



## THE PORTRAYAL OF DALIT WOMEN IN KUMUD PAWDE'S *ANTASHPOT*

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper endeavors to highlight the women characters in the Autobiography<sup>i</sup> of a dalit women writer Kumud Pawde. Kumud Pawde is an eminent writer from Maharashtra who writes about the caste system and social inequalities that are prevalent in the Indian society. Her forte is to talk about the gender and problems that are faced by women in higher as well as lower class society. Her Autobiography entitled Antashpot is a beautiful presentation of the social, cultural and financial situation of dalits in the Indian society. She brings out the hardships and difficulties faced by dalit women in a patriarchal society.*

In a patriarchal society either in the east or in the west, women have been always treated in an unequal manner and as an inferior sex; either put on a pedestal as symbols of purity and keepers of tradition or degraded as sex objects. In a patriarchal set up like the one in India, women are supposed to be, and made to be, traditional, religious, docile, obedient and subordinate to men. There is evidence in the two great Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that women are restricted by social rules and norms. For example, two classical characters of Sita in Ramayana and Draupadi in Mahabharata behave as ideal, obedient and docile wives to their husbands and as good mothers towards their children. They do not cross the boundaries that are set up by their patriarchal societies. Submission to others is the only thing that a patriarchal society, whether in India or in the West expects from a woman. John Stuart Mill rightly points out,

*“All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others.”<sup>ii</sup>*

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In a patriarchal society a woman is treated as a person dependent on others for her existence. For example, as an old woman, she has to depend on her children for her survival, in her girlhood she has to depend on her parents while when married she is dependent on her husband. Men from time immemorial have not given woman an individual identity in the society. She has been restricted to a minor part of the society. To use the words of J.S.Mill again:

*“A place of subordination has been traditionally accorded to her at the behest of the male dominated culture which ordains a grim existence for her. Self abnegation, personal will, dependability, and denial of the right to individuality are made to her lot. Not self assertion but self denial, not self awareness but role fulfillments are expected of her by the society with its entrenched ideas of male dominance.”<sup>iii</sup>*

A brief glance at the Indo- Anglian literature shows us the impact of such a patriarchal society. Most of the male Indo-Anglian writers have restricted women to the mere tradition and custom. The famous big three of the Indo-Anglian stalwarts such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan also have not been that successful in depicting the women characters with their desires and fancies. They highlight only the motherhood and the other issues related to the tradition instead of depicting the rights and their individuality. Even the second generation writer like Bhabani Battacharya, Chman Nahal Khushwant Singh and other male writers also were not that successful in portraying women characters. Khushwant Singh presents three kinds of Women characters in his works. First of all he portrays the conventional women who always stand for motherly qualities like patience, love, sacrifice, affection, and mysticism. These kinds of women readily offer everything including their life to save or redeem their beloved people like their sons, daughters, and husbands. Secondly there is the portrayal of unconventional women characters who symbolize the negative qualities such as promiscuousness, sensuality, desire and hypocritical nature. They are ready to do anything to satisfy their carnal desires under the cloak of tradition. What rankles one, though is that Khushwant Singh cannot move beyond a dichotomous, binary representation of women, depicting them always either as pure and chaste or lustful and promiscuous.

As a reaction against this male domination women started writing about their own problems. Shashi Deshpande, Kamla Markandeya, Anita Desai Kamal Das Arundati Roy and Kiran Desai are some of the writers who write against the male dominated society. The above writers questioned the traditional and conventional superiority of the males over the females in their novels. Anita Desai in her novel Cry the Peacock highlights the silent subjugation of men over the women since the time immemorial. Arundati Roy in her novel God of Small Things wonderfully portrays the domination of man over women in political, social, economic and financial spheres. In her novel God of Small Things she marvelously compares



upper class women with dalits, who can neither speak nor have their say in the society. The setting of the novel is Kerala, one of the most developed and hundred percent literate states in India. Through the novel she brings out the fact that even in the most developed states there is the prevalence of caste and co Among the Dalits Bama Baby Kamble and Kumud Pawde are some of the important writers who present caste and gender in their works. Kumud Pawde is a writer and feminist from Maharashtra. She was born in a Mahar (dalit) family of Nagpur in 1938. *Antashpot* is an autobiography written by Kumud Pawde. Through the above work Pawde discusses her identity as a dalit and talks about the difficulties and hardships that she had to face in the so called male dominated society to learn Sanskrit. She was praised by all for her reading, writing and speaking skills in Sanskrit. But at the same time she felt that the people of her community as well as the Brahmins disliked her because she wants to learn and aspires to become a lecturer in Sanskrit. Brahmins did not like her learning Sanskrit as it was *devwani*, the language of Gods which is forbidden for dalits. According to the Hindu Law maker Manu education is forbidden for dalits and women. He also proposes that it is a sin if women and dalits aspire for education which seems ridiculous. But later the efforts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Phule and the liberal English education paved the way for dalits to pursue education.

Kumud Pawde had a comfortable and happy life as her father was a lawyer. Her father was so considerate and an inspiration for her to learn Sanskrit. She lived in a very big house and went to the good schools. She had all comforts and material pleasures as a child in her house. People mocked at her and discouraged her from learning Sanskrit. She worked hard and completed MA in Sanskrit but it was not enough for her to get a job as a lecturer in Sanskrit. For two years she could not get job as she belonged to a Mahar community. It was only after her marriage with a caste man Motiram Pawde that she got a job based on her family name, Pawde which is very ironical in a Hindu society.

Kumud Pawde also describes the caste troubles and violence in the family when her father-in-law was not willing to cuddle his grandson as he was born to a lower caste woman. Pawde also expresses the superiority of the male dominated society when she describes in detail about a particular tradition i.e *watasavitri vrat* a kind of fast performed by women to get the same husband in seven cycles of births.

Thus, through the above discussion we can come to the conclusion that in a patriarchal society like the one in India there are some set norms to depict and portray women characters. They are depicted as virtuous and vicious or as good and bad. Most of the male writers seem to have followed this tradition. Women on the other hand seem to write about their psychological, spiritual and social problems. Kumud Pawde through her autobiography goes beyond other writers and marvelously presents the major problems such as caste and gender in her book. She also depicts how the males have always dominated the lower classes and the weaker sex in the Indian society.



## REFERENCES

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- <sup>i</sup> Pawde, Kumud. 1981 *Antashpot*. Aurangabad : Anand Prakasshan.
- <sup>ii</sup> J.S.Mill, *The Three Essays*. London: OUP, 1975 p.444.
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid. p.444.