bring firewood on their heads and they would tell the stories of marginalisation of other women. Baby Kamble also writes the same issue in her autobiography *The Prison We Broke*, "My father has locked up my aai in his house, like a bird in a cage (Kamble 5). Phoolan Devi was brutally raped and tortured by the upper caste people. Bama notices how an old dalit man was not allowed to touch the

eatables belonging to the upper caste people. She had to face the discrimination in the convent school.

Dalit women's life was very tough as they were depended on the leftovers. They had to clean the gutters and lanes; they would collect dung with a shovel and make cakes; they chopped the trees for cooking food and they had to do other works also assigned to them by their mistresses. Sharmila Rege also writes about it, "By this time, it is already afternoon. They collect all the leftover....this is the life, if one can call it by that name, of all Mahar women! (qtd. in Rege 148).

Mukta Sarvagod decides to bring a change in the status of women. She joined a Mahila Mandal so that she may do something for the upliftment of women. She gives a new direction in her life. This life gives her much inspiration and enthusiasm to work for the untouchable women. These women made containers together so that they may become self-dependent:

Encouraged by their husbands, the women worked hard and made the containers, stringing them on the walls from the ceiling to the floor. Their tiny homes were crowded with these containers. When 80,000 such containers were ready, a wholesale merchant from the main vegetable market was invited to see the goods, and discuss prices. (Rege 151)

When the merchant came to see the containers, he saw that these containers were made by dalit women because he saw their arms were tattooed with pictures of trees and flowers. There was a portrait of Dr B.R. Ambedkar also on the wall. He immediately left the place saying that he will tell later. Mukta came to understand the intention of the merchant and she contacted the mayor and the editor of a newspaper to put pressure on the merchant. It was argued that they know it well that these contacts are to be used for the temple offerings and nobody will accept the offerings if people come to know that these containers are made by a Mahar woman. They tried to sell the containers to someone else but nobody was ready to buy them and ultimately, they had to throw away these containers.

Dalit women were untouchable for the upper caste people but the same dalit women were physically exploited by them. The husbands of dalit women also beat them mercilessly and treated with them mercilessly. This autobiography records not only her own life but the life stories of the people of her community.

Dalit women were depended on mercy of the men of their own family as well as the upper caste people. They had to please their own life-partners and they were forced to please the bodily hungers of the upper caste people.

The duty of Mahars was very tough. They were generally assigned those tasks which were generally not done by anyone else. They had to clean the dirt, carry the dead animals, protect the dead bodies, clean the drains, road and sewerage etc. They were given such tasks also in which their life was also at high risk. They were given importance at the time of solar eclipse only because it was considered that the alms given to such people will save them from the misfortunes.

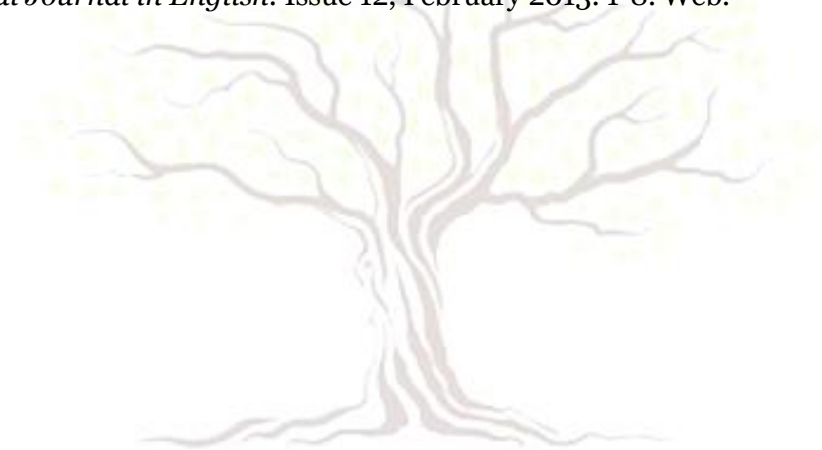
The Mahar women would do all the duties assigned to them. They had to work from early in the morning till late night. They were depended on the men for everything. They did everything otherwise they knew it well that their children would sleep hungry. Thus, the Mahar women had to compromise with their soul and they had too many works which were against their wish. Ruchi Tomar writes in this context, "Not only patriarchy and caste but also class divides Dalit women by bringing the embourgeoisment and Sanskritisation. Dalit feminism must respond to the complexity of salience of class and the differences create by the caste-ridden society" (Tomar 2).

Mukta Sarvagod has realistically brought out the pains and problems of dalit women and her community in her autobiography. She wanted to open new avenues for the dalit women. She tried a lot to improve their condition and to give them equal rights. Thus, this autobiography vividly narrates the patriarchal pressure on dalit women, their fragmented self and marginalised status. Dr Deepika Rani comments about this autobiography that "*Closed Doors* is an

autobiography that brings the pain and agony of Dalit women from the deep waters on the surface so that it should be realised by others” (Rani 97).

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