

# LANGUAGE AND INEQUALITY: DALIT LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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## Abstract

*The language of the Dalit(ex-untouchable castes) becomes the most crucial constituent of Dalit literature. The language used should violently disturb the seemingly natural posture and superficial orderliness of the status quo. The Dalit language goes against the established codes of 'standard language, pure, classical, divine and cultures' - the academic languages. The so-called decency is the most suffocating term for the Dalits and it does stifle the Dalit voice. The Dalit language is decent for Dalits. Language is a medium to express your feelings. The language used by a person is determined by the education he receives and the socio-cultural environment he was brought up in. The Dalit have a different vocabulary and speech. They should deliberately overstep what they are permitted to write, by the rules of the dominant grammar. The Dalit should write as a Dalit. The Dalit's writing should be read like Dalit's, writing and reading are indeed political practice. Dalits being at the lower end of the caste hierarchy have been kept away from education and this is the reason why their language is very different from the textual language used by the upper castes. Dalit literature brings out the discrimination they face in every walk of their life and the atrocities committed on them. An elder person is addressed with respect generally. But in the case of Dalits even an elder person is addressed disrespectfully by the caste Hindus in a singular way. Dalits face discrimination even at their work places. Talent in Dalits would never be recognized, but any success a Dalit achieves would be attributed to the policy of reservation which is an equivalent of affirmative action in the United States.*

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Language is a medium to express your feelings. The language used by a person is determined by the education he receives and the *socio cultural environment* he was brought up in.

Indian society is a hierarchical society divided by caste system.. The language used by upper castes and the language used by *Dalits* had always been different. In some cases the language itself is different and in some the same language is spoken in different ways. Dalits being at the lower end of the caste hierarchy have been kept away deliberately from education and this is the reason why their language is very different from the textual language used by the upper castes.

In the villages Dalits have been pushed in to the separate enclaves on the outskirts. This physical separation from the mainstream life also reflects in the difference in language used and the completely different culture. The fact that Dalits were never allowed in to the mainstream life of society is reflected in the different language used by them. This separation has been endorsed by *Manu Smṛti*, (An important Sanskrit text of Hinduism) where the author, Manu had inscribed rules for Dalits which systematically denied them education and the rules were strictly followed for thousands of years and it was only during the colonial period education became available for Dalits. Terming that Manusmriti was the reason for the discrimination and downfall of Dalits. just before the Indian Independence, India's tallest Dalit leader and the Chief architect of the Indian Constitution Dr.Baba Saheb Ambedkar publicly burnt the copies of Manusmriti and demanded a ban on it.

To quote the discriminatory nature of the text, "The name of a *Brāhmin* should symbolise his purity, A *Kṣatriya*'s name should indicate strength, a *vaiśya*'s name should be symbolic to his wealth and the name of a *Shūdra* should be degrading and repulsive." (Manu Smṛti, 2.31)

Dalits were forbidden from learning and speaking Sanskrit. Women and Dalits were disallowed from speaking Sanskrit, they can use only Prakrit. Sanskrit became an exclusive property of Brahmins. Education was always imparted in Sanskrit, and the scripture which dictated every walk of life has been written in Sanskrit. This has effectively kept Dalits from questioning their position in the society and uniting in the fight for their rights. So this barrier of language has kept the exploitative society alive. This has strengthened the political domination of upper castes.

*Dalit literature* brings out the discrimination they face in their everyday lives and the atrocities committed on them. An elder person is addressed with respect generally. But an elder person if he is a Dalit would be addressed disrespectfully. Dalits face discrimination even at their work places. Talent in Dalits would never be recognised, but any success a Dalit achieves would be attributed to the policy of reservation. A Dalit writer does not have to write in colourful words, but his anguish and pain on the indignities faced by him would come out even in the plainest of words.

The discrimination faced by women is no less in our society. By making woman just an object of beauty, they have been denied the role of an intellectual human. This was very clearly mentioned in the Vedic literature. The rules according to which women should behave have been formulated by the patriarchal society. There is a lot of discussion in the Sanskrit literature about the duties of a woman. Yagnavalkya (Mītākṣar, Chapter 77) states that it's a woman's duty to follow her husband's dictates, and in this lies her salvation. Even if what the husband says is immoral the wife should follow his words without any hesitation.

“A woman, whose husband is away from home, should not entertain, should not make herself beautiful, should not celebrate festivals and should not go out of the house.” (Chapter-84, Mītākṣar)

This implies that a man is allowed to do whatever he wants. He can even entertain himself with other women when he is away from home, but a woman is not even allowed to smile and enjoy the company of friends in husband's absence. Yagnavalkya also states that a man should remarry immediately after his wife's death, without any delay.(Mītākṣar, Chapter-89)

It's also said in Manu Smṛiti that a woman should be under the guardianship of father before marriage, husband after marriage and son during old age.

Dalit women are doubly oppressed, from one side she faces oppression being a Dalit and on the other hand being a woman. A Dalit woman works as much as a man. But after coming back from work a man takes rest, but the woman has to do the household work, take care of the children and serve the husband. Dalit women also go through sexual harassment from the men of upper castes.

Respect towards woman and also the awareness about their rights has developed due to emergence of awareness about democracy and its values in the Indian society. But the development of this awareness has taken thousands of years. During the course of that many movements came into existence and have faced as many hardships to inculcate democratic values in the society. The existence of *Brahmanical* Patriarchal system is as such in the modern world as was there in past. Even today, the Brahmanical Patriarchal heritage wants to enslave woman and *Shudras* by its religious, epical and core values. As the great sage Parashara laments through the symptoms of *Kalyuga*: “The untruth has got triumph over the truth, the Truth is being defeated by Untruth. The robbers have controlled the kings and woman has triumphed over the man. The respect towards elders and the worship of Gurus both have diminished. Teenage girls face pregnancy; all these are the reflection of *Kalyuga*.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The reign in which the women follow the decisive positions and in which the men are helpless to follow the laws made by women is not considered favorable for the Patriarchal society. It may be *Satyuga*, *Treta*, *dwapar* or *Kalyuga* but No society will accept the subjugation of the important position of man by woman. The higher roles are always ascribed to man only as compared to woman in society. As is stated in the above shloka by Sage Parashara that the teenager girl will face pregnancy, here the concept of single parenthood is considered bad. The lawmakers want to lead the society by these values and customs. They impact the masses by emphasizing rebirth, fear from the Hell, and the enjoyment of the Heaven. If the woman does not approach her husband after the menstruation then the Sage Parashara says in this matter:

*Ṛtusnātā Tu Yā Nārī Bhartāraṃ,  
Sā Mṛutā Narakam Yāti Vidhavā Cha Punaḥ Punaḥ.* <sup>[2]</sup>

The woman who after being *Ṛtumatī* does not approach her husband on time, she falls in the Hell after the death and after realizing the Hell she becomes widow. The woman whose husband is alive and she goes on fast by not taking

<sup>1</sup>Pārāśar Smṛiti 1.30-31

<sup>2</sup>Pārāśar Smṛiti 4.14

food, leads to reduction in the life of her husband and falls in the Hell.<sup>[3]</sup> In today's scenario the analysis of those *ancient epics, Shamhitā* and *Purāna* becomes essential. When the followers of primitive thought don't tire of saying: "The ancient civilization of India was great", the famous Indian historian Romila Thapar says:" the ancient book of Brahmanical thought is Rig-Veda".<sup>[4]</sup> Furthermore the historian Suvira Jaiswal states:" in the broader sense it will be right to say that in it the attitude and the reference of all the accommodated thinkers is patriarchal system.<sup>[5]</sup> It is worthwhile to mention here that the great feminist thinker Simone de Beauvoir has considered the Patriarchal system as the outcome of culture. With reference to these three we will represent the condition of Indian woman.

First of all we will talk about the nomenclature of woman, depending on time or reign she was given titles like *Mainā, Strī, Nārī, Grāh, Yodyā, Vāmā, Ablā, Pramadā, Duhitā* etc. The modern Linguistics and Linguists have proved this with the clear-cut evidence that the selection of words for the nomenclature of woman not only the meaning but other factors like the contemporary wise men, anthropologists and the social tendencies also play a role. We are here talking about the changing of the names of women with the historical perspective and the about the views of thinkers about it. These naming words will help us understand the woman of different times.

### THE VARIOUS SYNONYMS FOR WOMAN

1. *Mainā*- in Rig-Veda the word 'Mainā' was used for woman. This is a synonym for woman. The contemporary Sanskrit scholar Yaska while taking about the origin of this word. "*Mānāyanti Maināḥ*" The man respects the woman, therefore she is called '*Mainā*'.<sup>[6]</sup>

2. *Grāh*- this word is also used for woman in Rig-Veda. Yaska while talking about the meaning of this words says: "*Grāh Gacchnti Enāḥ*"<sup>[7]</sup>.....in addition to it Durgacharya has made it clear that as the man approach woman for sex, therefore she is given this title '*Grāh*'.

3. *Strī*- In the Vedic time this word was frequently used and got fame. The word is made of '*Stya*' word. According to Acharya Yaska '*Styai*' is used for the shrieking with shame. Therefore this word is used in this context that she feels ashamed of.<sup>[8]</sup> According to Patanjali due the structure of her body that is established in the world, she has been decorated with the same name.<sup>[9]</sup>

4. *Yodyā*- this word has also been in use since the olden days. She is called so for she attaches herself with man by sex.<sup>[10]</sup>

5. *Nārī*- the word was frequently used by ancient preceptors in the beginning of time. This is made up of nri or nar words. *Nṛ+As+Dīp =Nārī*. The great sage Yaska has created this word by 'Nrit' i.e. dance.<sup>[11]</sup> Due to this quality of woman she was called '*Nārī*'. Sayan has elaborated the meaning of this word and incorporated the absence of enmity in woman towards man in this word.<sup>[12]</sup>

6. *Vāmā*- in the writings and analyses of ancient preceptors '*vama*' word is used for woman. Because it was assumed that woman spreads fragrance, therefore she is called '*Vāmā*'. '*Vayati Saundaryam*' '*Vāmā*' is also the name of great Indian Goddess.<sup>[13]</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Pārāśar Smṛti 4.17-18

<sup>4</sup>Romila Thaper, 'Shakuntla, Text, Reading, Histories', Delhi 1999, from 'Tadbhava' Journal, July 2009. Editor : Akhilesh, Suvira Jaiswal's article, Page Number 35

<sup>5</sup>Romila Thapar, 'Shakuntla, Text, Reading, Histories', Delhi 1999, from 'Tadbhava' Journal, July 2009. Editor : Akhilesh, Suvira Jaiswal's article, Page Number 36-35

<sup>6</sup>Nirukta 3.21

<sup>7</sup>Nirukta 3.21

<sup>8</sup>"*Striyāḥ Satyāyate*", Pārāśar Smṛti 4.1.3

<sup>9</sup>"*Stan Kesavati Strī Shāllomaśaḥ Puruṣaḥ*." Pārāśar Smṛti 4.1.3

<sup>10</sup>"*Striyāḥ Eva Etāḥ Shabda Sprśa Rūp Rasa Gandhahāriṣṭāḥ*." Pārāśar Smṛti Chapter 14, Part 20

<sup>11</sup>Nirukta 3.15.1

<sup>12</sup>Nirukta 4.23

<sup>13</sup>"*Nṛagaṃ Mahāvīrārthinām Upakāritvāt Nārīḥ Nariḥ Nārīḥ*." Sayan Taitariya, Chapter 4.2.1

7. *Ablā-* due to physiological structure of her body she was decorated with this name. But she does not have visible male potential, although the Vedic sages also used to have estimated her mental determination and considered her impossible to control.<sup>[14]</sup>

8. *Sundrī-*The origin of this word is from ‘*Su+Unda* i.e. to wet. *U+Dīpa* = Sundar. She was called ‘*Sundrī*’ for after having a look at her the man gets wet at his heart and his soul liquefies. “*Suṣṭhu Nandayati iti Nairuktāḥ.*”<sup>[15]</sup>

9. *Pramdā-* due her happy and dynamic nature she is called by this name. “*Pramad Saṃmardau Harṣeḥ*” This is also used in another context also, where she excites man by her natural quality.

10. *Duhitā-* she was also called ‘*Duhitā*’. Durgacharya has interpreted this by saying that she is mistreated everywhere she goes.<sup>[16]</sup> “*Duhitā Durhita*”. The father pleases after the departure of his daughter.<sup>[17]</sup> Acharya yaska has taken the origin of this word by ‘*Duh*’ word. According to him she helps please her father and helps him to earn money.<sup>[18]</sup>

What might have been the reason behind the above discussed views of the various Acharyas/Preceptors about the synonyms of woman and her naming and foundation of these naming and their own created qualities and the formation of these synonyms? We can analyze this by beholding here. Through so many synonyms used for identifying the woman, we come to know about the contemporary patriarchal ideology and also helps understand the social condition of woman. According to ancient Scholar Yask and Durgacharya men go to women with the desire to fulfill his lust. Therefore, she is called ‘*Grāḥ*’. Acharya Yask takes the foundation of saying ‘*Strī*’, to *Strī* from her behavior of feeling shy. Acharya Patanjli also directs towards it. according to Yask woman is called ‘*nārī*’ because of her dancing nature. She expects appreciation from man. The word ‘*Vāmā*’ is used for she spreads fragrance of beauty or she talks unfavorable. She was considered physically weak and hence was called ‘*Ablā*’. It is impossible to control her, this was believed from the old-Vedic scholarly age to contemporary world. She was called ‘*sundri*’ because by showing her to man, man feels allured towards her. She was called ‘*Pramdā*’ because she excites man with her body expressions. ‘*Duhitā*’ was ascribed to her for she is to be discarded. Yask and Durgacharya have accepted that while the daughter goes away from her father, the father feels relaxed. *Duhitā*’ was ascribed to her for she is to be discarded These words must be interpreted as follows:

1. The ideologies of Sanskrit Scholars, Acharyas and Critics about woman.
2. The social condition of woman in that particular time frame.

The ideology of Sanskrit scholars becomes clear from the above mentioned adjectives that have been used for the synonyms of woman. Nowhere has she been described according to her inherent qualities. Her qualities just excite the men. The qualities of feeling shy, dancing, burden on the father, ‘*Sundrī*’ are based on the perception of man. They are just the means of excitation for the man. Because man cannot control over her, therefore it is impossible to subordinate her. Here natural quality is that she is ‘*sundrī/ beautiful*. She knows how to feel shy. Because she has natural quality of exciting man. It is questionable whether it is the naming of woman on the basis of her qualities or her disrespect. Is it for the development of her personality or to disrespect her? This is to be thought. The values on the basis of patriarchal system and Varna system were being constructed and within no time these became inherent in the society. The patriarchal and cultural ideology after having a critical look on the Sanskrit books brings out the sugarcoating over religion and the hidden ideology of Mantras. As in order to change the ideology and thinking of layman, the great scholars, Acharyas and the ruling classes play a significant role. These self-framed values, traditions and laws do the work of organizing the masses. If the Sanskrit Acharyas say that the woman is the medium and means of excitation of man or to give pleasure to man, the ideology and thinking of common man can’t be separated from it. we can cite an example from Kalidasa. What kind of analysis had he done about woman in his writings? Could he understand the pain, plight and her internal depth? The woman is only to use. His body and her organs do the work of excitation only. The representation of woman as ‘*Abla*’ projects her weak.

<sup>14</sup>“*Vāmāviruddharūpaṃ Tu Viparitaṃ Sugīyate Vāmen Sukhadā Devī Ten Matā Budhaiḥ.*” Devīyū, Chapter 46

<sup>15</sup>“*Strīya Asāsya Manaḥ*”, Rīgveda 8.33.17

<sup>16</sup>“*Sā Hi Yatraiva Dīyate Tatraiva Duhitā Bhavati.*”, Nirukta 3.3.4

<sup>17</sup> Kṣīr Swāmī Amar 5.1.52

<sup>18</sup>“*Dūre Sati Sā Pituḥ Hitā Paśyaṃ Bhavati Iti Duhitā Uchyate Dogdyervā.*”, Nirukta 3.4.4

It might be that she is physically weak, but she also seems to be weak in her physical expressions. She is less the product of nature more the production of society. When European feminist scholar Simone de Beauvoir says: “one is not born woman but she is made.”

In her famous book ‘The Second Sex’ she has discussed about woman a lot and has given many historical explanations about the concept. There is a dire need to see all these explanations in reference to earlier explanations.

After the analysis of the naming of woman, let us return try to analyze the same, famous and established *mantra shloka* which has been interpreted as shloka related with the ‘Varna’ system.

Brāhmaṇōśya mukhamāsīd bāhū rājan'yaḥ kṛtaḥ.

Urū tadasya yadvaiśyaḥ padbhyām śūdrō ajāyat.. (Ṛgvēda 10.90. 12)

Brāhmaṇōśya mukhamāsīd bāhū rājan'yōbhavat.

Madhyaṁ tadasya yadvaiśyaḥ padbhyām śūdrō ajāyat.. (Atharvavēda 19.6.6)

We never viewed it with the feminists’ point of view. This has similar interpretations for the exploitation of *woman* and *shudra*. How man has been projected as mother/Brahma? Let us investigate it first.

The synonyms used for woman and the representation of Mother/Brahma, these both analyses give us a glimpse of the mental make-up of the thinker of that particular time. Let us proceed with some mantras shaloka of Dharamshatras and Vedas associated with the social condition of woman.

### Conclusion:

Breaking the stereotype of so called traditional Indian classical literature Dalit literature have moved far by creating their own language that reflects the pain and struggles of centuries of oppression, and the cultural difference, redefining the magnificence of literature being different from the brahmanical literature. Dalits had been always kept away from Vedas (or Sanskrit) which depicts Dalits in an inhuman way and especially Dalit women as just a commodity for a comfortable and enjoyable life of upper caste men. This is why there was a huge gap in critical thinking and questioning of Vedas, their positions, and their rights, for centuries. Denial of space in the mainstream society approved by Vedas like Manusmṛiti (later, symbolically burnt by Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar) which also has an inevitable role in the emergence of a different style of writing other than romanticized articulation. The challenges in reaching to the language always kept a huge population as exploitative and favored the dominant sector with huge cultural capital. Even without a colorful language the language of Dalit literature captures the attention of readers looking at the depth of discrimination they face, and their fight for dignity and voice for space in all levels. Dalit women literature reflects multiple discrimination they faces based on the gender, low caste and class. Through number of synonyms used for identifying the women, a deliberate attempt of Vedas can be seen for keeping women in forever subjugation.

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