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Mother's Story: The 'Third Space' for Emancipation in Dalit Women's Life Narratives

By Parveen Kumari¹, Anupama Vohra²

Abstract

In India, Dalit women wrestle not only with gender and economic deprivation, but also discrimination associated with caste and untouchability, which results in the denial of their social, economic, and political rights. Today, Dalit women's life narratives form an important segment of not only Dalit literature, but also world literature. The narration of their sufferings due to gender and caste forms the basis of these narratives. The articulation of the past, which is a "narrative strategy of reminiscence", is the most crucial aspect of Dalit women's life narratives. While narrating the past, Dalit women try to negotiate direction for the future, and their mother's story is the pedestal on which their life story depends: "...a woman writing thinks back through her mothers'" (Woolf 1929: 81). The oppression of caste, class, and gender pushes Dalit women to understand the construction of power structures. In their life narratives, Dalit women narrate their oppressive lived experiences, but simultaneously acknowledge the resilience of their mothers. They see their mothers as a source of strength as they display "tremendous strength in adverse conditions" (Collins 2000: 75). Against this background, this paper analyses the select life narratives of Dalit women: Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2008), Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary* (2006), and Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* (2017). The study underlines the mother's story as a past which becomes the 'Third Space' in Dalit women's life narratives that acts as a space of emancipation for the future generation, thus giving the marginalized voices a space to articulate and redefine the center.

Keywords: Dalit women, Mother's story, Reminiscence, Third Space, Emancipation

Introduction

It is hard to write about my own mother. Whatever I do write, it is my story I am telling, my version of the past. (Rich 1976: 221)

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A mother's story is the foundation of a woman's life. A woman as an individual cannot separate herself from her mother as "The first knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, sensuality, mutuality, come[s] from her mother" (Rich 1976: 218). Nancy Chodorow argues, "...the process of identity formation in girls takes place through continuous attachment to and identification with the mother" (qt. in Glenn 1994: 4). A woman achieves awareness of her existence through observation of her mother's life because she identifies herself with her mother. In this context, Virginia Woolf points out, "...a woman writing thinks back through her mother's" (1929: 81). For many, the mother has an audible and visible appearance in women's writing. The mother's story is not merely a guide for the woman writer but also becomes an agent for social change: "...the mother...frequently becomes instrumental to larger and seemingly more important social change objectives...mothers are accorded agency to affect social change" (O' Reilly, *Twenty-first* 2010: 368). The narration of the mother's story as a reminiscence becomes the source of inspiration as well as the action for rising against societal and familial oppression.

In India, Dalit women wrestle with not only gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination associated with caste and untouchability, which results in the denial of their social, economic, and political rights. Jyoti Lanjewar observes, "Dalit women are also Dalits in relation to Dalit men within the Dalit community. They are thus Dalits twice over insofar as they bear the burden of both gender and caste oppression" (qt. in Basu 2002: 195). Dalit women are victims of double marginalization as they are the targets of discrimination within and outside their community because of patriarchy. Hence, Dalit women are "Dalits among Dalits" (Bhoite 2013: vii), the most harmed and unrecognized human beings.

A Dalit woman writer locates Dalit women's "experiences at the complex intersections between and among gender, class, caste, rural/urban divisions and makes a strong case for human rights for all based on rational thought honed by formal education and mediated by motherwit — a very rich metaphor that points to women's/mother's knowledges" (Deo 2013: xiii). While narrating their "lived experience" (Parham-Payne 2017: 2) with the oppression of caste, gender, and class, Dalit women make the 'mother's story' a "pre-text" (Viljoen 2007: 187) in their life narratives, which is a source of strength and awareness for them.

Life narrative is the "act of people representing what they know best, their own lives..." (Smith and Watson 2001: 1). The narration is the representation of the narrator's own life story. Dalit women's life narratives, today, form an important segment of not only Dalit literature, but also world literature. The narration of sufferings due to gender and caste is the basis of these narratives. The articulation of the past, which is a "narrative strategy of reminiscence" (Christopher 2012: 17) is the most crucial aspect of Dalit women's life narratives. A Dalit woman, while narrating the past, tries to negotiate direction for the future, and her mother's story is the pedestal on which her life story depends. The mother's resilience and an unbreakable spirit against the odds become the source of knowledge for Dalit women to overcome adverse circumstances. The mother's story is the 'Third Space'³ for Emancipation in Dalit women's life narratives. Homi Bhabha emphasizes the location of marginalized subjects as the 'Third space' which is crucial in the life narratives of the marginalized as "Dissent operates in a Third space... space where oppressed and oppressor are both able to come together in the mirror of each other..." (Roberts

³Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* defines "Third Space" as "liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction...This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility...that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1994: 5).

2011: 97). Hence, 'Third Space' is a space created by the marginalized in her/his life narrative which acts as a space where the oppressed and the oppressor come together and the oppressed comes to an understanding of her/his oppression due to the dominance of the oppressor, thus using the Third space as a space of resistance. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography* observe that in the life narratives of the marginalized:

...the "I" is often representative of a larger group's experience at powerful moments of social change and an articulation of the desire for transformation as a social group. (2001: 46)

The 'marginalized subject' in these life narratives represents and is the voice of the whole community to which it belongs and speaks for social change. Against this background, this paper analyses the select life narratives of Dalit women: Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*⁴(2008), Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary*⁵(2006), and Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants*⁶(2017). The study underlines the mother's story as a past which becomes the 'Third Space' in Dalit women's life narratives to act as a space of emancipation for the future generation, thus giving the marginalized voices a space to articulate and redefine the dominant discourse.

Discussion and Analysis of the Mother's Story in Select Life Narratives

Urmila Pawar's life narrative *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* attests to the presence of a powerful mother figure. Urmila Pawar belongs to the Mahar⁷ caste in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. Her mother, Laxmi Pawar, had to weave bamboo baskets to earn livelihood for the family. After her husband's death, her only wish was to educate her children. The title of Urmila Pawar's life narrative "The Weave of My Life" is itself an inspiration from her mother's hardships: "My mother used to weave aaydans" (Pawar, 2008: x). Like her mother, who weaved *aaydan*⁸ for livelihood, Urmila Pawar also knits her mother's memories into her life narrative. The symbol of weaving baskets by her mother is the representation of Urmila Pawar's writing: "The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering, and agony that link us. I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing are originally linked" (2008: x). Writing and weaving both are the means of expression and creation: "text and textiles...are the same thing" (Prain 2014). Urmila Pawar sees her mother as "an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium, her position in society allowed her to use" (Walker 1972: 407).

Urmila Pawar recalls her mother's hardships which motivated her to strive for progress and create her identity and independence through education and self-awareness. Gloria Wade-Gayles comments, "...mothers in [Marginalized] women's [stories] are strong and devoted...they are

⁴Urmila Pawar's life narrative *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs (WML)* is originally written in Marathi as *Aaydan* which was published in 2003. It was translated into English as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* by Maya Pandit and published in 2008.

⁵Baby Halder's life narrative *A Life Less Ordinary* is originally written in Bengali as *Aalo Aandhari* meaning "From darkness to light" (*LLO*, 2006: 73). The narrative was first translated into Hindi by Prabodh Kumar and published in 2002. In Bengali, *Aalo Aandhari* was published in 2004. Urvashi Butalia translated the Hindi version of *Aalo Aandhari* into English as *A Life Less Ordinary*, published in 2006.

⁶Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India* is originally written in English and published in 2017.

⁷A Dalit caste in Maharashtra.

⁸*Aaydan* is the generic term used for all things made from bamboo.

really affectionate" (qt. in Collins 2000: 187). *Aaye*⁹ was a source of support and power which made her confident to fight against injustice. The memories of her mother weaving baskets under a *Vad* tree left a deep impact on Urmila's 'self': "That was the last thing our eyes, heavy with sleep, would take in before we went to bed. And when we opened our eyes early in the morning, she would be sitting in the same place" (*WML* 2008: 64). Despite ill health, her mother continued to weave baskets: "In the past it was my father's hands that worked, now it was hers.... Pressing a rod or pestle into her stomach to lessen her pains, she would continue with her weaving" (*WML* 2008: 64-75). Suzanna Danuta Walters remarks, "The victimization of the mother is carried over onto the daughter" (1992: 145). Her mother's strong will against odds enabled Urmila Pawar to remain brave in unsympathetic conditions.

In her life narrative, Urmila recollects the support of her mother for her. In her school, Herlekar, a school teacher during the study hours always ordered Urmila "to do the dirty work, like cleaning the board, the class, collecting the dirt, and disposing it off" (*WML* 2008: 67). The teacher considered these activities as menial and found her appropriate to perform these duties as she was a Mahar. He once slapped her when she refused to do the work. When Aaye, Urmila's mother, came to know about the incident, she immediately came to her daughter's rescue and support, giving a warning to Herlekar, the teacher:

'...Look, I am a widow; my life is ruined. Yet I sit here, under this tree, and work. Why? Because I want education for my children so that their future will be better. And you treat my girl like this? How dare you?' Aaye was speaking in her dialect in a voice, loud and ringing. Then she thundered, 'Let me see you laying even a finger on my girl again and I'll show you! Let me see how you can pass this road if you do so.' (*WML*2008: 69)

Despite her poor and powerless condition, the Dalit mother not only protected her daughter but also taught her the lesson of "the necessary skills to survive" (Crew n.d.). After this incident, the author recalls: "Guruji did not beat me again. I started going to school on time. And most important of all, I started considering my mother a great support" (*WML* 2008: 69).

The economic, caste, and gender factors make the process of "mothering" (Glenn 1994: 1) painful and problematic. The acknowledgment of the mother's support and the telling of the struggle of the mother is an integral part of the marginalized women's writing. A similar parallel can be drawn in Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" in which she admits her mother's toil to feed and educate her children:

Her quick, violent temper was on view only a few times a year when she battled with the white landlord who had the misfortune to suggest to her that her children did not need to go to school.

She made all the clothes we wore, even my brothers' overalls. She made all the towels and sheets we used. She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover all our beds.... Her day began before sunup and did not end until late at night. (1972: 406)

There are so many "stories of struggle and mothering...considering love and compassion and health and safety for their families, despite a broader social context..." (Dani McClain qt. in

⁹Mother in the Marathi dialect.

Warfield 2019). Despite the hardships, Aaye never gave up her strength of mind as she knew her ways of negotiating were the role model for her daughter. Dani McClain, the author of *We Live for the We*, affirms the struggle of marginalized women of 'mothering' so that: "...you can be the best parent..., and that's going to see your children for who they are and help them find their own self-assurance and dignity" (qt. in Warfield 2019). Urmila's mother's fortitude taught her never to succumb to discrimination, violence, and challenges. She learned from her mother to keep her head high and speak up against inequity and unrighteousness. Thus, Aaye emerged as an agent of rebellion and an inspiration for her daughter to survive in a caste-ridden society and gave Urmila, the author of *The Weave of My Life*, an opportunity to voice the unheard struggle of Dalit women in words.

The lessons learned came to her rescue in critical situations. A farmer once attempted to sexually abuse Urmila. She pushed him and fought him bravely but avoided telling her mother because she knew that she "would have simply torn him apart" (*WML* 2008: 126). The incident substantiates Urmila Pawar's will and determination who, through the observation of her mother's life and her struggle to fight the wrong, realized the power in her 'self' to wrestle any abuse and discrimination that came her way.

Urmila Pawar, in the later years of her marital life, carried out the motherly legacy of care and support, and ensured her daughters became self-reliant. Her daughter Malvika wanted to marry Ravi, a boy from Uttar Pradesh, whom she loved. Urmila Pawar supported her daughter's decision and even went against her husband and other family members for her daughter's happiness. She also inspired her younger daughter, Manini, to assert herself against the relatives and her father who were compelling her to marry Uday just because her elder sister Malvika refused to marry him:

'...Are you willing to marry Uday? I have nothing to say if you are willing.'

'No', she said, 'I am not at all willing.'

'All right then. Tell your father clearly.' (*WML* 2008: 312)

Patriarchy limits choices for women. The mentioned incident shows how Dalit mothers help their daughters to stand against this oppression. Hence, *The Weave of My Life* gives insight into the story of Dalit mothers and their legacy. In her novel *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison reflects upon the importance of "other-mothering" (O'Reilly, *Toni Morrison* 2004: xiii), when she makes the narrator narrate Hagar Dead's need for mother's support and legacy: "She needed what most colored girls needed: a chorus of mamas, grandmamas, aunts, cousins, sisters, neighbors, Sunday school teachers, best girlfriends, and what all to give her the strength life demanded of her—and the humor with which to live it" (Morrison 1977: 311). Similarly, Dalit women need 'Mother's story' to live life with confidence. Aaye became the role model for her daughter Urmila because of her resilience, courage, and determination. Sara Ruddick, in her conversation with Andrea O'Reilly on 'Maternal Thinking', affirms: "I do identify resilient cheerfulness as a virtue of maternal practices. Resilient cheerfulness resists despair and courts hope" (O'Reilly and Ruddick 2009: 21). Aaye's strength of fighting back against familial and social subjugation filled her daughter Urmila with optimism, and she later passed on the similar strength to fight back injustice in her daughters, Malvika and Manini. Therefore, the story of Aaye's struggle becomes a source of inspiration not only for Urmila Pawar and her daughters, but also for marginalized women at large. Hence, telling the mother's story acts as a "...third space...a place where the oppressed can plot their liberation" (West 2016: 53). Dalit women are oppressed in public as well as private

spaces because of their gender and caste. Hence, articulation of mother's sufferings becomes the Third space where Dalit woman narrators revolt against oppression.

Akin to Urmila's Aaye's story in *The Weave of My Life*, the story of Baby Halder's mother is the sub-text of her life narrative *A Life Less Ordinary*. Baby belongs to Halder¹⁰ caste. Her life narrative represents the reminiscence of her mother, Ganga, a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her husband, Upendranath Halder. Unable to cope with the long absence and insensitive behavior of her alcoholic husband, Baby's mother abandoned him and her three children and left the house along with her youngest infant son. This mother's life reflects the appalling helplessness of Dalit women: "...the ability for mothers to foster their children's preservation and growth is hindered by social factors like domestic violence" (Sara Ruddick qt. in Jenny N. n.d.). The mother's anguish made Baby conscious about the physical and mental victimization of Dalit women because of the patriarchal aggressive behavior. Upendranath Halder had a job but sent money home occasionally: "...there were gaps of several months" (*LLO* 2006: 1). The money came irregularly, and Baby's mother made efforts to apprise her husband, but he never bothered to respond or communicate. It became hard to provide even the basic amenities to the children, which added to Ganga's mental distress:

Ma found it very difficult to make do: how could she not?... Ma asked Baba's friends for help but none of them was in a position to take on the burden of another family. Ma also thought of taking up a job, but that would have meant going out of the house, which she had never done. And after all, what work could she do? Another of her worries was: what would people say? (2006: 1-2)

Baby's mother was not educated and remained dependent on her husband for her and her children's maintenance: "A woman who is illiterate and does not know what her rights are and who is not allowed to move about without her husband's permission is not likely to take the initiative..." (Thomas 2005:142). Baby's mother suffered mental agony, and she deeply probes the suffering of her mother, "She was in a terrible state. I was a little better off than her because at least I had some friends, especially Tutul and Dolly, whom I could always talk to and who loved me a lot" (*LLO* 2006: 2). Her mother suffered mentally and emotionally and had no one to share her pain with. The situations became unbearable when her father (Upendranath Halder) took her elder sister Sushila to Karimpur to settle her marriage without asking and informing his wife, thus making her a "non-entity" (Jacob 2009: 2) with no right or say in decision making for her children's future, leaving her "to adopt...the stereotyped role of a weak and helpless woman... to ensure complete dependence on the male sex" (Sharma et al. 2013: S245). Baby recognizes her mother as a fellow victim to integrate her 'self' and 'existence' with her mother:

Many daughters live in rage at their mothers for having accepted, too readily and passively, 'whatever comes.' A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman.... The mother's self-hatred and low expectations are the binding rags for the psyche of the daughter. (Rich 1976: 243)

¹⁰Halder(in the Bengali language): A Dalit caste in West Bengal.

The author recollects her mother's suffering: "...she couldn't live like this anymore" and "one day, with grief in her heart and my little brother in her arms, she just walked away from home" (*LLO* 2006: 3). According to Caroline McGee, "...mothers are also concerned about the impact of the domestic violence on their children and for many of the mothers, "this is the trigger which led to their leaving" (2001: 69). Baby's mother also opted for the same choice. Sara Ruddick observes, "Some mothers are incapable of interested participation in the practices of mothering because of emotional, intellectual, or physical disability. Severe poverty may make interested maternal practice...nearly impossible" (qt. in Jenny N. n.d.).

Suffering and the absence of a mother in her life became a bitter part of Baby's 'self'. She and her brothers were always on the search for their mother. After many years they found her and brought her home. However, there was no feeling or emotional expression on her mother's face:

Anger, sadness, happiness: didn't she feel any of these at seeing her children after so many years?... I looked at her again. She looked ill. She spoke very little. She still had *sindoor*¹¹ in her hair, a large *tika* on her forehead. But for whom? For a man who had no time to remember her, who was doing perfectly well without her? (*LLO* 2006: 115)

Sindoor and *tika* are the symbols of a married woman in Indian society. She must exhibit these symbols on her body till her husband is alive. It does not matter how much she is ill-treated; a wife has to display these symbols as markers of her devotion and loyalty to him: "The ways of enslaving woman in the patriarchal society are very subtle. The total sacrifice of personality is framed out in such a way that if she doesn't follow the code of conduct, she will underestimate herself...the intention of a man to enslave her is transformed into her own intention to become a *pativrata*¹²" (Athalye 2003:72). Later, when her mother died in a hospital, Upendranath Halder did not bother to visit her in the hospital as he was happy with his second wife.

The sufferings of her mother had already sown the seeds of a rebel in Baby, which stresses "the daughter's identification with...the mother" (Gardiner 1981: 356). When Baby also went through the same mental and physical violence in her marriage, she also rebelled and made the same choice. She left her husband, along with her children, and started working as a domestic helper in Delhi. She saw her mother's decision of separation and leaving her children to her husband as an act of resistance and anger against the oppression and oppressor. Taking a cue from her mother's life, Baby got the spirit to revolt against the oppressor, but she did not want her children to experience the same anguish which she suffered in her life because of the absence of her mother, so she chose to take her children along with her to Delhi.

Baby's mother saw education as the only way to emancipation from the sufferings a woman endures because of her marginalized position in a patriarchal society: "...despite all her difficulties, [her mother] did not let them stop studying" (*LLO* 2006: 1). Even in difficult circumstances, her mother kept telling her to study well: "Education and economic upliftment should form the first step in their overall objective of women's empowerment" (Sinha and Sinha 2007: 247). Ganga's [Baby's mother] emphasis on education for her daughter is itself a narration of the lost dream of being somebody and to have the power to do away with mental agony and sufferings which she endured because of being illiterate:

¹¹A traditional red or orange-red colored cosmetic powder from India that is usually worn by married women in the part of their hair.

¹²In South Asia, among Hindus: a woman who is faithful and devoted to her husband.

...“crazy,” “Sainted” mothers and grandmothers. The agony of the lives of women who might have been Poets, Novelists, Essayists, and Short-Story Writers (over a period of centuries), who die with their real gifts stifled within them. (Walker 1972: 403)

Baby Halder kept alive this urge for learning infused in her by her mother. Prabodh Kumar, her employer, recognized this urge in her and motivated her to write her life story by providing her with a pen and notebook, “Here. Write something in this notebook” (*LLO* 2006: 152). With that pen, she wrote about her mother's struggle and her sufferings and documented her resistance against oppression and suppression. She ends her life narrative, “Had she been alive today and seen that her Baby was able to read and was learning to do more, how happy she would have been” (*LLO* 2006: 174).

Hence, the articulation of the untold story of her mother's silence in Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary* becomes the space of resistance against the double oppression suffered by Dalit women in society and within the family. Carolyn Kay Steedman in “Stories” states that the mother “shaped [her] childhood by the stories she carried from her own, and from an earlier family history. They were stories designed to show [her] the terrible unfairness of things” (1998: 244). Mother's sufferings became the distressing memory of Baby's childhood and made her conscious about the patriarchal double standards which evaluate women more strictly than their male counterparts. The situation becomes more difficult in the case of Dalit women who already are on the extreme periphery of the societal rules and codes because of the caste system. A similar narration of mother's struggle can be found in Sujatha Gidla's life narrative *Ants Among Elephants*. A daughter can identify and relate to the untold sufferings of her mother. Luce Irigaray, a French feminist, psycholinguist, and cultural theorist states:

The relation with the mother is a mad desire because it is a “dark continent” par excellence. She remains in the shadow of our culture. [...] Could the father substitute the uterus with language? But his law refuses any representation of that body, that first love. It is sacrificed to form the empire of representation, which privileges the masculine and the human race. (qt. in Stevens 2015: 94)

The Dalit mother is always silent and cannot be represented in the texts which endorse patriarchy and casteism. Hence, Sujatha Gidla writes her life narrative “in white ink”¹³ (Cixous 1976:881), to articulate her mother's story making it a ‘Third Space’ where “silence speaks” (Rigney 1991:3). Sujatha Gidla belongs to “an untouchable”¹⁴ (*AAE* 2017: 3) caste from Andhra Pradesh. In her life narrative, she makes her mother's [Manjula] hardship as the representation of Dalit women's struggle. Manjula suffered discrimination and alienation as a student; she “felt so out of place” (*AAE* 2017: 190) in Benares¹⁵ where she was pursuing post-graduation in History. She studied hard to get first division. However, she ended up securing second division as Professor R.K. Tripathi held strong caste prejudices: “Then, like a photo developing, a picture formed in her mind. She had made top marks in all the papers except for those that were graded by Tripathi.... His venom had a delayed effect, and Manjula's career would suffer” (*AAE* 2017: 196). Manjula's story of

¹³“Writing in white ink,” means resisting the stable language of patriarchy and creating feminine writing on a literary as well as on a metaphorical level.

¹⁴ Dalit in traditional Indian society.

¹⁵The former name of Varanasi.

victimization as a student represents the agony of Dalit students who are given low grades, failed and at times indirectly compelled by the teachers because of their personal caste-based grudges to commit suicide: “Jaspreet Singh [a student at the Government Medical College (Chandigarh)]...was stunned to find that he had failed community medicine...he was even more devastated by the alleged reason: His professor was determined to flunk him because of his caste” (Overdorf 2011). Meena Kandasamy writes that Dalit student’s suicide is:

not just an individual exit strategy, it is a shaming of society that has failed him or her...education has now become a disciplining enterprise working against Dalit students: they are constantly under threat of rustication, expulsion, defamation, discontinuation. (qt. in Biswas 2016)

Hence, the educational institutions which are meant to be the means of change and ending inequalities, ironically end up as the sources of anxieties and restlessness because of the teachers’ indifferent attitudes and caste prejudices.

Dalit women's sufferings in the workspace hinder economic progress and hence lead to misery and dependence. As a lecturer, when Manjula went to report at her place of posting, the Brahmin principal harshly told her: "You have no job here. I won't let you report" (*AAE* 2017: 244). Highlighting the effect of caste discrimination on Dalit women in the educational institutions, Bhagwan Das writes: "Universities and colleges abusing the power and authority given to 'autonomous bodies' close the doors of progress to students, teachers, and employees..." (qt. in Mukherjee 2007: xxiv). Hence, the insensitive and discriminatory outlook of the people in authority and power closes the doors of progress and empowerment of Dalit women. By narrating her mother’s struggle, Sujatha Gidla “questions all oppressions, disturbs all complacencies” (Holmstrom 2012: xiv) worn by Dalit women.

Sujatha Gidla realized the marginal existence of Dalit women through the observation of her mother’s deplorable condition. Women occupy a secondary place at home with no right to the money they earn and are denied decision making, which pushes these helpless women to the margins. Manjula was educated and working, but all her money was taken away by her brother and his friends: “And all of them leeches off Manjula for their expenses” (*AAE* 2017: 202). As a woman, she was denied the right to economic independence. The lack of awareness about their rights and marginalized position compels Dalit women toward misery. They are even denied the right to choose a life partner on their own. Manjula was married to a man chosen by her brother who turned out to be violent. He had no concern for the family: “He took his mother’s and Manjula’s gold chains and pawned them...” (*AAE* 2017: 282). When she confronted him, he beat her mercilessly: “A hand grabbed Manjula by her hair, lifting her right out of bed and onto her feet.... Then he slapped her face. Manjula screamed” (*AAE* 2017: 283). Domestic violence reduces a woman to a non-human existence: “...Dalit woman... labors outside her home...When she comes home, her husband will be waiting to snatch her hard-earned money which is often the only source to feed the family. If she refuses to give him the money, the husband beats her up” (Ghosh 2007:58). Domestic violence is a threat to the dignity, self-confidence, and self-respect of a woman as Susan Schechter states, “Domestic violence is not simply an argument. It is a pattern of coercive controls that one person exercises over another and abusers use physical and sexual violence, threats, emotional insults, and economic deprivation as a way to dominate their victims and get their way” (qt. in Kaur and Garg 2008: 73).

The empathy and identification with the mother's sufferings reflect in the writings of women. The identification of herself with her mother as a fellow victim motivated Sujatha Gidla to make her mother's story a central part of her life narrative and therefore a space of articulation of pain and protest their victimization. Discussions of female identity thus inevitably return to the special nature of the mother-daughter bond, and "female identity bears special relevance to women's empathic literary identifications" (Gardiner 1981: 356).

Mother's story forms an inseparable part of Dalit women's life narratives: "...the autobiographical project symbolizes the search for origins, for women a search for maternal origins" (Brodzki 1998:157) where "The constitutive is reconstructed from the constituted" (Brodzki 1998: 158). Dalit women's life narratives are the reconstruction of the already existing stories which signify the search for maternal roots, giving meaning and shape to a Dalit woman narrator. The mother's story in Dalit women's life narrative acts as a "Third space of enunciation" (Bhabha "Cultural," 2006: 157) where articulation acts as resistance to the subjugation and becomes the means of liberation from oppression. The mother's story in the life narratives of Urmila Pawar, Baby Halder, and Sujatha Gidla renders voice to an unarticulated story. This unspoken story has remarkable implications and importance for marginalized and suffering women to gain hope and an indomitable will to survive as "within the reality of our universal inadequacy, uncertainty and blindness is a limitless capacity to reach out to one another, to hold one another, a limitless energy, a limitless empowerment which is available and accessible directly in our finite limited condition" (Kogawa qt. in Vohra 2009: 228). The mother's story in Dalit women's life narratives becomes the space of emancipation for women at large and Dalit women in particular which inspires them to fight back to break free from the shackles of dominance, subjugation, and overlapping oppressions of caste, class, and gender.

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