

# MAPPING THE DALIT WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE: AN EXPLORATION INTO VIOLENCE AND VIOLATION OF WOMEN RIGHTS IN HARISH MANGALAM'S GUJARATI DALIT NOVEL TIRAD

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## Abstract

Women concerns in Dalit literature is a crucial site of exploration to depict the reality of marginalized women in India. Issues like violence, displacement, marginalization, exploitation, slavery, injustice owing to caste discrimination and experiences of women mirrors in the works of major Dalit writers. Dalit movements, particularly in Gujarat, have played a critical role in bringing these issues to the forefront. Though major writers have focused on addressing the Dalit subject with respect to these concerns generally, however, the issues related to Dalit women have remained unvoiced and unanswered. Women in general have been considered as marginalized but the plight of Gujarati Dalit women has been manifold and it would not be wrong to consider her doubly marginalized, firstly, being a woman and more so, being a Dalit. By being Dalit women, they are the affected victims of several forms of violence. Moreover, the violation of their self-respect, dignity and basic rights breaks them both mentally and physically. But with the rise of Dalit movements and the influence of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Dalit women have come forward against injustice, and their voice has also begun to surface in Dalit writings. This may not be on a large scale but these depictions are of great significance. At the same time, it is crucial that the stalwart writers provide a respectful space to these concerns in their writings along with the women writers. In the light of this thought, this paper explores how Harish Mangalam, a pioneer writer and an activist in the Dalit Movement in Gujarat has not just depicted the plight of Dalit women in Gujarat and but also attempts to restructure and reposition them in society in general. It is interesting to note that Mangalam does so in the reality of their existence of suffering rather than creating that ideal or an imaginary all-good situation. The present paper studies social othering and economical challenges faced by Dalit women as depicted by Harish Mangalam in his novel Tirad. Moreover, it also tries to understand the psyche of Dalit women and brings out the hidden scars inflicted on their mind and body.

**Keywords:** Dalit women, Caste, Violence, Resistance

Harish Mangalam has played a significant role in the advancement of Gujarati Dalit Movement and Literature. Born in a very small village named Fulu in Mehsana district on 15th February, 1952, he started his journey as a Dalit writer by writing a poem titled 'Kisan' in 1967. His poetry collection in Gujarati is available as *Sankrutvruto*. His poem 'Manushya Tu Jo' was published in *Gyan Sagar* magazine. Many of his poems were also published in prestigious magazines like *Vishvamanav*, *Vishram*, *Prakhar*, *Pratishtha*, *Nayamarg*, *Chandani*, *Disha*, *Ajumbo*, *Kalo Sooraj*, *Dholak*, *Pragati Jyot*, *Charotar Times*, *Saurashtrabhoomi*, *Stree*, *Parishad Sandesh* etc. Other than magazines, his poems were also included in the anthologies like *Dalit Kavita*, *Ek Mutthi Akash*, *Visfot*, *Eklavya no Angootho*. Not just a poet, Mangalam is also a founder of a magazine titled *Akshay* that began in 1985. Moreover, he has been actively participating and working in the literary, social and academic institutions such as *Dalit Adhikar Manch*, *Sangharsh Sahitya Sangh*, *Literature Study Forum*, *Fountain Poets*, *Gitanjali* etc. He has been associated with *Samarth Prakashan*, which was run by *Saraswati Seva Samaj Trust*. He has been a translator too and has translated the poems and short stories of Marathi Dalit writers like Namdev Dhasal and Yogiraj Vaghmare and also translated English booklet named *Jan-Harijan* by Yogendra Makwana which was published in *Parishad Sandesh*. His translated works were also published in English magazines like *Poems in English* and *Tailor*. Other than poems, short stories, criticism and translated works, Harish Mangalam also explored novels and contributed immensely to the field of Dalit novel writings in Gujarati. His novels like *Choki*, *Aganjhal* and *Tirad* are notable in the sphere of Gujarati Dalit Literature. (Parmar p. 04-06)

Harish Mangalam in his works depicts the condition of Dalits in general and situates them in particular to the region-specific discrimination pertaining to caste divide in Gujarat per se. Novel, in a way, provided a discursive space to him, wherein he could not just depict the plight of the Dalits but also concerns regarding Dalit consciousness. With this an exploration of Dalit theory particularly in Gujarati begins to evolve.

In the novel *Tirad*, he portrays the life of Dalit women and their struggle, through the protagonist Joiti's experiences. *Tirad* unfolds issues related to Joiti's life and also narrates the social customs that make Joiti's life miserable. The story begins with the fight between Baldev Patel and Bhaga Patel for the farm's *shedho*<sup>1</sup>. Somo, who is Joiti's husband, interferes to settle the fight. But he becomes a victim at the hands of Bhago Patel who in a fit of anger hits the shovel on Somo. Somo, by bearing the stroke of a hoe, dies after crying in pain for many days and to add to Joiti's suffering, she gets pregnant in the midst of all this. But by seeing the mischievous behavior of Baldev Patel with Joiti, the people of the village begin to doubt that Joiti may be bearing the child of Baldev Patel. Even after Baldev Patel is married, he continues chasing Joiti. She makes every effort to avoid him or any situation where he is involved so that the evil eyes of Baldev Patel do not fall on her. But, when at the end of the story, everyone comes to know that Baldev Patel is impotent, Joiti is freed from the suspicion of carrying Baldev's child while others are reassured that it is Somo's child (01-92).

The entire story revolves around Joiti who at every stage, bears the hardships and tortures of the society in which she is living. She faces huge challenges while nursing her bedridden husband. She struggles to arrange medicines for him, to bear the harassment at the hands of Baldev Patel, in an attempt at marrying another person. Her worries increase as she is carrying a child being a widow and most importantly, she is expected to prove herself innocent. All this is the on-ground reality of Dalit women who face several challenges in every facet of their lives. This is an age-old experience for such women and has a long-lasting history. Unfortunately, there is no trajectory or pattern to trace that history as most of it has remained unrecorded for years together. Often brutal forms of violence such as societal humiliation, sexual harassment, caste-based discrimination and oppression forced women to take some extreme steps like committing suicide as well. Dalit women have been seen not only as sexual objects but also as subordinate to men in their own caste. Therefore, their discrimination is witnessed at several levels. Dalit writers like Harish Mangalam have revealed how such violence is not just limited to physical and mental torture or sexual abuse, but it is available in many other hidden forms like the way people converse with such women or the intimidation that they have to face on daily basis. Therefore, this violence takes shape in different forms, socially, religiously, economically, politically, or even psychologically. Unfortunately, these forms of oppression work under the guise of a more acceptable socio-cultural framework in which the Dalit women are often trapped and remain invisible.

Through his novel, Harish Mangalam posits how the constant harassment and exploitation by the society and the members of Joiti's community lead to unintended consequences rather than the physical blot itself. In *Tirad*, the author shows how instead of helping or providing a support to the Dalit woman, social exploitation and humiliation renders the Dalit woman helpless. He deftly addresses these issues in his novel and powerfully presents a Dalit woman's condition in the society. This paper attempts to present different forms of gender and caste-based violence that is experienced by the Dalit protagonist. It also tries to examine how her own community creates a hurdle in her life while she is a widow and at the same time, pregnant.

Violence against women in any form whether it is rape, domestic violence, murder, physical, mental harassment, or sexual abuse is a major social problem in India. Though the Dalit women have been facing exploitation for years now, their situation seems to be worsening everyday rather than improving with time. Hence, it is crucial to address this issue and understand the reasons for it. Due to unequal status, the Dalit women experience caste and gender-based discrimination and violence. The vulnerability that prevails at every stage of Dalit life forces them to endure oppression and exploitation at the hands of upper caste as well as their own community. Dalit women find no way to escape from this situation. The main cause of the violation of these women is the caste division and prejudices related to it. Caste concerns are one of the main issues detailed in the constitution of India and there are strong laws for providing justice entitling the right to live with dignity and equality to all human beings, irrespectively of caste, creed and gender. The fact is that when it comes to practical implementation of these laws, the public fails to observe them in their entirety. Rather, the constitutional right to equality fails the moment people are ignored or slighted in the name of social or religious norms. It is very important that the people and particularly women of all castes have adequate conditions and a conducive environment where it is possible to practice and implement the basic human rights to all citizens irrespectively of caste, creed and gender discriminations. In this context, R. M. Pal opines that the constitution has not given any description of the ground reality. The constitution is kind of a prescription. The change is sought only by recognizing the dangers of the caste system that function as a major and a terrible source of human rights violations (qtd. in Narula 23).

Often the Dalits, because of their caste system, are deprived of the fundamental rights. Moreover, they have been denied the right to possess any land or property of their own. Therefore, they are forced to work as laborers and have to depend on the upper caste community for employment. As per Manu's law, *seva*<sup>2</sup> is the only way in which a *Shudra*<sup>3</sup> is recognized. (Paswan 126) In this story also, Joiti and her husband, Somo both work as field laborers but the whole responsibility to run the house comes on the shoulders of Joiti after her husband is physically paralyzed and becomes bed ridden. Somo interferes to stop a fight between two brothers

<sup>1</sup> *Shedho* means a patch of land left uncultivated around the field or farm in which grass grows naturally.

<sup>2</sup> *Seva* means service.

<sup>3</sup> *Shudra* are the people from lower strata of society.

Bhago and Baldev, sons of Punja Patel. He gets injured by the blow of a hoe when Bhago tries to hit it on Baldev (15). This incident not only shows Soma's benevolence and fearless nature but also exposes the coercion of the hot-tempered upper caste landlord. Moreover, it also discloses the timidity and helplessness of Dalit labourers who initially aggrieve towards Bhago but after some time, they shun the matter. Moreover, the abusive words of Bhago Patel, "You, bloody *Dhedh*" (15) depicts the derogatory language used by the upper caste people for the lower caste. This also shows that they do not value life of a Dalit. On the other hand, his father Poonja Patel secretly gives money to Joiti for the treatment of her husband and Joiti accepts the money without blaming his sons or asking for more money for the treatment.

But this does not mean that there is no injustice and exploitation. Joiti tries everything for the treatment of her ailing husband. The money she received from Poonja Patel is not enough for treatment. That is why she constantly thinks about money as how she would make arrangements to buy medicines for her husband. She is constantly worried about running the house with limited means. After returning exhausted, working the whole day on the farm, her tension and perplexity is seen in the black dots of the burnt *rotlo*<sup>5</sup> that she makes. She adjusts the edges of the *rotlo* by pressing the sides of it, but she cannot settle down the storm of her thoughts. She thinks, "I don't have money for medicines, from where should I bring the money? I can take money from Baldev Patel but..." (21). This reveals her worry and her psychological state of not having enough money, the perplexity in her mind is not only about the economic crisis but she is also in doubt whether she should ask Baldev Patel for money or not. She fears that if she borrows from Baldev, she will have to 'pay' a price for it. She knows Baldev may sexually harass her at the cost of lending money. Working in the fields and homes of non-Dalits, Dalit women often feel insecure and face the danger that they may become victims of sexual abuse and violence and above this, they are not in a position to resist against this exploitation because they are in need of work. The dependence on non-Dalits prevents Dalit women from planning work routines where they can avoid entering non-Dalit spaces and escape from the experience of being humiliated every day (qtd. in Shah 201). But, after her husband's death, Joiti does not have any other option than working in the field of Baldev. Joiti's plight is that she is a widow, poor and, to top it all, a Dalit woman.

Though being an insider, Harish Mangalam is aware about the condition of many women like Joiti, he depicts the story of Joiti with great sympathy. But in Dalit society where not many Dalit women are educated and cannot write about themselves, the position of Dalit male writer becomes significant. Harish Mangalam with his position tries to show how male gaze operates in the story. Baldev lustfully looks at the Joiti everytime she appears. When Joiti tries to escape him, her vulnerability and lack of support of her husband, Patel feels all the more powerful and begins to treat Joiti like an object. In such a situation, Joiti needs to take charge of herself and to raise her voice against this mischievous behavior of Baldev but she doesn't do anything even once. The assertion of agency and rebellious nature of Dalit woman is somewhere missing in this story, as one can find in the stories by other Dalit female writers like Chandraben Shrimali and Daksha Damodara. Chandraben Shrimali in her short story titled *Bas Have Bahu Thyu* shows the aspiration of a Dalit woman, Manshi who wants to become lighthouse for those Dalit women who are helpless, widow and not physically capable to lead their life. (Shrimali 17) Her fearless nature and her desire to fight against the social evils, becomes visible in the story. Even she takes a morning walk on the day of her husband's death anniversary, showing her progressive nature that she is not merely submissive to Hindu rituals and customs. (Shrimali 17) In the same light, Daksha Damodara also shows that now Dalit women are not helpless who surrender to every situation, but they can raise their voice when it is needed. Within the novel *Savitri*, she presents how Savitri encourages her husband Jyotirao to not get frustrated by the behavior of the upper caste people when he is insulted by upper caste people at the marriage ceremony. Rather, she tells him to convert his weaknesses into strength. She says, "O master, transform this fire of insult into the torch of revolution. Try out the root of our agonies and choose the constructive path in place of the destructive path for uprooting these causes" (qtd in Nimavat 94). In these stories, it can be seen that the treatment of Dalit women at the hands of Dalit male writers and that of Dalit female writers is different. As Sharmila Rege in her book titled *Writing Caste Writing Gender* also argues that Dalit men representing Dalit women put forward their own views on behalf of Dalit women.... Similarly, when upper caste women talked about oppression, they considered Dalit women to be similar to themselves and talked about a generalized victimization of womanhood...this kind of theorization of experiences is problematic because the actual experiences of different sections of women in society are very different. A Dalit woman is doubly cursed as a woman and as a Dalit. (54)

Moreover, the Dalit male writers and Dalit female writers vary in terms of emotion, nature of narrative and a sense of family and community reflected in their writings. When Dalit female writers depict about their fellow Dalit women, they present Dalit women's perspective on various things such as what makes her world, her take on societal evils and her anguish, hopes and fear and also a remembrance of the past. When Dalit female writers write stories from Dalit women's perspectives, the story becomes internally much intensifying.

<sup>4</sup> *Dhedh* comes under the Scheduled caste of India. Certain upper caste communities have considered them to be an Untouchable group, they are also called Bhangi.

<sup>5</sup> *Rotlo* is bread or loaf made out of millet and bigger in size than *chapati*.



However, it is important to bear in mind that when Dalit male writers present Dalit women's life, their condition in rural locale they sometimes fail the empowerment angles of Dalit women as is often present in the writings of Dalit female writers. In this case, Harish Mangalam's character, Joiti is much different from Chandraben Shrimali's Manshi and Daksha Damodara's Savitri. As Joiti is not educated, not financially sound, not having any family support, moreover she is living in a village. Rather than showing her resistance, Joiti prefers to avoid the situation and escapes from the gaze of Baldev as she has to live in the village and is in extreme need of money. But she has to face Baldev everyday as she is working on his field. When Joiti tries to put a bundle of dry wood on her head, her *saree*<sup>6</sup> slips down from the head and she uses both her hands to settle the bundle. As her hands are over her head, Baldev tries to look at her cleavage visible from her blouse. He touches her with his elbow by helping her to settle the *saree* and bundle it on her head. Joiti becomes cautious for a moment and walks hurriedly towards her home (42-43). This is the third time that Baldev approaches her in the name of help. This act of harassment shows that the dominant castes are overconfident that whenever they approach Dalit women, they are sure that they can never be challenged (qtd. in Irudayam 332). Though Joiti is well aware of his nature, she is so helpless that she cannot resist the situation. Therefore, she silently endures this sexual harassment at the hands of Baldev. Therefore, Mangalam is successful in depicting a Dalit widows' plight and helplessness but he is not able to inculcate resistance as a means of self-empowerment for the Dalit women. Though he sympathizes with her, he is not able to empathize with her like the other women writers. At the same time, it may not be wrong to consider Mangalam coming closer to the ground reality positing the inability of a Dalit woman to resist. In a way he raises a question, do Dalit women really have a choice to resist? Who among them are coming forward and resisting? Is it the educated urban Dalit women resisting or others as well? Probing into these questions could well justify Mangalam's stance and point of view in the novel. In *Untouchability in Rural India*, this has been somewhat reasoned out as follows:

Fearful of losing their jobs, Dalit women silently submit to sexual harassment.

If the case somehow becomes public, the Dalit woman is blamed, without any stigma attached to the non-Dalit men. (qtd. in Shah 201)

This is what happens with Joiti too; the entire village talks about the affair of Joiti with Baldev as Pasho Pandya has seen Baldev trying to touch Joiti in an inappropriate way. Now villagers use derogatory words for Joiti and abuse her, and no one even wants to stand by her. Instead of knowing the truth, people start gossiping about her and her character. A person like Dharmo tries to describe her character by saying that she has become a widow and she is supposed to behave like a poor-helpless widow. Moreover, he judges her on how much she respects elders as he says that generally she keeps a veil to show respect, but he never thought that she can turn out to be a different person who has an affair with an upper caste man. (53) Due to her position as a Dalit woman which is the lowest of the low in the power structure of caste and gender, Joiti is considered to be subservient to the upper-caste man. She is the one who suffers the stigma of being "sexually immoral" in the society. Her caste position is also one of the reasons that makes her inferior in both caste and gender dynamics, whereas, in the case of upper-caste women, they are considered to be "pure" and protected from public visibility. (Singh 168). According to Samata Sanghatana,

.... Dalit harassment of upper-caste women gains sympathy across the Hindu society while upper-caste aggression against Dalit women, often extreme and unremitting, but naturalized by caste privilege, regularity and lack of protest, goes unnoticed. (qtd. in Rajan 230)

This inequality and injustice raise a question about the role of society or *panchayat*<sup>7</sup>, who constantly criticize widow Dalit woman without any evidence. This matter becomes worse when everyone comes to know that Joiti is pregnant though it is Soma's child. Everyone appeals to the *panchayat* to boycott Joiti's family by proving Joiti as "immoral." The violence generated by *panchayat* on Dalit woman is also made legitimate by bringing the question of "morality" of Dalit woman. In this light, Gabriele Dietrich says, ".... control over the women of a community is an integral part of establishing superiority." (qtd. in Rajan 230) Here, the question arises what makes the *panchayat* decide that Joiti is at fault? There is no women candidate in the *panchayat* nor any Dalit candidate who could genuinely understand the problem of Joiti. All members of the *panchayat* belong to the upper caste men though there is a quota system in place for Dalits to have seats in the local *panchayat*. In this context, one report on Dalit women talks about this,

Women's participation, Dalit women's in particular, in the *panchayats* is necessary so that society can develop. Only women will think about women's issues. Only Dalit women can respond to and take a stand on Dalit issues and particularly on Dalit women's issues. In as much as Dalit women's participation is required, they also need to be given support and guidance. Then only can they become capable representatives... Nothing is attainable without exercising authority, and my desire is to increase the confidence of Dalits to fight and gain authority and power in society for their development. (qtd. in Magnubhai 08)

But the reality is that after so many provisions are made for Dalits and particularly for Dalit women, their conditions in rural areas are the same as earlier. Dalit women are still most vulnerable and ignorant that makes

<sup>6</sup> Saree is one kind of garment worn by Indian women.

<sup>7</sup> Panchayat is the people's court in the village.

upper caste males as well as Dalit males take undue advantage of Dalit women. One such form of domination over Dalit women within Dalit household is the power of decision-making regarding Dalit woman's marriage. In the case of Joiti, it is the members of her family and other members of Dalit community, who decide about Joiti's remarriage. As a result of this, Joiti is remarried to Dhanji in another village and that too without asking her. (61) But at Dhanji's house, Joiti does not need to do laboring work as they have their land for farming. Moreover, Dhanji is capable of earning money for his family. Therefore, he doesn't want Joiti to do the laboring work. It shows that when Dalit men can afford to work alone outside, they stop their wives and other females from working outside. In this context, Dalit women seem to appreciate this restriction on their mobility because their burden of work reduces, and they do not have to face sexual and other harassment also. (qtd. in Shah 201)

Such an attitude of not going to work just to avoid exploitation and harassment, is not a permanent solution to this problem and it also shows Dalit woman's dependence and subservience to her husband and his family. For this, Dalit women need to fight against the injustice and assert their agency for that if needed, they can take help of constitutional laws. One such law is article 14 under which the Indian Constitution ensures equality by providing that the State shall not deny any person equality before the law or the equal protection of laws within the territory of India (qtd in Desai 46). For enabling Dalit women to take legal actions against injustice and violence, there is need to make them educated and financially independent.

Earlier, Joiti was financially dependent on the upper caste landlord as she earned her living through the daily wages, employment and laboring in fields. Moreover, because of the stigma of untouchability, there are not many options available for employment. R. Balakrishnan says,

The caste system is an economic order. It prevents someone from owning land or receiving an education. It is a vicious cycle and as an exploitative economic arrangement. Landowning patterns and being a high caste member are co-terminus. Also, there is a nexus between [being] lower-caste and landlessness...caste is a tool to perpetuate exploitative economic arrangements. (qtd. in Narula 27)

Therefore, the equal share of land in society gives Dalits a respectable status and becomes a means of earning. Moreover, society has to play a significant role to fill the gap that creates inequality and injustice among Dalits. Harish Mangalam also through the title of the novel *Tirad* shows us certain gaps or fissures in society based on the caste system. By symbolically using the title, he depicts how in the story, everyone's relationship with each other bears cracks and how they are struggling to keep a balance. In this vein, the observation of Mafat Ozha is very apt here. He says,

In this novel, there is a sum of cracks. In the beginning of the story, there is a crack between Baldev and Bhago; between Joiti and Somo, there is a crack due to the illness of Somo; between Baldev and Rukhi, there is crack as Baldev is impotent; in a village, there is crack due to the politics of *panchayat* and above all, Joiti is living her life utterly in cracks and those cracks become deeper and deeper with time which makes her life poisonous (qtd in Vegda 306).

Furthermore, with his narrative technique, style and diction, Harish Mangalam vividly presents the rural environment. His use of figures of speech attracts the attention of the readers like a 'graveyard slept by covering itself with the yellow curtain of *puvadiya's* flowers', 'there is stillness on the straight neck of the mountains' (Vegda 306). Here, he uses a simile for the yellow curtain which looks like flowers of *puvadiya* and compares the peak of the mountain with the upright neck of a human. He employs local dialect for not only presenting the social vividness but also for drawing the psychic vividness of the characters and their symbolic characteristics. Throughout the novel, a reader can find the author's ability to handle the style and language of the village. Through the usage of dialogues, narrative techniques and style, one can find complete synthesis between the author's creative point of views and that of the real world. By talking about the peculiar atmosphere of *Tirad*, Mafat Ozha notes,

In the story, the author presents Dalit community, its tendencies, behaviors, social customs and language by keeping proper hold on it and that makes the work more intense. With the usages of symbols as per the situations and narration of the subject, the author makes the readers familiarize with his vision of artistic writings. (qtd in Vegda 307)

Other than narrative techniques of Harish Mangalam, the way he narrates the psychic world of the Dalit women, is also notable. Other than the novel *Tirad*, Harish Mangalam with his short stories titled *Shraddha* and *Dayan*, describes how the Hindu social structure exploits Dalit women physically, mentally, economically and culturally. In the story *Shraddha*, the author presents the life of Dhani whose husband Bachu left her after ten days of marriage and did not return even after four years. But Mankeba, mother-in-law of Dhani, has faith that her son will return some day and for that, she prays every day to Lord *Shiva*<sup>9</sup>. She gets irritated often by seeing Manekba's blind faith in *Shiva*. Moreover, she has a responsibility to the house and her in-laws. For that, she works in the tobacco field where she is molested by Sheth Sundarlal, an owner of the field. Rather than resisting Sheth Sundarlal's molestation, she romanticizes and enjoys it. But later, when she comes to know that Sheth Sundarlal is not a good person and takes advantage of every woman labourer, she feels guilty for what

<sup>8</sup> *Puvadiya* is one kind of medicinal plant.

<sup>9</sup> *Shiva* is Hindu God.

she did. But at the end when she hears the hail of Lord *Shiva* entering the house, her guilt disappears (qtd in Mishra 124-127). Through this story, the author tries to depict the world of Dalit woman, Dhani. The author's treatment of the character, Dhani, is somewhat different from Joiti. His main focus is on a Dalit woman's desire which is somewhere crushed under the burden of her husband's absence and entire responsibility to run the house comes on her shoulder. The economic condition both in the case of Dhani and Joiti, makes them vulnerable at the hands of upper caste landlords. Dhani gets double wages from Sheth and this makes her able to run the house smoothly. She is aware about what she is doing and that is why when she comes to know the reality of Sheth, she does not allow her guilt to dominate her. She becomes composed and takes charge of her life by keeping the faith that her husband will come someday.

Another character in the story titled *Dayan*, Benima who is a midwife, leads her life all alone. She is a seventy-year-old widow and still earns her living by doing midwifery and selling mangoes in the season. She is the one who helps every woman in the village in their delivery, whether one is from upper caste or lower caste. Even though there is a financial crisis in Benima's life, she does not take money for her work that shows her merit. (qtd in Sherrif 97) Moreover, the author by depicting the life of Benima, tries to say that by being a poor Dalit widow woman, she is not dependent on anyone and this is a greatness of her character. But here it is not dependency on upper caste people for work that makes Benima vulnerable. Rather, the author describes the inseparable stigma of untouchability that is attached to Benima. For example, in the story when Pashi, an upper caste woman who has complications in delivering a child, is blessed with the boy with help of Benima and two years later, when Benima sees Pashi and her son, Pashi calls her son to her in order to avoid a lower caste Dalit woman. At that time, Pashi tells her son not to touch Benima (qtd in Sherrif 99). Pashi's son was born with the help of Benima who was the first one to hold Pashi's son but now Benima becomes untouchable for Pashi and her son. This shows the hypocrisy of upper caste society who takes advantage of the lower caste people when they are in need and the very second their work is done, the same people become untouchable for them. This is the condition of Dalit women in our society where they are exploited and harassed in the name of caste, class and gender. With these stories, the readers get a chance to peep into the life of Dalit women and how they are leading their lives in this caste-driven society.

Apart from Harish Mangalam, there are other Dalit writers also, who try to portray the life of Dalit women. In order to depict the bitter realities of Dalit women's life, Dalit writers like Joseph Macwan, Hari Par, Radhavji Madhad, Mohan Parmar through their literary works bring Dalit women's concerns to the forefront. Joseph Macwan in his collection of short stories, *Pannabhabhi* depicts how the widow mother named Lucy, remarries and becomes the victim of sexual harassment at the hands of police, in *Masiha* short story, Joseph Macwan portrays the life of a prostitute. The same depiction can be found in the anthology of short stories titled *Naklank* by Mohan Parmar. In one of his short stories named *Ravesh*, Mohan Parmar shows the Dalit woman, as mentally unstable and depicts the beautiful world which she creates in her mind. Moreover, Bhi. N. Vankar in his short story titled *Kuldipak* depicts how a Dalit mother sells her body to buy the medicines for her son. With his story titled *Meli Mathravati*, Radhvji Madhad puts forward a worst form of violence that makes a Dalit woman end her life. Ganga, a leading character of the story, is exploited sexually by the *Sarpanch*<sup>10</sup>. She exposes *Sarpanch* in front of the whole village but with the thought that her individual struggle is worthless as it does not make any change, leads her to kill herself. On the other hand, the Dalit writers like Hari Par with his short story titled *Somali* presents a very strong and rebellious character. Somali kills the *Sarpanch* of her village who assaults her and her daughter-in-law sexually. But she is not the one who bears this silently, rather rebels and cuts the throat of *Sarpanch* with the sickle. (qtd in Vegda 282-284).

By considering the treatment of Dalit women at the hands of Dalit writers, one can find that varying forms of violence such as physical, sexual, and verbal, are happening on a large scale that target Dalit women. The projection and the representation of Dalit women, in above stories is more or less on the same lines. But with the narration of the psychic world and perplexed mind of Joiti, Harish Mangalam stands out differently from his fellow Dalit writers. Joiti is not only victimized in public and at the hand of an upper caste man Baldev, but she is equally exploited within her own family and community. Though she is the one who bears all the assaults and exploitations, the society makes her feel guilty and does not consider her worthy of being treated with honor and respect. As the honor is centered on the behavior of Dalit women, many a times, upper caste men exercise their authority, power and force over them to bring down Dalit men and also to show their superiority. Moreover, the lack of access to economic sources and the denial to access the land, makes them an exploitable labour force. The lack of a sound economic base further leads them to ignorance of their rights and all these circumstances make them disempowered and vulnerable in society. All these social, economic and psychological cracks in Joiti's life tend to fill up when she gets remarried to Dhanji, though now she remains entirely dependent on her husband. In the entire story, Joiti seems as if she is the sole bearer of all the guilt. The power to resist injustice is somewhere missing in Joiti. The question that continues to haunt is whether for the Dalit woman, there is a safe and independent place of her own?

<sup>10</sup> *Sarpanch* is the head of the village.

## BIO-NOTE OF THE AUTHORS

**Meghana Dalwaniya, (Research Scholar, Central university of Gujarat, Gandhinagar)** has been largely interested in the studies related to marginalized communities all over the world. Her inquiry began by reading about the literature and cultures of the Indigenous communities, Dalit communities and women in particular, she explored complexities of reconciliation and the practical problematic both in literature and life of the people of Aboriginal communities of Australia. She completed her M.Phil on a similar concern from the Department of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies, Central University of Gujarat in the year. Her research briefly covered the notion of Reconciliation and Representation, a critical study of policies and acts by taking selective Australian Aboriginal Plays.

Since, she has been interested in playwriting or theatre as a means of representation by the marginalized communities, she began exploring the plays written in Gujarati particularly by the Gujarati Dalit writers. She is now working on translations of Gujarati Dalit One-act plays and narrating the experiences of marginalization and reclamation of the Dalits in Gujarat. She continues to understand this in the realm of Dalit movements in Gujarat per se. Her research concerns broadly fall under the larger field of translation study, studying aspects of playwriting as a genre and culture studies.

**Dr. Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry (educationist, author and poet)** teaches at the Centre for English Studies at Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. She was recognised as an Inspired Teacher for The President of India's In-residence Program at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi in June 2015. She has been a recipient of the MHRD's Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) course on Marginality and Literature in 2016. She is also associated with The Guru Granth Sahib Project (Translation and Transcreation of selected compositions) an initiative of the prestigious Sikh Research Institution (SikhRI), USA.

Ishmeet has been largely interested in research around issues related to literatures of margins, social movements and studies of violence and trauma. She has also been actively engaged in Comparative Studies and Translations from Punjabi into English. Her recent work has been on violence studies engaging with discourses on women and violence, and 1984 anti-Sikh carnage in Delhi. She is an editor of *Black November: Writings on Anti-Sikh Massacres of 1984 and the Aftermath* (2019); the author of *Texting the Scripture: Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Visionary Poetics of Patrick White* (2016). Editor of *Patrick White: Critical Issues* (2014); co-editor of *Violence, Subversion and Recovery: Women Writers from the Sub-continent and Around* (2019, with Rachel Bari). Her collection of poems is *Forbidden Button and Other Poems* (Signorina Publications, 2020).

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