

Interrogating the Internal Gender Oppression within the Dalit Culture: A Critical Study of Malika Amar Shaikh's *I Want to Destroy Myself*

Arup Kumar Mondal

Assistant Professor

Department of English, Nabagram Hiralal Paul College, Hooghly, West Bengal

Abstract

Malika Amar Shaikh in her memoir *I Want to Destroy Myself*, translated from Marathi into English overtly criticizes the gendered discriminatory structure embedded in the apparently democratic and emancipatory Dalit ideology. It problematizes the Phule-Ambedkarite ideals of Dalit movement. Malika's interrogation explores the double standard of the so-called crusader of freedom. She expresses her disillusionment in her relationship with her husband Namdeo Dhasal, one of the Dalit leaders and founder members of Dalit Panthers movement. The question of gender discrimination is overtly highlighted in her memoir. She refers to her personal life where the question of right and liberty of a Dalit woman poses a challenge to the Dalit patriarchal set up which compounds itself by internalizing the upper caste Brahmanical mores. She interrogates the authenticity of the male oriented Dalit struggle against caste discrimination as the Dalit revolutionaries are not free from gender discrimination. Dalit men fighting against one form of oppressive hierarchy constructs another form of internal oppressive structure. Malika's reference to Namdeo as a "scripture-quoting Mahar" establishes her disapproval of her husband unconsciously imitating the oppressive hierarchical structure in justifying the gender discrimination. She criticizes the "foul language" and "ugly behaviour" of the 'opportunist' Namdeo. There's a marked gap between propaganda and practice in Dalit culture and ideology. The loneliness and self-disgust that she felt destroyed her inner self. She has defined her real femininity as somewhere between aggressivity and sensitivity. She wishes to strike a blow to the "ugly face of patriarchal culture." She has unburdened herself to express her loneliness. The interrogation of Dalit internal patriarchy by a Dalit woman adds a new dimension to the Dalit intersectional analysis aiming at the independence of Dalit women from the shackles of subjugation.

Keywords: Dalit, patriarchy, hierarchy, gender, culture, ideology

Dalit literature is a literature of protest, which revolutionizes the idea of the struggle of a Dalit self against caste based oppressive hierarchy. But the question of 'gender' doesn't receive so much importance in the general agenda of Dalit literary movement. In fact, the question of liberty of women is shadowed in the general communitarian Dalit resistance against the unjust treatment meted out to them from time immemorial. It is a problematic

zone in Dalit socio-political struggle against oppression as it poses a challenge to the so-called emancipatory ideals of Dalit liberation movement. This aspect implores us to delve deep into Dalit struggle and find out that the Dalit movement which opposes marginalization based on the social identities of caste, class and gender constructs another oppressive hierarchy within its own fold. The Dalit male tradition enjoys the monopoly of power and authority in the general Dalit struggle. The result is pernicious as it dispossesses the Dalit women of their just right to claim their contribution in the resistance against caste oppression. This is highly paradoxical as it is not in tune with the motto of Dalit literary, political and cultural struggle. The Dalit women are yet to attain real independence from all sorts of discrimination.

Dalit women are silenced and marginalized in such a hegemonized, subtle and politicized way that it is almost impossible to perceive how Dalit intellectuals and revolutionaries can be so much oppressive. It is indeed a grave issue to ponder on. Jerry Pinto, the translator of Malika's memoir has categorically referred to this dialectic, "Malika Amar Shaikh's tone is conversational but what she is telling you about straddles the personal and the political, the intimate and the public, the bedroom and the venereal disease clinic" (Pinto 8). Dalit women's articulation tend to shatter the cocooned existence within which they are confined so far. Now they can shatter the shield and come out with their own voice to assert their identity. Malika herself says, "Inside my cocoon, I developed into a lonely, stubborn, sensitive girl" (Shaikh 22). There is a deliberate attempt to ghettoize and otherize the Dalit women as insignificant and voiceless. Dalit women decentre the oppressive construct through their writings. Influenced by the Ambedkarite counterpublic, they challenge the oppressive hierarchy even against internal discrimination.

Interrogation implies challenge against the established discourse questioning its validity. Internal questioning may possess the ability to destabilize the hierarchy of power. Malika Amar Shaikh's memoir questions the role of her family and community in redressing the problems of the Dalit women. She questions the role of her husband Namdeo Dhasal, a noted Dalit poet and intellectual. The so-called Dalit crusader of freedom practises double standards as he practises internal discrimination within his family. This is not in tune with the agenda of Dalit struggle. The question of gender discrimination is overtly highlighted in Malika's memoir *I Want to Destroy Myself* by referring to her personal life where the question of liberty of a Dalit woman poses a challenge to the Dalit patriarchal set-up which compounds itself by internalizing the upper caste Brahmanical mores.

The memoir puts before us the question of authenticity of the Dalit struggle against caste hierarchy. But this battle against caste hierarchy gets undermined as Dalit men voicing against one form of hierarchy creates yet another form of internal hierarchical oppressive structure. So, the emancipatory advances made by the crusaders of freedom are contradictory and biased. The perpetuation of injustice to those who are already on the lower rungs of society is the sole motto of the powerful. This is the social and political marginalization which belittles the role of the women in fighting against caste discrimination. Raj Gauthaman, a leading Tamil intellectual has criticized the internalization of the Brahmanical oppressive mechanism by the 'bourgeois' Dalits. To quote Gauthaman, "Some of the educated, petty bourgeois Dalits in the cities who consider themselves 'progressive' make the same mistake. These are the people who

have internalized the ideology of the neo-Brahmanism and the democratic government and are gradually getting alienated from the majority of Dalit people” (Gauthaman 30). This is to say that the internalization increases the discrimination for the Dalit women. By protest culture only this sort of injustice can be countered. The “Antipodal cultural characteristics” (Gauthaman 36) of the Dalit women’s writings will hopefully be able to deconstruct oppressive set up and construct a new discourse of equality and freedom. Obviously, there is a tendency to suppress the voice of protest by the dominant culture. But one should not succumb to the tormentor. Everyone is concerned about one’s own identity and culture. Malika’s resistance tends to dismantle the so-called superiority claimed by the Dalit patriarchy. It is the inversion which is the way to revolutionize.

Jerry Pinto, the translator of Malika’s memoir has stricken the right chord by suggesting the assumed superiority of Malika’s husband Namdeo. After her marriage, Malika finds herself in “the middle of a tempestuous marriage to a political figure who could never be accused of consistency” (Pinto 7). It is in fact a “destructive relationship” (Pinto 9). Pinto has acquainted us with a hegemonized structure by means of which the superior-inferior binary works. Dalit patriarchy takes advantages from this binary as they place themselves on the upper rung of this hierarchy. The Dalit women, on the other hand are unfortunately relegated to the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Naturally, women are supposed not to disagree with her husband, even if the husband practises oppressive mechanism. Namdeo places himself on the upper rungs of the hierarchy as the discriminator. But Malika does the opposite to what Pinto has suggested. She interrogates the inconsistency of Dhasal with regard to his demeanour. This questioning places Malika as taking a Dalit-Feminist standpoint to highlight the intersecting and interlocking nature of oppression concerning caste and gender. Her ‘self’ may be referred to in the words of famous Dalit-Feminist author Bama as “wounded self” (Bama x). But this self doesn’t surrender to odds. Rather it fights with courage against all odds. As the women face discrimination due to numerous reasons and their identity is at stake. But resistance against oppression through voice of protest is imperative to reconstruct the self. Just as Bama didn’t practise the culture of silence, Malika too is full of protesting articulation. By writing her memoir she could assert her identity. In this context, Bama’s own words may be quoted to refer to the role of writing in the assertion and celebration of identity, “I described myself in *Karukku* as a bird whose wings had been clipped; I now feel like a falcon that treads the air, high in the skies” (Bama xi). Dalit women must reconstruct their identity based on reality.

Malika has been very honest and sincere in expressing her inner mind. In her “rare self-portrait” (Pinto 9) she refers to the struggle of her married life. She doesn’t take divorce rather she continues to live occasionally raising voice. She has unequivocally pointed out the dual nature of her husband. Jerry Pinto refers to it:

There is a section in which Malika Amar Shaikh, not yet twenty, finds herself with a baby in a rented room in Lonavla. She has no household help. Her only companion is a male chauvinist who, as an Ambedkarite has probably followed Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar into Buddhism, but cannot help quoting Hindu scripture at Malika. Her husband vanishes for days at a time, haring off to Pune and leaving her alone. She must wash and clean and tend to her baby and fight with the scripture-quoting Mahar. (Pinto 10)

Being a follower of Ambedkarite ideology, Dhasal should have shunned the Brahmanical and Sanskritized tradition of gender discrimination. According to Ambedkar, the relationship between the husband and the wife must be on equal terms. Ambedkar's counter-cultural discourse deconstructs and questions the hegemonic representation of women. The structural and graded violence scripturally sanctioned by Hindu Brahmanical religious order is interrogated in the Ambedkarite ideology. Decoding and deconstructing the coded law enunciated in *Manusmriti* is one of the major characteristics of Ambedkar's writings to explore the oppressive hierarchical layers. Throughout his life Ambedkar fought against the orthodox nationalists deconstructing the essentialist viewpoint regarding caste and gender. The multidimensionality of Ambedkar's religious discourse poses a challenge not only to the dominant Brahmanical religious order but also the bourgeoisie consciousness of the Dalit culture. Ambedkar, through his religious thinking, Navayana Buddhism dreamt for the worldly egalitarianism, free from the shackles of hierarchical oppressive order. But Dhasal's engagement in gender discriminatory practices, creates a marked gap between his theory and praxis.

Malika wages a war against the exploitative strategies meted out to her in her private life. She throws open her private life and utters her voice as a representative of all those marginalized women who are hegemonized. She asserts that her voice, expression, mind is important. She is not at all concerned about the readers and their recognition of her voice. She asserts her identity thus:

I have peeled away the skin of my life and served it up to you. Some may say this fruit is inedible but that doesn't matter. It is more important for me to present this very different world of experience in which I lived, telling the story from my point of view and from the point of view of all women who have been exploited. (Shaikh 14).

In fact, she doesn't even try to commercialize her writing just for the sake of consumption by the readers. The authenticity of her experience is of utmost importance. Hence, she says, "The story takes shape as of itself" (Shaikh 14). As a writer, she asserts her own individuality. Here comes the question of the authenticity of the translator in the exploration of meaning. The politics of translation may influence the work of translation. Sometimes the Dalit text from regional language translated into English may suffer the authentic voice of the author. The translator in most cases enjoys the privileged position and may suppress the voice of the author which is recorded in the original version of the text. The problem of cultural untranslatability implies a loss of meaning in the translated version of the text. Malika's book may also face the similar problem of cultural untranslatability in the process of translation of her memoir into English.

Malika gives a clarion call to the women to arise otherwise the discrimination will continue forever. They are stereotyped and essentialized in society. They are transformed into secondary human beings having no active role in family and society. They will have to raise their voice. In real life, they need proper respect as human beings. The male dominated patriarchal society creates gender stereotypes in order to essentialize women's roles in society. Malika expresses her consciousness about gender and gives a clarion call, like a true Feminist to deconstruct the stereotypical image of women in general:

As long as women will not put off the garment of shame and inhibition and tolerant self-sacrifice, as long as people ignore women's sufferings and their experiences or take them for granted, as long as women are only adored or pitied, we will all develop the habit of seeing women as victims. And we will take her oppression as a given. (Shaikh 14)

In a patriarchal society, women are pigeonholed. They are asked to maintain certain norms in accordance with the expectations of social categorizers. Their natural desires are suppressed. V. Geetha, a noted Dalit-Feminist critic has observed this issue, "Women had to observe their dharma, that is, *stridharma*, failing which their essential animality, their wild nature or *strisvabhava*, would take over their lives" (Geetha 107).

Malika has developed a social consciousness in her writing intrinsically. This social consciousness has taught her to protest against injustice. In Dalit literary struggle, community struggle takes precedence over self-struggle. Her journey from self-centredness to community struggle places her as a leading Dalit-Feminist thinker. She refers to this transcendence:

To think, to dream, to scan the self, these were my obsessions. Each poem, I hoped showed a different mood. But now I began to see another set of ideas creep into my poems. I had begun to develop a social consciousness. Without willing it, I was responding to my social context expressing my hatred of injustice and inequality. This continues even today. I was not forcing it. I was not posing. This was not a matter of style. I have not been able to change this. (Shaikh 57)

Malika revolutionizes the traditional and stereotypical ideas about Dalit-women. She criticizes the foul language and ugly behaviour of Namdeo. The verbal abuse is a sort of psychological abuse which dehumanizes her. The sole aim in this regard is harassing. It attacks the identity of the woman through the gendered violence. Naturally, the identity of the woman is at stake. The marginalized status of Dalit women may be analysed by Dalit Feminist theoretical tool. Dalit-Feminist perspective will offer us a new strategy of looking at the multiple marginalised location of the Dalit women. Politically, Dalit women are at the lowermost rung of hierarchical power structure. Brahmanical or graded patriarchy oppresses the Dalit women most. They are placed in such a location where they need to be shown as different from other women because of the unique nature of their oppression. Dalit women are excluded both from mainstream as well as Dalit discourse. The multiply marginalized status of them is overlooked. In her memoir, she refers to how women are made to accept the patriarchal laws. She refers to her mother-in-law who was forced to remain silent. She refers to how her father-in-law had the habit of having sexual relationship with other women. But when she found out that her mother-in-law is silent, she criticises her, "How does this fit in with the dharma of a woman, with her character? What mould had she been made from? I had never heard of a woman who would help her husband have it off with another woman" (95). Shaikh has found a marked gap between Namdeo's personal and political life. Namdeo was so busy in his political life that she had suffered from loneliness. She narrated the incident thus, "Namdeo had his meetings, his workers, his sabhas. I was terribly lonely. And that in turn made me angry. And so I quietly took some of the pills that had been prescribed for aai" (Shaikh 99). However, in difficult situation, she had the desire to live. It was

strong in her. She didn't surrender herself to odds. Through her resistance and resilience, she changed her personality. She says:

Whenever Namdeo and I had a fight, I would bear the brunt of it, and carry the tension inside my head. When he said something cruel, it would echo in my head for days. I would go blank and then try to kill myself. This was an extreme reaction. It was difficult to justify or to confess or even to deny. It was all very difficult. But one thing is true. Even during those times of pain and sorrow, I wanted to live. In fact, I knew that this much was not going to kill me. One's subconscious mind is always at work, they say. And as if by an invisible and silent force, it would be constantly dragging me back. (...) I was completely out of control and at the same time, a great alertness, a great cautiousness would also surface. Yet my mind was slowly freezing over. I felt as if I had suffered an internal short circuit. This would happen very often. And then I would sleep soundly. I was aware of something changing in my personality, an imperceptible, cautious, hesitant change. But a change nonetheless, a change within and without. (Shaikh 99-100)

Malika possesses an anti-essentialist view regarding mother and motherhood. She negated the traditional concept of motherhood. Motherhood is generally supposed to be the height of fulfilment of women. But, to her the birth-pain is beyond toleration. She refers to it, "If this was supposed to be the height of fulfilment of femininity, I had nothing to say; I only wanted to spit at it" (Shaikh 109). She questions about the so-called euphemisms about motherhood. It is time, according to her, to question the oppressive mechanism. She can understand how others feel the same kind of pain during the delivery of the baby. She describes it in her own way, "No one else suffers your pain. You alone understand its magnitude and intensity" (Shaikh 112). After she came home, she was astonished at Namdeo's behaviour. She simply wanted care and love from her husband. But her expectations were not fulfilled. Namdeo disappointed her. Malika confesses her inner desire, "My needs, my existence and its joys had been erased from his life. This hurt me deeply. Far more than a child, I needed a husband, a companion in those days. Namdeo had no enthusiasm for family life" (Shaikh 113). At the same time, he showed his irresponsibility towards his household. The Dalit revolutionary sometimes used to beat her, "He (Namdeo) began to spend more time outside the house. He would stay out until two or three in the morning. If I asked him where he had been, he would beat me. The tears would follow" (Shaikh 116). She got disillusioned with regard to the behaviour of her husband. She felt heartbroken at this. She says, "I had lost my Namdeo, the Namdeo of old. He was changing, drifting away from me, and there was nothing I could do to stop it. I had loved his companionship but he felt no need for me now. This bitter truth broke something inside me" (Shaikh 117). She also felt broken when she realized that her husband had cheated on her by having an extra-marital affairs: "That he (Namdeo) should cheat on me was a thought too terrible to be contemplated. How could he have descended to this level? Neither I nor my love was so cheap" (Shaikh 119). Malika had asserted her own female identity. She didn't surrender to Namdeo. Rather due to his faithlessness, she got separated from her. She had done it because it was beyond her toleration. She had to banish her own child for that. But she was helpless. Namdeo would not allow to take her son with her.

Malika criticises the dual nature of the Dalit revolutionaries. There's a marked gap between theory and practice. Through her writing she establishes the Dalit Feminist standpoint position which is the true instrument of recognizing women's position within the hierarchical social structure. She asserts the need to change the Dalit outlook. She speaks in a mocking tone:

Oh, that's wonderful. You're using the very scriptures that turned you into an untouchable, that put you into the lowest category of humanity, that treated you as if you were an animal, as examples to me? So do you want women to sacrifice ourselves? In your speeches you deride Hindu mythology but, in your own home, you seek to victimize women by using the example of Sita? (Shaikh 126-27)

Intersectionality is one of the major mechanisms through which we can understand the unique nature of the location of Dalit women. It is a theoretical framework to situate the location of Dalit women. This critical concept is coined and developed by the Black Feminist writer Kimberle Crenshaw who refers to the interlocking nature of oppression. The multiple social identities like race, class, caste, gender, creed, culture, religion, language etc. combine together to affect multiple layers of oppression. These multiple factors intersect in the lives of caste and racial women to increase their discrimination. Kimberle Crenshaw in "'Difference' through Intersectionality" criticizes "a single-axis framework" (Crenshaw 139) which tends to undermine the specific type of discrimination which the caste and race women go through. The discrete aggravated nature of Dalit women's experiences can only be analyzed by this intersection of different categories. The idea of giving validity to a singular experience is the way to maintain status quo in society. The dominant cultural structure always tries to maintain its influence which needs to be destabilized. To quote her:

I will centre Black women in this analysis in order to contrast the multidimensionality of Black women's experience with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences. Not only will this juxtaposition reveal how black women are theoretically erased, it will also illustrate how this framework imports its own theoretical limitations that undermine efforts to broaden feminist and antiracist analyses. (Crenshaw 139)

With Dalit-Feminist standpoint, Dalit-Feminism can fight against the oppressive dominant cultures and methodologies. Dominant cultures and structures tend to dominate over other cultures and methodologies. Therefore, Dalit standpoint needs to formulate its own culture, structure and methodologies to counter the hegemonic structure. Standpoint studies the hierarchical social structure and refers to the graded nature of oppression. Dominant epistemology tends to focus on the dominant ideology ignoring the marginalized narratives. Realization of power relations by the oppressed group is highly necessary to resist the oppressive structure. From experience, they gather epistemological knowledge and realize the hierarchical power structure.

Similarly, the experience of Malika as narrated by her in her memoir may be analysed from an intersectional point of view as she is located in the intersectional point of caste and gender oppression. The Dalit women will then be able to assert their own voice resisting against the dominant ways of thinking. The idea of giving validity to a singular experience is the way to maintain status quo in society. The dominant cultural structure

always tries to maintain its influence which needs to be destabilized. There is a deliberate tendency to structure politics in such a way so that “struggles are categorized as singular issues. Moreover, this struggle imports a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo. (...) In addition, it seems that placing those who currently are marginalized in the centre is the most effective way to resist efforts to compartmentalize experiences and undermine potential action” (Crenshaw 148). Dalit politics tends to neglect and theoretically erase the gender specific problems of the Dalit women.

The effect of the verbal abuse is very adverse. The abuser is supposed to hold a superior position. The abused is considered to be inferior with regard to social, political and economic identity. This has been justly enunciated by Aloysius Irudayam, et al., “The abuse attacks the woman’s identity, integrity, and autonomy by seeking to label her body and gender, her livelihood or occupational identity, and her social status and family/community identity valueless” (126). The women’s identity is lost. They live with the imposed identity constructed by the dominant, Brahmanical patriarchal order. Aloysius Irudayam, et al. have beautifully referred to it, “Contemptuous language seeks to destroy Dalit women’s own sense of self and replace it with the identity scripted for them by Brahmanical patriarchy. Dalit women thus find themselves forcibly denied authorship of their own social identities” (129). Aloysius Irudayam, et al., rightly argue, “Dalit families subconsciously assimilate this culture of violence precisely because in a hierarchically structured social system where Dalits are placed at the lowest rung in the caste hierarchy, the gender hierarchy allows for some measure of power to be expressed by Dalit men over their daughters and wives” (298-99).

‘Othering’ is one of the major characteristics through which the dominant-dominated binary is constructed. Obviously in the process of verbal abuse, the Dalit women are othered as sexual objects and naturally they are dehumanized. This is one of the processes through which the Dalit men internalize the Brahmanical mores of marginalizing the women. Dalit men consider themselves as superior as they are placed politically in a privileged location. With this sense of superiority, they presuppose that they have the sole right to dominate their female counterpart. This is the double standard of the Dalit men who are supposed to follow the Ambedkarite ideology but in their gender discriminatory attitude within their household, they marginalize the women. Through this process, women are inferiorized and sexually objectified.

It is the question of basic human rights and dignity. Namdeo, according to Malika is an opportunist. The loneliness that she felt destroyed her inner self. She expresses the fact that her life has become aimless, “Not one tree remains to protect the nest of my dreams. How many years have passed? The silks of my youth have been scooped up in my lover’s beak and he has flown away” (Shaikh 149). She feels a sort of self-disgust. Inwardly she felt discontented. This inner discontentment has turned her life hellish. Nevertheless, she doesn’t succumb to defeat. The discontentment teaches her new lessons and experiences.

Malika asserts her own female self which has its own desires, likes and dislikes. This self must be allowed to develop and express itself. The outward layer of artificiality needs to be peeled off to assert the natural self. Social injunctions may restrict the flourishing the natural desire of the self. She asserts her true female self thus, “I peeled off the layers of deceit and falsity and hypocrisy from the self as one might peel a banana. My real

femininity was now primitive, unashamed, intense, aggressive; but also sensitive” (Shaikh 151). Society may not approve of the assertiveness in her behaviour. But she doesn’t care. At the same time, it must be admitted that fighting against the patriarchal mind-set of her husband, somewhere in the inner core of her heart, she feels a sort of loneliness. She faces the tough struggle in her life. She has admitted that she doesn’t distort the truth in the expression of her feelings. To quote her, “I had been fighting so long and I had been fighting alone. I was making a laughing stock of myself. I was also laughing at myself. And weeping for myself. Facing my loneliness, facing the bitter truth every night, embracing this truth as I feel asleep” (Shaikh 139). Generally, in an autobiography or a memoir, sometimes an element of truth with regard to the feelings of the author may be distorted if the author feels that it may not appeal to the audience. But be it appealing or off-putting, Malika expresses her life as it is in reality. She became too much frustrated with her present life. She says, “The habit of loneliness is difficult to form so I formed others. I began to drink beer. I began to smoke cigarettes. I neglected my diet and drank tea instead. All day tea; at night, beer, I had subconsciously decided to destroy myself” (Shaikh 140).

Writing is one of the major resistance mechanisms through which a counter cultural discourse can be constructed. Women also can write with intelligence and can express their problems. By writing her memoir, she makes her private life public so that she can assert her voice and make people know how to voice against injustice. This is a right, according to a famous Dalit intellectual and writer Kancha Ilaiah, common in most Dalit families, “Wife-beating is a patriarchal practice that exists among all castes. Dalit-bahujans are not exempt from this vice. But the beaten-up wife has a right to make the attack public by shouting, abusing the husband and, if possible, by beating the husband in return” (Ilaiah 40). Exactly the same thing happens in Malika’s life. She turns out to be a spirited woman who can resist against oppressive structure and assert her own subjectivity. She cannot be silenced. It is claimed that the internal patriarchal structure can be deconstructed. But without proper resistance and voice, it is not possible.

Namdeo was so irresponsible that he didn’t even take the responsibility as a father. After her first child, Malika had been pregnant for three times but she had been insulted in such a severe way that had shocked her. Naturally she had refused to carry his child in her body. She says, “I refused to carry his child in my body. And then it seemed as if my very body would reject the foetuses” (Shaikh 140). This is her protest in her own way. Here she doesn’t play the stereotyped role that society expects a woman to play. The rebellious blow on her part helps to construct her identity as a Dalit-Feminist thinker who has the daring spirit to resist. V. Geetha, a noted Dalit-Feminist critic in *Patriarchy* has referred to how essentialized viewpoint has doomed women:

Chaste wifhood became a norm, and motherhood an ideal and virtue. Valorized for these roles and destinies, women too learnt to value themselves chiefly as sexual beings and as mothers. This limited their sense of the world, doomed them to ignorance and prevented them from even considering themselves as worthy of freedom. (Geetha 101)

Malika is victimised in a Dalit patriarchal hierarchical structure. Namdeo considers her only as a “child bearer” (Geetha 107) having no other significant role to play. The sexuality of Malika is controlled and regulated by the male rule and “the control that

men exercise over female reproductive capacity become central to women's subordination" (Geetha 107).

She has realized no one is going to offer her happiness. She has to snatch away the happiness for her. She, being a member of the Dalit community introspects the seamy sides of Dalit movement. She has criticized the internal contradictions regarding the gap between the theory and practice of the Dalit movement. She wants to give a message to the Dalit leaders:

I watched the Dalit movement blaze across the sky but I also watched it crash and burn as it sold itself cheap. I had seen it breaking up. I became a part of it but I was still detached from it. Is it a mistake to talk about this? Is it right to criticize a movement that has just been born? Doubt, despair and disbelief were in every eye. Our circumstances do not change with the change in the ruling party. No party, no organization, no leader, no minister seems to be able to make this change. Having understood this truth, I am conscious every moment of their indifference. (Shaikh 147-48)

The Dalit men consider the Dalit women as socially and politically inferior to them. As they are mocked at by the mainstream patriarchy as having no 'true' masculinity. In the words of V. Geetha, the Dalit men are "symbolically emasculated" (Geetha 108). But they cannot assert their identity in a mainstream patriarchal order since they are politically inferior to the Savarna men. So somehow, they try to show their prowess over Dalit women whom they think as inferior to them, both socially and politically. They thus assert their "hyper-masculinity" (Anandhi quoted in Geetha 108) and exert oppression on Dalit women.

Malika wishes to do away with the cultural norms which deter the liberty of women. Symbolically those norms are like the fetters which restrain their freedom. She has exposed the bitter reality associated with the male control of the women. According to her, this is "the naked muddy messy truth" (Shaikh 156). But women should not practise the culture of silence. Rather they should voice their protest against the male desire of suppressing female individuality and assertiveness. Women, according to her, must celebrate their identity and individuality. In Malika's words, "But every woman should be proud of herself and her individuality and should be able to express those needs" (Shaikh 156). She questions the patriarchal set-up, "why should my life be a sacrifice to one man? I am a woman, a force of nature. I am a symbol of all this, this overarching, overwhelming, bliss-soaked nature" (Shaikh 152).

Women can resist against patriarchal negligence of female *écriture*. In most cases, women's writings are not properly recognized. Through their writings, women can destabilize the hierarchy. She asserts the quintessential value of women's writing. Generally, in society, their writings are underrated and undervalued. The female feelings that are recorded in their writings may not be appealing to society. Nevertheless, they are important to a woman as the expression of feelings which assert a woman's identity. Writing, according to her, unburdens oneself.

The women through their writings assert their identity and individuality against the communitarian negligence of Dalit women's self-assertion. This dialectic between self and community is one of the predominant themes in Dalit women's writings. They protest against the silence and indifference of the Dalit community. Sharmila Rege in

“Dalit Women’s Autobiographies” referred to this internal hierarchy within the Dalit community:

Yet, we need to remember that by bringing into the public domain details of life, they (Dalit women) also challenge the communitarian control on self. This dialectics of self and community assumes further significance in Dalit women’s testimonios for, situated as women in the community, they articulate concerns of gender, challenging the singular communitarian notion of the Dalit community. (132)

Malika’s memoir critiques the essentialized viewpoints of Dalit ideology regarding the question of gender. Self-introspection is imperative to challenge the discriminated outlook. Her interrogation of the authenticity of the male oriented Dalit struggle against caste discrimination as the Dalit revolutionaries are not free from gender discrimination problematizes the question of gender within the Dalit discourse. Dalit men fighting against one form of oppressive hierarchy constructs another form of internal oppressive structure. Her critique is a clarion call to shake the Dalit internal, hierarchical gender discrimination and procure real independence for the Dalit women in society.

Works Cited

- Bama. *Karukku*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. “‘Difference’ through Intersectionality.” *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore. London and New York: Routledge, 2020. 139-149. Print.
- Gauthaman, Raj. *Dark Interiors*. Trans. S. Theodore Baskaran. New Delhi: Sage, 2021. Print.
- Geetha, V. *Patriarchy*. Calcutta: Stree, 2007. Print.
- Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I am Not a Hindu*. Calcutta: Samya, 1996. Print.
- Pinto, Jerry. Translator’s Introduction. *I Want to Destroy Myself: A Memoir*. By Malika Amar Shaikh. Trans. Jerry Pinto. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2016. 7-11. Print.
- Rege, Sharmila. “Dalit Women’s Autobiographies.” *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore. London and New York: Routledge, 2020. 131-135. Print.
- Shaikh, Malika Amar. *I Want to Destroy Myself: A Memoir*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2016. Print.
- S.J., Aloysius Irudayam, et al. *Dalit Women Speak Out: Caste, Class and Gender Violence in India*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2015. Print.