

### Chapter 3

## Spellings: Women's Reading Beyond the Binary Territories of Upper and Lower

### Foreword

Today You came over to dinner for the first time

You not only came, you forgot your caste and came

But .....

With a smirk you said Oh My- Do you serve chutny koshimbir this way? (Bansode 49)

Hira Bansode's "Bosom Friend" starts on a note of fragrance. It is the fragrance of memories, desires, surprise, hope and fresh *chutny*. Bansode is overwhelmed receiving her upper-caste friend for dinner at her place. This visit is the assurance of no hierarchy but equality. It is the meeting of two humans where there are no submissions. The first paragraph summons several images to synthesise and express Bansode's unbound joy of acceptance. The joy of acceptance stems from problematisation of self-reading of a Dalit woman. Playing Shabari of the *Ramayana*, who is imprinted on the pages of history for her unconditional reverence and dedication towards Lord Rama, Bansode serves *chutny* alternating between happiness and anxiety of rising out of her fragmented past. *Chutny* not only adds colours and health to the Indian food but also completes the food adding power to it. It is the binding element of the Indian food, shuttling across wide ranges of Indian plates across time and space, paradoxically, dissolving and nourishing the diverse flavours of India. The mesh of symbolism and cultural allusions created by the images of Shabari and *chutny* not only highlights Bansode's flight from the world of reality to the world of imagination where space of social realities is insignificant but also relates her experienced

reality to the universal experience of oppression faced by women of lower-class and lower-caste. The upper-caste rich friend soon restores the chaos by her sudden pouring, assuring and widening the gap between the sky and the earth leaving Bansode ashamed and devastated. Bhima and Baby undergo the same emotional conflict as Bansode when the bonds of sharing and solidarity break through the load of discrimination and subordination.

### **Thrity Umrigar's *The Space Between Us***

Born a poor woman, abandoned by her husband, Bhima lives in a slum with her granddaughter Maya. Their small dwelling is furnished with poverty. The floor is of mud and in a fraction of a second, the entire hut of Bhima can be crossed. The roofs of the slum huts are patched and the drains smell poison. Work of the slum women begins early, while they have to line up with bones breaking heavy pots at the communal tap for water, the untouchable, *harijan* women would clean the heaped shit lying in front of the communal toilets. Thrity Umrigar while detailing the work of a *harijan* woman in *The Space Between Us* informs us that at times Bhima sitting on her mud floor observes this *harijan* woman sweeping away the pancakes of human filth. She feels miserable at the plight of the *harijan's* exploitation and therefore, unlike many other women of her slum without considering herself to be *harijan's* superior, Bhima smiles at her. It can be seen that the institutionalised status of the class structure in the cultural matrix of the Indian society is not only backed by the inevitable role played by the division of the labour and economic resources but also by the passive consuming of the constructed cultural meanings. Ironically, the same Bhima has to repeatedly experience this marginalised-harassment herself.

Bhima is also vulnerable to the inherent values and singular meanings stuffed in these class compartments by the dominant class. She is substituted as the *harijan* woman in

her relationship with her upper-class-caste *malkin*, Serabai. Sitting in the dining room, Sera sips her tea from the exotic mug bought by her daughter Dinaz from the Cottage Industries whereas Bhima who has been serving them with all her heart since time immemorial drinks from a steel glass that is set aside for her. Like always, Sera sits on the chair and Bhima has to squat on the floor. Dinaz pokes her mother, she questions Sera's hypocrisy as on one hand Sera addresses Bhima to be their family member and a person she can not exist without yet she can not share her furniture and utensils, "And you and Daddy are always talking about those high-caste Hindus burning Harijans and how wrong that is. But in your own house, you have these class differences, too. What hypocrisy Mummy" (26).

Bhima has been working as a domestic help in Dubash household for more than twenty years now. She has been a thick shoulder for Sera when the latter becomes the victim of gender-based discrimination. Sera's dead husband, Feroz treated her as a heartless body.

Sera's marriage took away her freedom and fulfilment. Feroz cleverly seduced her into marriage but only to make her the victim of his brutal violence. Feroz along with his mother Banu made every effort to destroy Sera's identity and forced her into silent acceptance. They internalised their norms to such an extent in her that she initially could not even notice her utilization. Feroz had weaved a thousand lies to get married to Sera. He had assured Sera of being the only girl ever in his life but she soon gets to know about Feroz's ex-girlfriend Gulnaz. On confronting Feroz about this lie, Feroz retaliated saying that it is not Sera's business to poke into his past relations. Even after severe agony, solitude and seclusion, Sera never retaliated rather she used to wait for Feroz's calls to mend things up.

At times Sera recollects, being gripped by the intense desire to leave Feroz's house but because of the lack of the conviction, she was never able to accomplish that. Sera could not even tell her grief to her parents as marrying Feroz was her own decision. Sera's

torments were not restricted to beatings and abuses, Feroz had also accused her of infidelity. Like many other honest wives, Sera had to suffer a lot. She was targeted for flirting. A mere polite nodding to a waiter made Sera a victim of double standards practiced against women. Feroz and his mother Banu together reduced Sera to nothingness, a body which should not project anything.

But the fact to be noticed here is Sera's lack of action even when she could understand her exploitation. She was conscious of her suppression and yet did not take any adamant step against it. Sera symbolizes the internal fights and pain of those middle-class women who through their education know what is women empowerment but lying under the debris of age-old traditions and customs lack the bravery to pave the way of freedom for themselves. Their class sophistication bounds them in a bond of eternal slavery.

From the beginning to the end, Sera is persuaded, governed, helped and ruled by other agencies. She is always in the positions of subordination to events and people, her act of flattening her relation with Bhima into the economic class structure is also powered by the patriarchal values. She is in the grip of an underlying fear that any outburst is threatening to the entire cultural values she has been brought up in as it is the very existence of her upbringing and that is why she feels, "...exposed under the X-ray vision of Bhima's eyes..." (111) when Bhima encourages her to voice her individuality. Bhima asks her to share her torture with her parents making her see the shame is Feroz's. She tells Sera that the latter does not have to embarrass as the beatings bring out her husband's barbarity. Stereotypically, Sera's condition in the Indian cultural space can be read only as women's sexual victimisation in the Indian family concealing the fact that this cultural space is a made-world of insisted right meanings.

Bhima nurses the wounds of Sera, yet Sera shares the ideology of her men. As Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi in *Daughters of Independence* say that controlling women's

freedom and sexuality keeps the patriarchal social and economic hierarchy intact (57), we can see that the upper-class-caste patriarchy successfully injects the deep-rooted contempt for the lower in their women also. This brings out the contradictions of the upper-class-caste women and also exposes the fact that the upper-class-caste patriarchal structures do not necessarily manifest themselves through physical violence and dictates. They at times rearticulate oppressive ideologies to show a change happening yet, in reality, establish new sets of conventions for their women. They have let Sera enjoy a sense of solidarity in exercising the power over the lower-class-caste woman. The other dimension of this patriarchal oppression is experienced by Bhima. She has internalised and accepted the notion of pollution, that is, the lower in the social hierarchy being impure and untouchables.

If on one hand, Sera's treatment and attitude towards Bhima elucidates one way of curbing women to maintain socio-economic hierarchies, Viraf's sexual violence on Maya shows the other. Viraf is Sera's son-in-law. Sera completely adores her son-in-law. She sees him entirely different from her husband. According to her Viraf is a perfect husband who knows how to take care of his wife. Viraf is the new male, representing the modern classlessness, his individualism is set against the perspectives and dead weight of the traditions followed by the old men like his father-in-law, Feroz, "Without being asked, he removes three plates and sets them on the dining table ..." (68) for his wife, mother-in-law and himself. However, moving away from the past does not mean moving away from the conventional freedom and constraints of the masculinity and femininity respectively. As Dinaz is pregnant, Viraf is not able to control his lust on seeing Maya, Bhima's granddaughter who nursing the paralysed Banu in their apartment. Viraf's act of exploiting Maya's sexuality keeps both the gender and socio-economic hierarchies intact.

Viraf has come to see Banu, Sera's mother-in-law and exploits Maya finding her alone. Nevertheless, what is new is the way Viraf justifies the crime of an upper class

man. He gives altogether a new perspective to the heinous crime of rape. Born in the new age, Viraf is still sure about the sanctity of marriage. It is the most important social relationship and has to be protected against the threats of all the other unjust relationships. Despite knowing this fact when Viraf could not restrain himself from the urge of sensual gratification, he, in order to escape punishment, gives Maya the limited liberty to articulate female sexual desires which are otherwise considered to be profane in the Indian patriarchal society, "... feeling the tension in his chest muscles, and somehow recognizing, with an ancient, primal wisdom, that she was the cause of that tension, that she was the reason for his shallow breathing. And her awe turning to pride..." (276-77). Maya loses her reason in the bodily attraction and this gives Viraf a license to fulfil his concealing evil. Maya does not desire Viraf rather he seduces her into becoming the object of his desire.

However, at the same time, Umrigar steals this moment to bring out the new features of femininity constructed by the patriarchal society to compliment the emerging attributes of masculinity. Maya's freer and independent space seem to be tailored by the modern patriarchy to pave the possibilities of their own freedom. Patriarchy is letting women sexuality be free from the clutches of past so that it can be styled up in the waters of modernisation. Viraf easily escapes the judicial punishment without abandoning the conventional traits of patriarchy, "Listen Maya ... that was a bad thing you did, tempting me like that, taking advantage of me while I was in a weak mood" (279).

Maya's protest is easily silenced through the trap of victim and victimizer often applied to deal with the issues of sexual exploitation. Viraf does not let her speak rather blames her for the act. He acts like a victimizer who ironically is ready to spare Maya from the punishment on the condition of never harassing him again. He indirectly makes her feel guilty towards Dinaz and her unborn baby. This highlights the entrap of debt that the marginalised owe towards the owner. He makes her remember all the favours that Dubash

family has done for her and Bhima over the years. He is smart enough to show this bond of Dubash family and Bhima as one-sided dealings, “They’ve treated you like their very own, sent you to a good college. You have a bright future ahead of you. Now don’t let this one incident ruin your life. You understand what I’m saying” (279)?

Viraf does not come out as a victim rather he is reminding Maya of the eternal taboos associated with the Indian female sexuality. Women’s breach of the conjugal relationships to get any other type of sexual behaviour approved is sealed to be blasphemous.

The articulation of female sexual desire outside the normative institutions is not acceptable. However, Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Third World women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991) discusses that the victim v/s agency is not the only power equation working, “The relation of power ... are not (only) reducible to binary oppositions of oppressor/ oppressed relations. I want to suggest that it is possible to retain the idea of multiple, fluid structural domination which intersects to locate women differently ...” (12-13). In the light of this claim, Viraf’s act of blaming Maya also reveals the reality of female sexuality playing the pivot of the normative class-caste structure. The exploitation of Maya, a marginalised woman by the rich man has been naturalised. On the other hand, the act of Feroz unjustly accusing his wife, Sera of infidelity, “Flirting with a waiter ... Smiling at him, saying thank you every damn time he filled your glass with water” (165) babbles the false sense of honour and respect associated with the sexuality of an upper-class woman. The whole normative structure can be upturned on the slightest hint of a woman knocking the thick walls of the socio-economic hierarchical boundaries. While the sexuality of one woman is openly disdained, others’ is stringently controlled.

Culture is how we live, but gradually sharing of the meaning of our lived and encountered experiences starts expanding which in turn, expands the cultural space. Thus,

in a way the cultural space is formed through fabrication, exchange and consumption of meanings. Sera since her childhood has been taught to be a good girl. She has grown up to get married. But as Stuart Hall converses in “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms” and “On Postmodernism and Articulation”, the ‘exchange’ as he terms it ‘articulation’, works at two levels; at the first, articulation means expressing the meaning and at the second, it means expressing it in a particular context and manner. When it is placed in the outline of ‘hegemony’, the articulation can produce either acceptance or negotiation. Conversely, it is not just about overpowering or suppression but a play which is open to the changing positions of power. Sera thus is not just a victim of sexual exploitation and violence but of the position from where she can see Indian culture and her identity chained in that static space which can fall from the eternal prestigious position through her speech and can be restored to its purity by her silence.

Sera has to recognise that both culture and identity work at multiple and shifting levels but she is contend with Bhima’s recognition of her pain. She is satisfied simply because someone understands her distress. Bhima is the channel through which Sera is able to merge her dreams with the harsh reality. She is able to explore issues of her life in front of Bhima which she otherwise could not raise in public. This is her only limited space to assert her position of subjectivity.

Maya, on the other hand, breaks this limited space sanctioned to women, she is adamant not to share the name and pain she had gone through the violent act of Viraf. She questions Bhima, “What does it matter who the father is, Ma-ma? The fact is that the baby is growing in my stomach, not his. That makes it my curse and my blessing, no one else’s...” (41). Sera articulation of silence was the act of acceptance but Maya’s is a negation. She agrees to Bhima’s condition of aborting the child, if it calms Bhima. Bhima is scared that soon Maya’s illegitimate pregnancy will be visible to the world. She thinks



shedding the child will shed the shame associated with it, ironically seeing it to be Maya's shame. Bhima who could understand Feroz's barbarity fails to recognize Maya's position. Maya does not revolt against her decision but keeps a condition, "I want Serabai to go to the hospital with me instead of you" (56). Maya's act of denying the space offered by the patriarchal society to women to voice their resentment and pain breaks the dominant ideology and norms, simultaneously paving opportunities for the marginalised to redesign the cultural space. Maya leaves no gap to critique it. On the day when Sera accompanies Maya to the hospital, she locks her house but instead of giving the keys to her old companion Bhima, hands it over to the unknown neighbour. Maya could not control her anger on the constant suppression of the Dubash family. She provokes Bhima asking the reason for not trusting her with the keys. She questions her as to why even after years of dedicated servility, Sera has not handed over the keys to Bhima and instead given them to an unknown stranger?

Maya's loud public breach of the patriarchal codes of governance staggers Sera to an extent that she calls Maya, "... so defensive, so uncultured, so—low-class, really" (119). Sera's words mirror that one common self which lies firmly under the different selves operating in a culture. This self is the symbol of a collective cultural identity that is inculcated through the hegemonic ways of naturalisation. It also brings out the point mentioned by Jyoti Puri in *Women, Body, Desire in Post-colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality*. Puri claims that every class has its own policies to subjugate their women but it is not done explicitly rather through a method of normalization. This process makes it difficult for women to unbind themselves from the multilayered policies (201). In the truth of the above claim, Sera has junctures of difference with Bhima.

Sera–Bhima relationship is constructed through a process of selection and rejection. Their relationship is not born out of correspondence but is the result of a

combination, an equation of similarities and differences just as meanings are produced in the structural world of language. They both view a particular situation with individual underlying thoughts and perspectives and the agreement is the result of a common system of rules and regulations operating in the network of social relationships.

Bhima remembers the way Sera and Feroz had helped her when Gopal was helplessly laying in a government hospital. However, what Bhima is trying to remember is the confident way they spoke to the doctor.

Bhima was left completely mesmerised by Feroz's confidence. It made him a star in her eyes and this gives Bhima the courage to talk to Sera about Maya's pregnancy. Even being bolder than Sera, Sera's artificial world convinces Bhima of her deficiencies. She has struggled through many difficulties and emerged a winner but yet today she thinks that Serabai will solve her trouble.

Sera and Bhima, both recognise and slip into their chairs acquiring the respective social identities, society has ordained for them. This division of women's identity on the basis of class and caste in the same equation is indispensable for keeping the patriarchy and its social hierarchies intact.

Sera's act of generosity will produce a position of agency over Bhima which will not only guarantee the social prestige of her family but also ensure her domesticity through confining her act and agency in the boundaries of middle-class women's yardstick of respectability. As Kumkum Sangari discusses in her "Introduction" to *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, this benchmark is assured by the nature of women's economic work (2-5). However, as already pointed once, the ways of detention are not cabined. Viraf is quick to de-familiarise the domestic subjugation of women in the interest of patriarchy by creating a mist of power and self-control around his wife, Dinaz. Viraf teases her for being her boss's favourite and Dinaz enjoys a sense of power in this. An urban professional

woman who knows the way to claim deserved promotions and perks. Viraf even accepts his lack of such skills and in this acceptance he again launches certain traits which can be seen as the enactments of femininity. He not only lays the new features that the modern woman will have to adopt in order to be labelled successful but also subjugates Dinaz's achievement to the mercy of her boss. Viraf by presenting a different sketch of femininity frees Dinaz from the traditional restrictive role of women only to make her the captive of alternative femininity constructed by patriarchy, "Dinaz immediately sets down her fork and leans over to kiss husband on the cheek. "I'm sorry, janu," she says. I feel the same way, too. Sorry for being so insensitive" (71). Dinaz is the same girl who questions the discrimination that her parents practice towards Bhima. Viraf has allowed Dinaz a cosmopolitan lifestyle but only to dress her according to his desires.

The reality of escapism placed in the space can never be oblivious. Bhima knows that she can not sip tea from the same mugs of the Dubash family. However, the suppression does not only work by providing an escape into a materially better place but also through the access marginalised have to the state power. Bhima takes Serabai to get Maya admitted to a college. It is a big college and Bhima is sure education in this college will get both Bhima and Maya away from the clutches of poverty. They stand in a queue waiting for their turn to fulfil the admission formalities. The clerk attending the students, seeing the condition of Maya, responds in a harsh way and it is Sera who confronts her. She scolds him with the tool of the elite education that she had got in her convent school. Her English-accent scares off the clerk to an extent that he not only completes their formalities but also seeks forgiveness.

The clerk exemplifies the power and position of the upper-class. Nevertheless, the courage of Sera also shows that the woman, who could never re-emerge from her

oppression at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law, outweighs the clerk with a single act of resistance.

Sera tries to escape her gender dishonour also by locating happiness in Dinaz's wedding. The apparent difference of Dinaz's marriage exports her into the world where her fantasies come real. When she sees Viraf linking, "... his right index finger to Dinaz's left ... All the misery with Feroz is worth it because it has brought me to this moment. My daughter has a marriage I never had. And I brought her to this point" (71).

This momentary flowing of identity into the other also provides a sense of control to Bhima. Gopal, Sera and Viraf are the different forces of domination under which Bhima shuttles. Maya becomes Bhima's escape in this situation.

Bhima and her husband Gopal loved each other a lot. Gopal was completely taken aback by Bhima's charm and did every possible effort to woo her and finally persuaded her to marry him. He was very happy marrying Bhima and promised her a life of a queen. He also kept his promise firm for fifteen years but after fifteen years of immense love, Gopal transformed into an agonizing husband.

An accident had occurred at Gopal's factory in which he lost his three fingers. The company without giving the right compensation chucked him out of the job. Gopal could not accept this loss and insult and to overcome the pain took to alcohol. He did not do anything to help Bhima run the household. The loving wife, Bhima understanding the hurt of her husband, could not say anything to him. She took the lead of her house and began managing it all alone. But Gopal like a cruel patriarch started taking the advantage of Bhima's goodness. He got pleasure by beating and exploiting her. Ironically, the Bhima who asked Serabai to share Feroz's shame quietly submitted to Gopal's shame. She accepted his brutality. But one day, when Gopal stole the money she had kept for the medicines of her son, Amit, Bhima changed into wrath and she with all her courage

thrashed Gopal publically. Bhima's freedom of expression resulted in societal chaos and Gopal avenged the explosion of her anger in public by abandoning Bhima and their daughter Pooja alone to live. He took them soon with him.

In this turbulent time, Sera employs the tools of empathy and sympathy to ensure the regulation of existing socio-economic structures of power. She gives Bhima the knowledge of the world which is otherwise alien to her. This knowledge, in turn, gives Bhima the temporary power to see and understand the world in a different way. She expresses gratitude for the way Serabai shows her the obscured truth of the political world. It is Serabai who shows her that it is not Muslims or Hindus who are bad but the politicians. Bhima could not first trust this reality but, "... then Serabai took it upon herself to translate parts of the newspaper for her, and Bhima learned about the burning of Muslim villages by Hindu mob and how the politicians played each group against each other. Then Bhima stopped hating the Muslims and started hating the politicians instead" (308).

Ismat Chughtai in "Kallu" also deals with the same issue of lower-caste education. "Kallu" is about the victimisation of a poor young boy at the hands of an upper class family and especially, Mumani. Chughtai in the first part of the story makes the reader examine if the basic human rights of lower class people enshrined in the Constitution are successfully delivered by the society. She also raises the issue of lower class exclusion from domains of knowledge. The extreme poverty also contributes to their lack of education and progress. Kallu, the seven-year-old boy does all the work for two rupees a month. One day while playing with the daughter of the house, Salima Bi, he in all his innocence asks her if she would marry him, overhearing this conversation, Mumani Bi throws a sandal at Kallu in a rage and asks him to leave the house immediately. The mother is strictly against the alliance because of his lower class. However, the now Deputy Collector, Kallu/ lower class self that Chughtai represents in the second part, rejects the dominance. He still loves Salima

Bi, and on even knowing the declining social and economic position of her family wants to marry her. Mumani even now is unable to accept the relationship as it entails the admission of her guilt. Kallu understanding her hitch addresses her Amma Bi. By doing so he places Mumani on the highest pedestal of reverence yet breaks the rules of the dominant class and also subverts the power equation. He is shown to possess a fine critical mind that refuses to blindly follow the dominant dictates of the upper caste. Kallu is aware of his power and uses it intelligently. The shift from Dulhan Bi to Amma Bi is a symbolic shift of power where Kallu changes the rule and silences the upper class and cajoles them to follow his heart happily. He comes as an energetic fighter who positively engages with ‘upper caste’ prejudices and wins.

When Serabai lets the class honour vanquish the sharing of gender injustice by trusting Viraf’s accusation of Bhima stealing seven hundred rupees, Bhima turns into a confused object shuttling between contradictions. She loses the intelligence of a unified subjectivity and it is where the necessity of someone to act on behalf arises. She feels cheated, she thinks that Serabai instead of teaching her written words should have revealed her own mind to her. She also flings apart the courage of the upper-middle class man, Viraf, “How scared could he have been, knowing that an old uneducated woman was his opponent?...That’s how much he bought and sold you for, seven hundred rupees. That’s your worth- less than a party’s supply of beer” (309). However, she still feels that Serabai will understand her.

In an effort to rejuvenate Maya, Bhima takes her out to Chowpatty for food. There on meeting Sera, Dinaz and Viraf, Bhima is left shocked on noticing Viraf’s attitude towards Maya, “It was strange how she found out. One moment she didn’t know the next minute she did. One moment her mind was as blank as a desert; the next minute the snake of suspicion had slithered into her thoughts and raised its poisonous head. And now she

must live with the earth-shattering knowledge that Viraf Davar was the father of Maya's dead child" (267).

Viraf's use of state power to secure his social position first makes Bhima desire Sera's shelter as she does not realise that Sera had shared with her the subjective knowledge of the world in which the important thing is not the eradication of injustice but the aggression against the injustice done to one sect. Sera in her translation of the article weaves a story about Muslim houses being burnt by the bad politicians, dividing the world into powerful and powerless, where Bhima identified herself as the wronged and thus, her hate shifted from the age-old enemies of the Hindus, that are, the Muslims to the politicians. Sera, in her act of translation, neither provides Bhima the space to question the construction of binaries nor let her place the legitimacy of injustice in the larger framework of objective history. So, as a structuralist demonstrates that language through its structure communicates a conceptual world and, by relation, the culture we live in. We can not also negate the fact that construction of language happens at the higher levels. This truth is also poignantly dealt by the heart-wrenching writer Saadat Hasan Manto in his short story "Toba Tek Singh".

Many of us have been acquainted with this story in its translation or original version at some stage. Set amidst the turmoil of partition, the central figure of the story is Bishan Singh, a Sikh lunatic who is struggling in a madhouse for almost fifteen years to find out "...where is Toba Tek Singh" (110). As the staff of the madhouse could recall, Bishan Singh had owned vast pieces of land in Toba Tek Singh. Toba Tek Singh after the partition is a city in the Pakistani province of Punjab. Bishan had a reputation of a well-known landlord but one unfortunate day his brain "... tripped" (109). His family brought him chained and left him in the madhouse for never to return. Like many, he was baffled at the sane and civilized governments' reordering through the attempt of exchange Hindustani and Pakistani mad-men. Finally on knowing that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan and he was

about to be uprooted and dispatched to Hindustan, he stood on a middle spot and after some time the man who had not slept for the last fifteen years laid dead on no man's land, that is, on the partition line of Hindustan and Pakistan. The story has copious traces of Manto's familiar assets of wit and irony. It brings out the trauma of the Partition of Hindustan into Hindustan and Pakistan and its aftermaths through a satirical yet grotesque expression of control and exploitation of common man by the government and its rulers. Sanity/ insanity opposition is aggressively undermined. If the political official mapping of the government rendering pain to the point of fragmentation of individual psyche is considered to be sane, then anyone reacting against being twisted away from physical and psychological securities is insane. This is how mad-men and particularly Bishan Singh come out to be the icon of masses. The shriek that fills the air works as a means of communication, a way to talk to the reader who can see himself being produced in the story, that is, in the course of the action, the reader is persuaded to be active. The action of authority/ power and its impact is delineated with a kind of disturbing cruelty which wafts up into a crucial consciousness. When the reader now goes in the real world he can identify certain practices and values of the men in power which are uncritically glorified or suppressed to suit the established political power. He can understand the reality through the analysis of these practices and values of the authority that are considered to be the most important. Both the player and the viewer in the Indo-Pak cricket match will now not feel that he has let his country down if he neither wins on the field nor shows aggression at the defeat of his country, respectively. However, this is also a special story in the sense it moistens one's eyes on every read. The dilemma of Bishan Singh is so appealing not just due to the representation of common man's suffering and ethical basis to it, but also because Manto takes us to into the depth of his feelings in the end. A man is keen on returning home eagerly and is struggling to do so in the face of unexplainable hardships for the last fifteen years but is ultimately forced to



die. The story is so appealing because it makes the moment of Singh's death in the face of political hardships so effective and poignant, yet does so without any melodramatic gestures. The pain of a helpless victim in a disillusioned world where hopes are crashing down is conveyed to the reader not on an explicit basis but due to the fact that s/he has already been acquainted with the depth and intensity of love that a man possesses for his place to which experiential qualities of home, belonging, and collective emotion are bound, in the area of relations, where various people breathe in harmony.

The second story narrated to Bhima is Maya's story, the story of the punishment inflicted on the female sexuality, that can not be confined in the walls of a permanent relationship, and thus is blamed to be sexually immoral. On seeing Viraf's face, Bhima politely requests Maya to pour her heart out and Maya narrates the story. However, the difference between the two stories is that Sera's story makes Bhima identify with the good people standing in opposition to the villain but Maya's reverses the conventional binaries of hero and society v/s villain who is a threat to the good society. This story places the heroine outside, struggling against a corrupt society and culture. The ideological role of the story is to help the listener accept the normative codes but Maya's story helps to decode the male violence as the heroine has been raped by the role model who himself generates the fantasies of power.

Viraf reads Bhima's act of reading as a threat to his patriarchal authority so before Bhima's resistance, he himself places Bhima outside their home, a home which had become the society of meanings, relations and roles for Bhima. Ironically, what Viraf could not read is the fact that Bhima now realises her position of being outside the society and the understanding of her position also reveals to her the corruption prevailing in that society. The myth of the society, coincidentally created and preserved by the society, that aligned the heroine and the society against the villain is stripped naked. Bhima has recognised the

villain, it is the same society and thus her open defiance makes her emerge as an icon of liberation, “He thinks he can buy my silence with his seven hundred rupees? If he builds me a house of gold I won’t forgive him for what he has done to my—” (303).

Bhima leaves, she assesses past through a subjective transmit of mind. Her upsurge against the society comes out connected with the traumatic memories of oppression, both hers and surprisingly also Serabia’s. Bhima sits near the shore and keeps her box of accessories that she has taken while leaving Sera’s house. This box contains the memories of her past miseries and she is firm not to take it back.

The different traumatic memories act significantly in her resistance yet the image that finally overwhelms her mind is that of the Afghani *ballonwalla* reminiscent of the Rabindranath Tagore’s Afghan “Kabulliwallah”. This Afghani Pathan invokes the bond which is beyond the province of history, the bond of unconditional love. Bhima remembers her son, Amit but, however, she is afraid as his face is getting washed away from her memory. She does not even remember Feroz’s face but, “... she can picture the Pathan’s face as if she had run into him yesterday ... she remembers the beautiful brown hands, hands that created poetry out of nothing, that turned lifeless pieces of rubber into magical objects that brought joy to the eyes of children” (313-14). There is a positive transformation of unconventional associations. She can hear him aloud as if his voice is travelling from far away mountains and valleys trying to communicate with her. Bhima has never questioned him, yet Pathan is giving her answers. The magic of Pathan strikes her, even being a solitary person, Pathan is the mesmerising pipe piper, our Krishna who can woo and charm anyone because he has understood to compose a song out of loneliness.

This bond transcends the sociologically created constructs of gender, class and caste. Bhima is not lost in the darkness of loneliness instead traverses from the insides of the society to the outside where she is free and knows how to safeguard her fundamental

rights against violations, “Freedom. She is almost grateful to Viraf now, for is treachery has been the knife that has cut the thread that kept her bound for so long (315).

Bansode in “Bosom Friend” and Baby in *A Life Less Ordinary* are also liberated when they deny conforming to the tradition of acceptance from the other, “Are you going to tell me my mistakes” (50)?

Bansode consciously and vehemently rejects the binaries that her upper class-caste friend is trying to impose by expressing her freedom to think and communicate. The poem ends on a tone of disseminating consciousness and information for the Dalit women to address the prejudice aimed at them.

### **Baby Halder’s *A Life Less Ordinary***

Baby Halder’s *A Life Less Ordinary* is a translation of twenty-nine years old domestic worker’s real life into a book. Baby’s life has been moulded by various social experiences but finally, is reconstructed by an informed awareness. The book presents the growth and progress of consciousness in Baby, who then begins to question her exploitation and assert her independent selfhood.

Baby’s struggle against the devastating poverty and discriminatory patriarchal restrictions breaks the mould of gender stereotypes. Right in the beginning when Baby introduces herself, she clearly expresses her love for school in contrast to the hatred she had for her home, more so after her own mother “...with grief in her heart, one day suddenly left...” (3) her and the siblings with their father. The sudden abandoning of her mother, the consequent second marriage of her father, nagging stepmother and the marriage of her fifteen years old sister put the burden of running the household and looking after her younger siblings on her weak but capable shoulders. Baby recollects that even after having immense work she never stopped going to the school. There were days when she used to go

to the school without eating anything and telling this to anybody meant bad beating from her father. Yet, her work in the school was appreciated but at home, she received nothing but rebukes.

She accepts her duties and liabilities yet paradoxically her childhood dialogues highlight that her resistance starts emerging soon out of her sense of self-respect and understanding. The inhuman and brutal conditions amidst which she has to survive clearly highlight the victimhood yet on hearing the news of her father's third marriage soon after her real mother left, Baby reacts, "I said to my brother, "How much more do you think we will have to bear?" (7). Baby's reaction can be foreseen as developing into something that Kumkum Sangari writes in "Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement". It is called female incitement. This involves the concept of woman provoking a man to act and in this process, she becomes a part of the public domain. Basically, incitement is read as the threshold of private and political or domestic or public where a woman can reformulate herself in various ways (872).

Being a child, Baby has no easy escape from an insensitive father still what can not be ignored is the fact that her resentment stems from a realisation. It is the realisation of being confined into endless repetitive structures. At times she is really upset with her father. She can understand that her father will not do anything to change their position rather because of him they have to listen to all kinds of fake sympathies from their known ones. The same consciousness is also read in the elder sister recited by Saleem Peeradina in "Sisters". On being scolded by father, the elder sister reacts vehemently. In the fight with her younger sister, it is always she who gets the scolding from the father. However, the father writes that the elder daughter is intelligent enough to read the biases of his actions. She does not spare her father without letting him feel his mistake.

Unfortunately, Baby's father does not even know that he is unfair. Baby's father has always been living with the image of his self constructed as 'low' in the socio-economic hierarchy by the upper caste and the capitalist society. Harold A Gould in "Sanskritization and Westernization" discusses how Srinivas looks "...the desire of the lower castes to move upward by transforming their ritual and social structure until it conforms more nearly to that of the Brahmana and, therefore, represents elite status within their experiential ken" (946). The father has been introduced struggling to fix a stable job which can at least earn him the minimum required for his family. The constant displacement has already made him vulnerable to a sense of alienation. He stays away from home for months and even on his return after long intervals never seem happy. He has always remained immersed in the world of his alcohol. Amidst this rootlessness, repeated marriages become a means of reclaiming, reconstructing and preserving his identity, past and culture as ordained by the social hierarchy. As written by Mary E. John in *Women's Studies in India*, "The sociologists like Leela Dube have discussed that men use women to work the caste relations" (444). He can not realise that these marriages are mere means of escaping the status struggle. The burden of this status struggle leaves little energy for real subversion, that is, the reconceptualising of the low self in order to stir the conscience of the upper and the consequent birth of a powerful self. A similar entrap laid for the Dalits has been explained by Ruth Manorama in "Dalit Women: The Downtrodden among the Downtrodden" where through the fake notions of liberty, the upper-caste provides a new understanding of the self to Dalits (447).

The weight of poverty leads Baby's father to avoid every effort. Baby's second stepmother never pays heed to her father's words. She never feeds the children properly and often beat them up without any issue. She fabricates false stories and gets the children thrashed by their father. Her father does not ever bother to cross check the allegations and in

the fit of frustration beat the children brutally. The third mother does not even go to fetch water for herself and the children have to do so. She also asks Baby to give her jewels so that they can be redone properly. Baby gives them but they are never returned to Baby and in fact, one day she sees her stepmother wearing a set of new one. There are many things they have to go through. Her father and stepmother also drink in front of them. Being children, Baby and her siblings can not do much to protect themselves. Baby has to finally leave her studies because her third mother is not able to manage the household all alone.

Where the father is stuck in the circle which make the escape impossible, Baby makes sense of the everyday world. She can understand she and her sister becoming the source their parent's worry. Her mother knows that no one will take their responsibility, "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? But worrying about people will say does not help to fill empty stomach, does it"(2)?

The above-quoted lines stress the multiplicity of an event. They not only elaborate what has already happened but are also an articulation of a silence, which has been expressed with the reality it begins from. These moments are generated from a tensed confrontation with the patriarchal capitalist culture that produces fixed frames of positions to see and perceive the world. Baby's Ma is the symbol of the passive consumer of the normative consciousness that secures social control by making her the passive consumer of their ideologies, however, Baby raises up the consciousness that culture is something we make in the different works of our everyday life.

Baby's ma unable to deal with the situation suddenly leaves the home with her younger son. Baby, on the other hand, does not suddenly break away from the traditional culture rather constructs oppositional meanings.

Soon after her mother leaves, Baby's sister gets married. Baby has to do all the household chores her now which makes her lives her physically weak and sick. She is admitted to the hospital and awakens to her sheets stained with blood. Since that day her father often told her that she is not a child. Baby discusses this transformation from a child to a grown up girl as an encounter between her and the reader, "... Baba watching me intently ..." (10) and "Like Baba, I think the boy who lived in the hotel behind our house also begun to think I was a grown up. Every time I sat down to read in the room, I would find him watching me from his window" (11). She now encounters socially constructed gendered location. The reading is accompanied with preconceptions. Ironically, Baby, who is herself well read, can not understand the difference in her after returning from the hospital and this brings out the constructed materiality of gender. Baby can feel this difference in every eye. The boy who lives in their street also started eyeing her. He continuously watches her, observes her and at times also follows her. Baby has heard him talking about her to his friends but still when Baby's friend questions her, "Why does that boy want to know everything about you?" (11) Baby dismisses the strangeness of the act. The conversation between Baby and her friend, the question and the answer bring something to the encounter. Baby deconstructs many myths regarding lower class women's inefficiency. It conveys the truth that meanings can be comprehended only when both the question and answer are placed in the whole. So if the question represents the submissive self, the answer portrays the birth of the new female self emerging in protest to these readings.

Her father and the third mother are really annoyed with the emergence of this Baby. The stepmother constantly complains against Baby to her father. There are many discussions about getting rid of her. Annoyed, Baby decides to stay with her Pishi-ma for some time. Visiting Pishi-ma is a big source of joy for Baby. She loves talking to Pishi-

ma's daughter. She gets to know that this daughter whom she addresses *didi* is soon going to be married. For the first time, Baby gets to witness the extensive process of parading a girl in front of strangers to be approved for marriage. Some people are coming to see *didi* and many arrangements have to be made for their visit. On seeing Baby, a beautiful energetic girl, they enquire about her for the obvious reasons to get her married to one of their relatives. *Pishi-ma* knows that Baby is too young for marriage and thus she very politely refuses the offer. However, the fate can not be held for long.

Baby is called back from *Pishi-ma's* house and forced into the patriarchal paradigm of marriage. On her return from *Pishi ma's* house, her family decided to marry her off. Her stepmother's brother has brought a match for Baby. The family is very excited. Her stepmother makes tea for the boy and asks Baby to serve it to them. On seeing Baby, the man starts questioning everything possible about Baby's culinary skills. He is just concerned about how well Baby can handle a kitchen and house. Baby is not able to understand the purpose of these questions, all she can see is the huge age difference between her and this man. The man is around twenty-six years old and Baby not even thirteen. Presenting the daughter as an object for acceptance by the future husband is a social practice, a ritual form of sexuality, a way of communicating through the body. The sexuality that is nurtured through the gaze of moral guardians is placed outside the public domain to get the scores and approval on the scales of social expectations of femininity. The lower class position and economic instability of her father completely trap Baby into conforming to the image of the woman as the self-sacrificing caregiver. Her wedding is just announced to her.

One day her father and stepmother come with bags full of vegetables and fruits that are required for her wedding. Turmeric paste is put on her body, people are dancing, a large *chulha* and *pandal* are set up. She is asked to fast that day. Baby though can not



understand anything but is very excited. She does not realise that these are the preparations for, "... her days of grief and pain, little did she know what the future held for her. On the seventeenth day, a Wednesday in the month of *Agrahayan*, Baby was married" (34).

The third person narration makes varied differing range of discourses activated during reading. These counter discourses help to articulate and connect many social and cultural issues which include changing ideological relations between classes, and patriarchy and its role in the life of a girl.

Baby is married on Wednesday night. The whole night passes in mirth and merry. She chats and plays with her friends the whole night. Thursday being an inauspicious day, Baby is not sent to her husband's house. On Friday, a taxi is called and she, her brother, *mama*, *masi* and her husband sit inside it. Baby has no idea about where are they going. Her mother keeps some rice and *dal* in her *aanchal*, only to return them back saying, "Ma, with these I pay you back for all the days you have fed and clothed me and looked after me" (35).

This scene is a cultural marker of the grim truth of the gender-bound perspective that the lower class shares of its traditional ruling elite. It is also discussed by Ruth Manorama in "Dalit Women: The Downtrodden among the Downtrodden". The moment Baby's taxi reaches her husband's place, it is crowded by many people. A woman comes to help her and takes her to her husband's house. She dresses her in a beautiful sari, bangles and *sindoor* because people as a part of custom will be coming to see her. The woman hands a *thali* full of sweets to Baby, asking her to serve everyone. Her husband is teased saying that he has married a child. The confused little girl does not know how to handle the situation. Someone is asking her to serve, someone to greet and some to set her *pallu* right. Baby's marriage exposes the hegemony of the patriarchal society through the institution of marriage. The heterosexual patriarchal society believes conjugality to be the base of sexual

relations and expression of female desire is considered an act of confrontation. When all of them have finished their food on the day of *bahu bhaat*, that is, a day where the new bride has to serve everyone before she eats, her *mami* forces her to eat from her husband's plate. She is scolded by her *mami* on refusing to do so, "We're not going to be here forever you know. You're the one who has to be here. Just be quiet and eat" (36).

*Mama's* act of ensuring her compliance to the normative structure is no doubt is in fulfilment with the Brahminical social structures of society. The strict control of Baby's sexuality is the depiction of forced sexuality which is constructed so rigidly that one can not break through the conjugal relation. She is indirectly but with all the air of obviousness fed the codes within a day that have been always followed by women. She finds her husband sleeping beside her the next morning, the neighbourhood women make sure that she addresses their husbands as *dada*, she is the one who will now be fetching water for the house. It is made sure that her every act of resistance is minutely monitored and punctured. She shares the fear of evenings. She fears and her heart beats frantically on return of her husband in the evenings. She does every effort to escape him at night. She has to sleep on the same mat with her husband yet she does whatever possible to avoid him, for instance, she sleeps with her head turned the other way. However, after some nights her husband finally pulls her hard towards him and begins "...to press his body against mine. I started to cry out in fear. But then, I thought, what's the point? I'll just wake everyone by shouting like this, so I shut my eyes and my mouth and let him do what he wanted. I just endured everything" (37).

Baby tries to share this pain with Sandhya didi but the latter dismisses the complaint by laughing at it. Being offended, Baby shares the grief with her brother, she could not reveal the reason for her despair but tells him that she wishes to return to her home. The brother when gets to know the reason of her hurt from her husband also walks

away without taking her. Baby's stepmother gets furious when she comes to know about Baby's behaviour on this issue. Baby does not get support from anyone. She is semi-conscious about the problematical situation or circumstances. She understands what is happening to her yet knows that shouting for help will not help her as there is no space for her to protest against the sexual intercourse forced within the limits of the conjugal relationship. On the other hand, the decision to endure brings the need to deconstruct those cabinets which label certain acts as sexual attacks. The meaning of an attack is completely transformed once it is defined as a sexual attack. But the question is if some legally accepted physical acts can explain the effect of sexual attack on the victim? A sexual attack has been conventionally understood as an assault on the pure self of the victim, however, this assumption further problematises the self that is being understood only in relation to a body and thus limiting liberty to the issue of justice, where the outcome can be, 'hence proved guilty or pardoned'. So, if placed in the larger space of women empowerment, it can not be denied that Baby, by choosing to endure definitely accepts to chain her body in the boundaries of the masculine power bringing the matter into the realm of justice. Nevertheless, it creates a new space where self is liberated from the heterosexual body and thus sexual attack can not be only restricted to the boundaries of attacking the female self, existing inside the heterosexual body of a woman.

Baby is reaching at a self-realisation that she can not escape but has to confront her situation. After two months of her marriage, one day suddenly she starts feeling sick. She is at her father's home at this time yet no one is concerned about her state. She throws up every day, can not eat much yet no one is bothered. Her husband is also not worried about her condition. He never offers to take her to a doctor. Finally, it is Sandhya who takes her to a doctor where Baby comes to know that she is pregnant. She is too young to even understand the meaning of pregnancy. Her stomach starts to grow bigger with every passing

day which makes her dread her state. Her husband, Shankar does not even now take her to the hospital. Eventually, Baby decides to go to the hospital and show herself to the doctor, “Given his behaviour, I had little hope that he would bother to come to the hospital with me when my time comes” (42).

Baby’s neighbour, Sandhya *didi* is Baby’s only support. Sandhya *didi* and her husband treat Baby like their own daughter, “Talking to Sandhya *didi*, the days passed well enough ...” (37). Sandhya and her husband bring the truth of diverse faces of patriarchy in the lower class itself. Sandhya is treated humanely in contrast to Baby. She is neither been beaten up nor ignored by her husband, however, the permission of the husband is still compulsory mainly if she has to go out. Sandhya’s relation with her husband highlights the naturalised alliance of men and power. Sandhya does not have to be controlled to protect the social order of restraint dictated for a woman.

Sera believed that power could be gained by recreating the power of patriarchy but Sandhya does not even see herself repressed by the male power because she mistakenly understands social power to be itself masculine, thus even when she is deciding, she is in the territory of masculinity. Baby in all the pain of first pregnancy goes to fetch water from Sandhya’s house. Sandhya has already told Baby to always do *pallu* in front of her husband as Shankar treats him like an elder brother. But on that day because of extreme discomfort, Baby forgets to put the *pallu* on her head. Even after seeing Sandhya’s husband, Baby does not remember to draw the *pallu* on her head. Sandhya on watching this furiously shouts at Baby to cover up her head. Baby also appreciates the scolding because it saves her from being pointed as ill-mannered by her father’s friends who are coming towards her house around the same time. Thus, we can see that the masculine structures in the Dalit patriarchal society are not necessarily maintained at an obvious level. The another instance of it is Sandhya’s acceptance of Shasti sister’s condition. These sisters are banished by the society

for the reason that Baby could not understand. They are sweet to Baby yet she is not allowed by her husband to visit them. Baby is curious to know as to why people do not talk much with Shasti sisters, “ One day I asked Sandhya-didi why my husband did not like me going to see Shasti and her sisters. She said, “You won’t understand,” but I persisted. Can’t you see that although they’re all married, not one of them lives with her husband?” (78).

Nonetheless, Shasti sisters are the part of the same community. Shasti and her two sisters were married but none of them lived with their husbands. The eldest was comfortably married but returned to her mother leaving her husband because of the budding bond between the elder brother-in-law’s widow and his younger brother after the death of her elder brother-in-law. Shasti had been married to a widower who also had a son. He married Shasti so that someone can take care of his son. They never had an emotional bond between them, the husband never let it happen. Soon after their marriage, he left the son and his house in the care of Shasti to work somewhere else. On several letters from Shasti he returned and stayed with her for a year. Shasti conceived during this time but the inhuman husband cheated on her and left her at her mother’s place never to return. Baby did not see any mistake of Shasti sisters in it. She questions their unsaid exile by the society, “ Shasti and her mother were both very religious and Shasti often became possessed by the Devi. I used to wonder how she could be bad if Devi could enter her (79).

Within a patriarchal society, separation of husband and wife finds its target in a profoundly gendered manner as the disgrace of being a witch is hurled only at a woman. Shasti constructs a space where a female spirit is terrorizing to the male. She uses the same space to do everything that is denied to a woman. Her possession becomes a way of articulation which releases her from all responsibility for her actions can be attributed to the *devi* that possesses her.

Mary E. John is right in saying that, "...dalit culture could not remain immune to the larger upper class patriarchal structure ..." (443). Shankar's act of, "...kicking and beating ..." (79) Baby on her visit to Shasti's house clearly delineates the patriarchal nature of Hindu ideals of a good woman.

On being publicly beaten up by her husband, Baby questions that why are such injustices hurled only at women? Nonetheless, all this did not stop Baby from visiting Shasti. But soon Baby herself, "... became the bad woman in the neighbourhood..." (81). She is stalked by a man regularly. According to the dominant view of patriarchal society which puts the blame of stalking and molestation on the character of a woman, the woman becomes the hopeless victim of the false consciousness. Even when Baby's father and husband are struggling against their existing condition of low, they follow the middle class model of womanhood that is built on an uneasy combination of the spaces that make women free to choose their feminine identities but from the offered images. Identities, other than them, will lead to inevitable danger and Baby could understand that such places will have stalkers like Pratap and Ajit.

Ajit is Shankar's friend and lives across the road. He addresses Baby as sister-in-law, *boudi* but his intentions are bad. He often visits them and in very less time becomes friendly with Shankar's family. He plays with their son and brings sweets and toys for him. However, Baby senses his hidden motive behind this sweet play and she confronts him openly telling him not to come to their house as people will talk bad about her. Ajit does not listen to Baby and rather increases his number of visits. He starts coming in Shankar's absence also. It makes Baby fear Shankar's wrath. His frequent visits earned a bad name to Baby and knowing this, her husband without listening to Baby's argument starts beating her regularly. But finally she decides to fight back and heated arguments started happening between the husband and wife.

Baby's sharp response against her husband serves as a monumental junction as she the heir of the lower class women history undertakes the path to discover the constructed meanings of a community. She not only tries to read the meaning and their entrenchment in the everyday lived lives but also battles to forge a valid foundation for her anguish. She voices her innocence bravely and decides not to take the false blame from anyone. Nevertheless, this does not stop Ajit from stalking her, rather he chases her openly. But Baby has now started questioning the contradictions in the lived culture. She writes an incident where the local boys of her colony collect money to film a movie. Baby has always been a movie lover, excited she finishes her household chores early that day. One has to also acknowledge her self-confidence. She never thought of asking for permission for the movie from Shankar. When her husband returns home that evening, she just asks him if she should serve his meal and informs him about her plan to go for the movie. When he refuses, "there's no need to do so. So I asked him why. I was so angry, I blurted out all kinds of things to him" (83).

Baby is translating her lived reality and while doing so, she is reconstructing her subjectivity outlined by series of socio-cultural experiences. After a miscarriage, Baby decides not to return to her husband, "I would much rather be alone. I have one child. I'll keep him with me and find work somewhere" (89). However, after few days, she reluctantly returns to her husband yet she is confident that people's opinion now will not matter to her, "'I thought, well, I'll speak to those who speak to me and not to those who don't'" (91). It is very clear that Baby's brutal husband and crumbling condition which has its origin in poverty and lack of proper education is an inefaceable experience for her yet she is rearticulating the dominant culture, that is, a subculture of conflicts is producing oppositional meanings, "And so time passed and I found myself pregnant again. On top, of this I was worried about how to send my son to school. How would we manage, I

wondered” (92). Yes, Baby has an understanding of lack of material resources but she also has the courage to recycle the available resources. She uses the same limited space imposed by the dominant socio-economic order to deconstruct the dominant cultural productions. Baby is now a mother of two children. But with two, it became hard for them to manage their finances. Even in such circumstances, Baby is sure of educating her children. She does not behave like a helpless woman, instead, thinks of working herself to bring her children in a good way. She decides to use her education to earn money. She offers to tutor the children in her neighbourhood. Education becomes her tool to battle against poverty, “I would teach them a bit, and alongside my boy could study as well. Little by little people began to send their children to me. I managed to piece together seem two or three hundred rupees at the end of the month” (96).

So, initially, when Baby is not able to reject the impositions of her class and caste, she makes her way through them by using them to her advantage. Baby knows the power of education to change the lived socio-economic reality of their class and caste, “Predictably, when my husband saw that I had some money in my hands, he reduced the amount he gave me for household expenses. Nevertheless, I enjoyed teaching and I decided that even if I earn nothing from them, I would not give up teaching them” (96).

Baby’s gradual control over the course of her life becomes the reason for her husband’s heightened anger. Shankar is anguished and thus, he does not even visit Baby to the hospital on the birth of their third child, a baby daughter. He could not bear the humiliation of his wife debunking his authority. There are a number of occasions when Shankar could not resist his anger but whether it is unleashed because of his degraded status or because of his inability to overcome his exploitation, the anger is always taken out on Baby. However, when Baby could understand the equation of self and other as explained by Gills Deleuze and Felix Guattari to be the boundaries which are continuously changing



arrangement of a range of interrelated 'assemblages', Shankar is emasculated. The movement through territorialized spaces, or the 'lines of flight' as Deleuze calls movement, can lead to 'deterritorialization', dismantling of power structures as deconstruction helps us to look at power structures as mere constructs, making them lose their meaning. This process can, in turn, lead to 'reterritorialization', subversion or a new power equation. Baby asks her doctor to close her tubes and she does not even need any one's permission for it. This existence of political consciousness aids to restructure the Dalit woman's subjectivity. Baby is completely aware of her circumstances now. She can see things getting worse day by day. Her elder son is getting spoiled. He does not like to study rather is interested in useless jobs like his father and uncles. He even bunks his school and at times does not return home for days. The father is least interested in the life of his children. He does not even give enough money to Baby to feed his children. Finally, Baby one day decides not to take any more insults and rebukes from her husband.

Baby's assertion is a form of resistance, the cruel action of authority blows up into a critical consciousness. However, Baby has to meet challenges at various levels. Shashti's mother is afraid if Baby will be able to handle her children all alone. She is the one who for the first time hints her that Baby might have to do work that she has not considered yet, that is, some work that she considers to be inferior in any way. Baby initially gets reluctant, she is not sure what will her father say if she cleans and washes in people's house. Shashti's mother advice to bother about life rather than the artificial dignity of the father gives Baby the strength.

Baby first inverts the image created by the patriarchal structure of her community by being close to the upper-class model of the normative world. She asserts that the self-image of women has to change from one of helplessness to critical interrogation of her subjectivity. An image of a strong woman willing to take on responsibilities, coming

from a poor background helps her make place outside the boundaries of her community. Baby agrees to take her first job. She will have to do everything: cleaning, cooking, chopping, washing, dusting. It is a Brahmin family and they soon started liking Baby's work. Her hard work earns her work in many more houses and her cordial and helping nature makes her the favourite of everyone in all the places she works. Seeing her dedication, the employers take every possible care of Baby and Baby also does not do some extra work for them. She is not treated like a servant in any of the houses because of her behaviour.

The understanding of the relationships between upper castes and Dalits, on the part of Baby definitely does not miss to portray the tragedy of crushing fight of survival. In all her work, she has to struggle very hard to find time for her children. She takes her third child, her little daughter along with her on work and sometimes has to bear people's comments because of it. She writes that one of the owners does not like her daughter playing with Baby's little one, "I thought, just because we are poor doesn't mean we can't be touched" (109). Baby's new awareness also helps her to accept her mother's abandonment as her struggle for survival.

Baby's husband does not like her working at other's place but he never tells her this. Baby has accepted the fact that he will not be able to earn to feed his family all by himself. However, one day to Baby's shock, a lot of money is discovered in his pockets. Baby gets really angry seeing all this money. She works hard day and night to not only feed her children but also to make them independent beings. Nevertheless, she does not say anything to Shankar but things stretch to the limits the day her little daughter catches a terrible cold and Shankar does not help her. It is with the help of Shasti's family that Baby is finally able to save her daughter. Baby questions herself, "I was unable to bear the way he treated me and I would ask myself, am I an animal or human being for him to treat me this

way?” (117). There is an attempt to find her own voice or identity, by locating herself in tradition and then keeping herself in separateness from the same tradition. Baby has now started to crack the treatment she had to meet. They are given new meanings. Baby finally leaves her husband in the lookout for employment opportunities in Faridabad, “I touched everyone’s feet and then took my children and climbed onto the train. The train moved away and I waved to everyone with tears in my eyes. I was saying goodbye” (121). The decision is the manifestation of Baby’s power. In one way, she can be seen as the victim of the dominant capitalist culture where identity is packed into the economic baggage. However, this suppression is limited by Baby’s use of same cultural place to affirm her position of subjectivity. It is an attempt to outline the construction of oppositional meanings in the established culture. She is determined to work hard to make her children grow into good human beings.

Baby does not completely subvert the class structure rather initially positions her struggle within it. She first destabilises the image of a domestication indoctrinated into her in the effort to imitate upper-class patriarchal practices and in the hope of gaining acceptance into that society. Baby starts working as a maid. Ironically, her work works as the version of domesticated culture of femininity, nonetheless, Baby herself decided to extend it to the public sphere. No doubt, here also she faces violence. This violence representing the violence unleashed on the lower class by the upper. The woman who employs Baby is very strict. Baby has to report to the work at sharp eight in the morning. There are four other servants who work in this house. The servants are neither allowed to talk to each other in their native language nor given any time to relax. The woman after some time gives Baby the room to stay in her own house. Baby is happy thinking that she will now be able to save some time of her travelling to feed and teach her children. However, the reality comes out to be something else. From the day of shifting, the woman

does not even spare Baby for a single second, “I was the one who was made to work the hardest- perhaps she thought that since she had given me room to live with my children, she had a greater claim on my time” (137-8).

The other point which can not be missed here is the fact that Baby’s *memsahib* has only poor women working in her house. It brings the reality of how gender and class together play in identity formation, they both overlap. The comparison of *memsahib* and Baby’s life reveals the fact that the needs and ways of working are different. The upper caste women though experience a gender-based equality yet they share the ideology of patriarchal subjugation which gives them a hollow sense of victory over the weak lower class women. However, the increased employment and educational opportunities provide the same lower class woman with the possibility of upward mobility. This upward mobility can give her agency at the present moment. Baby comes out to be powerful not only in domestic domain but also fights the burden of poverty through her skills and hard work. Baby takes justice into her own hands and when questioned about the injustice she meets at the hand of *memsahib* by her friend, “Why do you continue to stand for this?” (144). Baby realises that leaving this house will give her time to be with her children. She will be able to take her own decisions. Working in this house has made her slave again to the same system of the society. Therefore, one day without even informing or taking the permission from the woman, Baby walks out of the house with her children. She has money to survive for two months and is confident of getting some new work by that time. With her desire for freedom and dignity and confidence in work, She moves towards life.

Baby’s consciousness to practice her subjectivity has already reflected her inner power and now the realisation of her competence suggests the understanding of her rights to negotiate her relationship with the world on her own terms.

Baby at last finds work at Tatush's place where everyone treats her like a family member. Tatush has three children. He is a very good man and does not exploit the labour working at his place. In fact, at times seeing them busy he does his errands on his own.

Tatush apart from Baby's skills at work is also left amazed at the interest and enthusiasm Baby has to teach her children. He first inquires if her children are studying but Baby's silence speaks all. The next day he asks Baby to bring her son and daughter. Tatush gets them admitted in a nearby school. Baby is clear that she has the power to make her economic decisions, nonetheless, the constraint of lack of education can not be ruled out. Tatush ask her if she would like to read and write. Dalit intellectuals like Phule and Ambedkar have always stressed the importance of education as a tool to fight oppression. One day, Tatush gives Baby a notebook and a pen and asks her to pen down anything she wants. Be it anything, her observations, understandings, someone's story or her own tale but everyday something has to go into it. On getting the notebook and pen, she happily returns home and starts writing on the same day itself. She at times writes and at times reads the book by Talsima Nasrin.

Reading and writing do not instantly change Baby's position in the society. People are still curious to know about her husband and "Some men would make the excuse that they wanted water to drink and would push their way ..." (153) in her house. Yet, this does not stop Baby from enjoying the new light in her life and one day Baby receives a letter not only praising her writing skills but there is a magazine in which Baby's writings are published. Tatush without informing Baby had sent her writings to one of his friends.

Her text has a powerful agency of control, symbolic of her mobility in the public sphere. The journey of writing has an underlying journey towards a sense of self-worth. It expands the economic opportunities and frames an empowered social identity. Baby runs to show her achievement to her children, "See! Tell me what is written here"

(173). Her daughter hesitatingly read each letter and made out the words: “*Aloo Andhari*,  
Baby Halder... Ma! Your name in a book!!” (173).

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