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Research Article

SPOUSAL VIOLENCE AND DALIT WOMEN: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND RETROSPECTION

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ABSTRACT

Women from all walks of the society endure various forms of violence at all fronts but the condition of dalit women is appalling as they become the victims of triple subjugation due to their caste, class and gender. Violence both explicit and implicit hampers the dignity and self esteem of dalit women. This paper draws our attention to the spousal violence faced by dalit women and also highlights the theoretical concepts which account for the sadistic behavior of the perpetrators and the subservient attitude of the victims. An insight into the various theories like the social learning theory, the feminist theory, the evolutionary theory, the learned helplessness theory and the psychological perspectives accountable for spousal violence against dalit women forms the core of the paper. This paper reflects upon the perceptions of the dalit women on spousal violence as well as on the issues which need to be pondered upon to raise their self worth and dignity.

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INTRODUCTION

India is a home to more than 80 million dalit women. They are one of the largest segregated groups in the world and make up 2 per cent of the world's population and 16.3 per cent of the total Indian female population.¹ Indian society due to its patriarchal nature has always accorded a secondary status to women in contrast to men, be it women from any class or section of the society. Women encounter various kinds of violence during their course of life like feticide, infanticide, medical neglect, child marriages, bride burning, sexual abuse of girl child, forced marriages, rape, prostitution, sexual harassment at home as well as at work places which encroach upon the self-worth and autonomy of women. The forms of violence stated above are more or less overt in nature and often seek the attention of the community and the law but there are other forms of violence which are clandestine and somehow invisible in the eyes of the society. This invisible violence which we are talking about is none other than domestic violence which takes place within the confines of the home considered to be the safest lair of women.

The US Office on Violence against Women (OVW) defines domestic violence as a "pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner". The definition adds that domestic violence "can happen to anyone

regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender", and can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic, and psychological abuse. (Rasberry 2012: 73)

Women are marginalized to a large extent in a patriarchal society but this also holds true that the marginalization, repression and exploitation faced by the dalit women is manifold compared to the non- dalit women. Dalit women are thrice alienated on the basis of their class (poor), caste (outcaste) and gender (female). They are the ones who are the most vulnerable victims of repression and discrimination. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against women has reported "The reality of Dalit women and girls is one of exclusion and marginalisation ... They are often victims of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights violations, including sexual abuse and violence. They are often displaced; pushed into forced and/or bonded labour, prostitution and trafficking."²

The concept of marginalization and oppression can best be explained by the peeling of an onion which has multiple layers within it. We start with the most immediate and obvious because that is most within our reach and grasp. As we continue to delve more other deeper forms of oppression come to the surface which is hidden underneath and not visible to our eyes. Domestic violence faced by dalit women is one such form

¹http://www.rightlivelivelihood.org/fileadmin/Files/PDF/Literature_Recipients/Manorama/Bacground_Manorama.pdf

² <http://idsn.org/key-issues/dalit-women/>

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of violence which is invisible in the eyes of the community and state due to its extremely private affair.

Dalit women are exposed to violence within their homes which strongly manifests the oppressive and domineering attitude of the males to suppress the females. Kaushalya Baisantri, a dalit woman, penned down her autobiography depicting the agony she faced inside the home. She not only narrates her painful experience at home but also talks about the pestering faced by her mother and aaji (grandmother). She talks about the physical, mental and psychological trauma endured by the Dalit women within the home milieu by their own men. Baisantri's narrative focuses not only on the abuse faced by the dalit women in the public spaces by the upper caste men and the dominant sections of the society due to their triply subjugated status but also by the men of their own household and community.

We can find instances of domestic abuse very clearly in her autobiography. She talks of the violent beatings that her aaji receives at the hands of her husband almost every other day. We get a clear picture of the caste based discrimination and inequality towards dalit women rampant in the society by reading her narration. She highlights the plight of many other struggling dalit women among which she is one of them. She writes that the dalit women have been treated merely as objects and exploited at every step. They are considered inferior to men and the men find many reasons to degrade her. (Baisantri 2012)

Dalit women being at the lowest rung of social hierarchy are more at risk to all forms of violence. The efforts of dalit women to cope up with the plenteous violence endured by them dusk and dawn has not been contemplated upon in any of the women's movements or the dalit movement which raise voice for the emancipation of women. These movements have somewhat ignored the confrontation and the daily hassles of the women within their families. The report prepared by the Indian National Family Health Survey points out that women coming from poorer households, illiterate and belonging to marginalized castes are more likely to report violence by their partners. (Boyle *et al.* 2009; Ackerson and Subramanian 2008) The anguish of dalit women can basically be attributed to their caste-class-gender dynamics which is in a big way responsible for their tribulations and affliction. Thus it becomes imperative to shed light on the atrocities committed on women within their homes by their own men through the lens of their caste and class to gain a deeper understanding on this critical but neglected issue. Our concern about the emancipation of the entire dalit community cannot ignore the plight of the women folk of that community who are in constant pain and agony due to their pathetic status both outside and within their families.

The causal factors

Numerous issues within the household unit exacerbate violence against dalit women and exact a heavy toll on their physical, mental and social well being. This sort of violence is normally entangled in an intricate lattice of institutionalized social relations that underpin the vulnerable status of women. Dalit men who are perpetrators of violence leave no stone unturned to restrain the physical, psychological and financial autonomy

of their spouses by their appalling behavior. Various factors contribute to domestic violence within the ambit of home.

Gender biasness and iniquitous nature of society coupled with the norms of female subordination heighten the violence endured by women in their marital homes. Women are tortured for being undutiful wives, not performing the household chores properly, not taking proper care of their children and in-laws, suspected of having illicit relations with other men, not bringing sufficient dowry, being ugly, unable to bear sons or children, working for a living outside their homes, refusing to give their earnings to their husband's for liquor and the list is endless. (Irudayam, Magubhai and Lee 2006: 21-22)

Researchers such as Ahuja (1987), Sinha (1989), Jain (1992), Goel (1997), Rao (1998), Subadra (1999), Mukherjee *et al.* (2001), Dave and Solanki (2001) have shown correlations between wife beating and abuse and such factors as social stress, literacy, violence in childhood, low socio-economic status and social isolation and lack of resources; early age at marriage, type of marriage (arranged or companionate), residential crowding, strained relations with in-laws leading to instigation by in-laws, female sterilization, absence of male children and absence of children in general, suspicion of infidelity, and alcoholism.

Dalit women's sense of worth and self esteem is impaired on being condoned by their spouse. They are denied opportunities to grow, their autonomy is curbed, their voices shut and their dignity butchered. Women before marriage are taught by their families and society to be docile, yielding and dutiful towards their husbands without affirming their rights against their husbands or other family members for a successful marriage. This lesson is taught to women from all sections of the society and dalit women are no exception.

The nexus of caste, class and gender which is in a big way responsible for their dismal condition resists their injured voices from being carried to the mainstream action groups. Caste based discrimination, patriarchal exposition and the imposition of violence on them by the dominant sections of the society only aggravates their problems. Not only are these poor women oppressed by the men from their own community but also from dominant caste men as well as their own men and other male members of the family. Their life becomes a hell due to the multitude of violence inflicted on them. Consequently an analysis of caste class and gender would be helpful to expose the grim reality of Indian dalit women to violence within their home and their disempowered position in the society which discredit their self-esteem and status in the society at large. (Irudayam, Magubhai and Lee 2006: 2).

Questions of men women relationships and gender discrimination do not have the same immediate or urgent place in dalit women's everyday lives that caste discriminations do. (John 2008: 465) but it's high time now that the unexplored issues pertaining to their conjugal life be brought to public eye by the academe, feminist organizations and other human rights groups in India. Taking cognizance of the above issue this paper draws our attention towards the theoretical perspectives behind domestic violence specifically intimate partner violence endured by dalit women almost every day. The perceptions of

women on this form of violence supported by their theoretical underpinnings form the base of the paper.

Overview of Literature

Patriarchal attitudes are deep rooted in our Indian society. The segregated gender roles and stereotypes to a large extent define the female subjugation and oppression by their male counterparts. Inequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy which is worked out within a household (Karlekar 1988: 1742). The skewed nature of this patriarchal set up powers the male hierarchy over female that decisively structures the female behavior and the public code of conduct. Men have always been given the power to dominate their wives while good women are taught to be meek, humble and submissive.

This world of male domination is not only confined to any particular social class but applies well to all the women sections of society. The porosity of male domination is omnipresent. This is evidently true across all geographical domains (rural-urban), socio cultural and economic layers. But the magnitude of oppression, intensity and frequency of violence and the reaction of women may differ across these categories. The rural and urban set up, the socio economic status of women and the educational status of women all combine together to expose them to violence in their domestic sphere with differences prevailing only in its intensity and mode of perpetration.

The patriarchal element associated with violence makes them all the more vulnerable to violent attitudes within their homes. We get evidence of this from very early times too. Chakravarty quotes that "Women's impulses, can be contained through a recourse to intimidation- the threat of using force, or its actual use; the euphemism for 'impulse' control in the Arthashastra (111.3.7-10) is the 'inculcation of modest behaviour'." (Chakravarty 2013: 77) but the true situation is that patriarchy assumes such a horrendous form that it leaves the victim physically, emotionally and sexually injured.

A three year study of 500 dalit women's experiences of violence across four Indian states reveals that the majority of dalit women reported having faced one or more incidents of verbal abuse (62.4%), physical assault (54.8%), sexual harassment and assault (46.8%), domestic violence (43.0%) and rape (23.2%).(UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against women: 2013).

The India's National Crime Records Bureau also highlighted the trend of violence against women. It stated that 75,930 women faced cruelty by husband and relatives in 2007 which escalated to 99, 135 in 2011. The number of dowry deaths reported in 2011 were 8, 618 in contrast to 2007 when 8,093 of such cases were reported.³

The NFHS-3 (2005-06) data elucidates that 42.4 per cent ever married women between 15-49 years of age had experienced spousal violence and 87 per cent of spousal violence was initiated within five years of their marriage. Spousal violence was experienced more by rural women (44.3 per cent) in contrast to 36.3 per cent urban women. The major triggering

factor for violence was alcohol consumption by the spouse. Other causes were inability to bear children, not bearing male children, suspected extra marital relationship, denying sex to husband, demanding freedom or the woman asserting her space and rights.⁴

Sixty- nine per cent women reported that their husbands entered home drunk very often and resorted to violent acts. The NFHS data also elucidates that there is an underreporting of violence endured by women. Women were less likely to seek help for sexual violence than physical violence. Women who were victims of sexual violence indicated that men caused injury to their private parts which could not be brought to everyone's notice and so the men took advantage of this situation to harass them sexually. The perpetrator had the strong belief that his wife would not report such incidents to her parents or seek medical advice due to a sense of disgrace and shame. Despite of constant suffering and malign the report indicated that only two per cent women sought help from the police, one per cent from social service organizations and one per cent from religious leaders.⁵

Kaur and Garg (2010) conducted a qualitative study of domestic violence against women in a rural community. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among married women in the age group of 18 to 35 years. Physical violence was found to be a major cause of concern among these women. Some women had to suffer even during pregnancy. An alcoholic husband emerged as the main cause for domestic violence.

Results from a multi-site household survey- the Indiasafe study (INCLN 2000) revealed that out of a sample of 10, 000 women across urban, slum, non slum and rural populations in seven sites across India about 50 per cent women reported experiencing atleast one form of domestic violence in their married life and nearly 50 per cent of the women reported experiencing physical abuse during pregnancy.

Despite the awareness others may have of a woman's ongoing experience of abuse the phenomenon of intimate violence against women is typically identified as a private matter, made invisible by society and kept under wraps because of concerns of guilt, shame and secrecy. (Ranadive 2008: 128). It is also very distressing that belief in the value of relationships coupled with emotions such as hope, loneliness and helplessness propel many abused women into staying on despite violence (Johnson et al., 1992). Too many women encounter lack of support from friends and family, uninformed social service providers, lack of economic resources and the terror of looming homelessness (Anderson et al., 2003).

Husbands' relatives instigating wife beating was also common. Majority of the women preferred to remain silent despite being victimized. The women feared to resort to law because of implications such as social isolation. To address this, all sectors including education, health, legal, and judicial must work in liaison. Gender inequality must be eliminated and equal participation of women in the decision-making and development processes must be ensured.

³ <http://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Young-Hans/2016-03-14/Domestic-violence-against-women/213642>

⁴ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International. 2007. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005-06, India: Key Findings. Mumbai: IIPS.
⁵ ibid

Theoretical underpinnings

This section throws light on significant theoretical groundwork behind spousal violence. It delves into the various theories which incite violent behavior among the perpetrators of violence. It also sheds light on those theories which induce women to tolerate sadism and uphold a culture of silence.

The Social Learning theory

Spousal violence against women is a violation of their fundamental human rights that deprives them of their self esteem and dignity. Theoretical perceptions reveal that spousal violence is a learned behavior from childhood and that repressed batterers fall into a cycle of violence. The transmission of violent attitudes from one generation to the next (Stith *et al* 2000) can best be explained by Albert Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, Ross & Ross 1962). In accordance with the Social Learning theory children who grow up in violent homes are exposed to violent behavior both in an active and passive manner. They experience violence directly when they themselves become the victims of abuse and indirectly when they perceive the sadistic behavior of their parents. (Stith *et al* 2000) The transmission of violence herein is described as a complex process that occurs through learning, reinforcement and normalization of violence in childhood (*ibid*: 26).

Children are taught to socialize from a very tender age. The perpetration of spousal violence is more by males as compared to females due to the socialization practices which encourage aggression and instrumental goals in men (dominance and power) and interdependence and nurturance in women (*ibid* 29). Male violence is also linked to the endorsement of traditional gender role beliefs (Slith *et al*, 2004). Husbands who as children had witnessed their fathers abusing their mothers may practice more battering against their wives due to the stereotypical gender roles. Violence may also be the result of loss of control of anger and frustration by the husband mainly due to substance abuse.⁶

The feminist approach

Domestic Violence against dalit women is the core outcome of gender based inequalities. Husbands who batter wives typically think that they are exercising a right, maintaining good order in the family and punishing their wives felony especially the wives failure to keep their proper place. (WHO 2001) The findings of WHO are in line with the feminist theory describing spousal violence. Feminists argue that men consider their wives as inept and inferior and they feel that they are entitled to gender based respect and obedience. If the woman even tries to disrespect or contravene her husband he gets enraged and engages in violent acts. Dalit men constantly pester their wives and suppress them in order to showcase their masculinity and maintain their supremacy.

The dalit men use their masculinity as a weapon to frighten their wives to keep them in control. It is a reflection of their power and supremacy over their female counterparts. Their so called manliness is threatened when the women challenge their

actions. In majority of the spousal violence cases violence stems up when the wife confronts her husband's actions or does not bow down to his wishes. On the other hand the husbands rationalize their behavior by saying that it is the women who constantly nag them and incite them for the battle.

Another important issue that is also pondered upon by feminists while theorizing domestic violence is the involvement and active participation of other female members of the family like the mothers in law, sisters in law in inflicting violence on the women. Ironically the victimized women do not only have to struggle against their male counterparts but also the other females of the household who have maintained a sort of hierarchy in the family on the basis of their age, marital status or maternal status. Household may be defined as a site where daily struggle over resources and power are common between its members. This discrepancy in the access and use of power and assets leads to a re-division of household work among women members which results in the surfacing of hostile feelings between them. This causes a re-entrenching of patriarchy as the more privileged female members of the household function as the surrogate and often violent agents of male hegemony and control. (Bhattacharya 2004: 60).

The evolutionary perspective

According to feminists spousal violence also springs up due to lack of autonomy of women and their less bargaining power. They say that financially independent and autonomous women are less susceptible to spousal violence in contrast to women who have less autonomy but the evolutionary theory disregards this point of view. It puts forth the argument that women working outside their homes and bringing in their earnings are more vulnerable to violence because their husbands suspect them of having unfair relationships outside and are jealous of their spouse which triggers violence. Researches on spousal violence against women portray them as economic burdens thereby increasing their vulnerability to violence. Notwithstanding this argument many researchers and activists hold the opinion that wife beating cannot be only seen as a lower class phenomenon arising out of financial dependence of women on their male counterparts (Agnes, 1988; Subadra 1999; Bhattacharya, 2004) but is also indicative of the fact that women become the subjects of violence mainly due to their economic independence and non adherence to strict gender roles.

Seema's husband is indolent, sits idle at home and does nothing for a living. Seema is engaged as a domestic help and works hard to feed her children's mouth. She works hard all day and earns money to sustain her family. When she returns home after a hard day's work she is thrashed by her husband because he feels that she goes out to have illicit relations with other men. He expresses his inability to bear the family burden by insulting his wife and snatching away all her hard earned money to buy alcohol or for gambling.⁷ The dalit men pose having high self esteem and they cannot send their wives for work outside because it would demean their dignity no matter how much crisis there is in the home.

⁶ The Neglected side of Domestic Violence Research: Case Studies of Female Aggressors in Intimate Relation, Proquest 2007

⁷ Interview with Seema, Sarpathaiya village, Chak Babura, Naini, Allahabad dated 24 June 2015

International Clinical Epidemiologists Network (INCLIN) conducted a multi-sector survey in 1999 in which it found that the women who sought employment did a renegotiation of their ingrained gender roles which was viewed negatively by men and in-laws. They attributed women's employment to neglect of children and mismanagement of household leading to acts of violence by men.

Spousal violence is a pattern of abuse that shoots up after every violent episode. The physical, verbal and sexual violence on dalit women affect their bodily integrity, psyche and sexual integrity respectively which camouflage their self esteem and injure their persona. It is a very common sight in the dalit hamlets that poor parents marry off their girls at a very early age to lessen their financial burden. These newly married young girls being incapable of fulfilling the expectations of their in-laws and husband become the victims of torture and battering.

In a study conducted on spousal violence against twenty dalit women residing in Durjanpur village of Allahabad district in Uttar Pradesh it was found that the phenomenon of spousal violence was widespread and admitted openly by most of the women respondents. Dalit women victims of spousal violence blurted that their mothers in laws were primarily responsible for the fights with their spouse and the mother in law instigated their sons to beat their wives to keep them under control.⁸ It is indeed pathetic that mothers in law who once occupied the same position as their daughters in law experience a sense of power by ill treating their son's wives. Many dalit women victims of spousal violence are not mortified even a bit to egg on their sons to practice the same behavior on their wives. Out of the twenty women interviewed, fifteen women (75 per cent) retorted that they were living separate from their in laws.⁹

Understanding the psychological dilemma

Psychological perspectives of spousal violence are even more alarming. A dalit woman of an urban slum in Allahabad district during her interview conveyed that her husband was mentally sick. He found every small reason and sometimes no reason to abuse her. She was eyed with suspicion even when she talked to her female friend and her husband felt that she was conspiring against him. Her husband was so suspicious that if she dressed well and put on a little makeup then also he struck a blow at her because he felt that she had illicit relations with another man.¹⁰

Psychological perspectives hold that perpetrators of such nature suffer from some personality disorders or have experienced some distressing situations in their early life which predispose them to such kind of violence. These perpetrators might have been abused by their parents, experienced multiple failures in life or faced rejection. Thus they feel that the best way to give vent to their subdued emotions is by re-enacting the dysfunctional relationships they had with their parents. batterers of such nature possess a low self esteem and feel as though everyone is against them even their wives.

The learned helplessness theory

The femininity of women coupled with their socialization and adherence to strict gender roles pressurize them to keep their mouth shut to this culture of violence for a long time. Women are blamed for being deviant and culpable if they take the extreme step of leaving their husband's home. The marital family also expresses their inefficiency in accepting their daughter back due to social pressures and economic deprivation and she is again sent back in that den of danger by teaching her the values of virtuousness, patience and acquiescence.

The learned helplessness theory best explains the reason behind women staying in violent relationships inspite of constant abuse and torture inflicted on them. The psychology of women staying behind in their fractured relationship along with their justifications for lingering on forms the core of this theory. Rina, a rural dalit woman is clinging on to her relationship despite being severely abused by her husband. Her husband hits and tortures her every other day for no fault of hers but then too she doesn't want to dissolve the relationship. She says 'Kahan Jayein bacchon ko le kar. Ab yehi jindagi jeeni hai. Maa baapp bhi saath nahi dete.' (Where to go alongwith the children. I have accepted this as my destiny. My parents also do not support me.)¹¹ It is seen that women who are subjected to persistent atrocities or excruciating stimuli over which they have no control soon stop making any efforts to escape the traumatic situation or to prevent their abuser from harming them.

Some researchers hold the opinion that the learned helplessness theory is rather contentious because it takes a stance of blaming the victim of violence (Walker 1989, McCue, 2008). They feel that when the victim decides to stay back in her awful situation in spite of repeated exposure to agony it entails that the victim is in a position to control her situation. Walker points out that learned helplessness is not submissiveness but rather a complicated set of coping skills. (ibid) Defense mechanisms like minimizing, dissociation and denial are resorted to by abused women in order to cope with their dilapidated relationships. Women's perception is damaged to such an extent over time with the endurance of violence that it becomes a normal part of her life and she is habituated to her husband's demeaning behavior. She may even begin to think that this is the kind of behavior she deserves and justifies her husband's actions. Other senior women in the family who encounter such acts of violence by their husbands become role models for the younger generation of women who muster courage to put up with these inhuman acts and rationalize their husband's behavior.

Various social, economic and cultural pressures force dalit women to stay in abusive relationships. Women fear reprisal by their perpetrators if they take action to register complaints against them, they may be anxious about their finances and they may be apprehensive about the reactions of their family and community who may desecrate them. Women also being trapped in poverty do not have sufficient funds for legal recourse and do not receive adequate support by their family and community which make them reluctant to take any action. It is pathetic that even the victim's parents and family step back

⁸ Field study, Durjanpur village, Bahadurpur Block, Allahabad District, Uttar Pradesh January 2016

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Interview with Kanchan, dalit hamlet, Alopibagh flyover, Allahabad district, dated 29 October 2015

¹¹ Interview with Rina, Durjanpur village, Bahadurpur Block, Allahabad district dated 11 January 2016

due to fear of dishonor and ignominy. Women engage in a process of 'staying, leaving and returning' in order to reestablish the relationship on a non violent basis.

Wives view the actions of their husbands like providing a tight slap on their face or abusing them with demeaning words as a routine husband like behavior. Women hold their men responsible for their shameful acts yet do not leave them. In addition to blaming their husbands they also hold responsible other factors like unemployment of their spouse, poverty, alcoholism, drugs, disease, bad living conditions, familial responsibilities and even the mother-in-law for the violent actions of their husbands.

While interviewing dalit women in Durjanpur village in Allahabad district on the issue of spousal violence, women retorted that their men come home drunk daily but only after work. When they return home their wives reprimand them for their shameful behavior but they do not misbehave with them. They turn affectionate towards their wives, feel guilty of their actions and vow never to repeat this mistake again. Women are so much tied up to their husbands that they themselves feel guilty of leaving them. Somewhere in their heart the women feel that their husband cares for them and it is their duty to support him in all odds. Out of the twenty women interviewed sixteen (80 per cent) were suffering from spousal violence with alcohol being the prime reason behind the violence inflicted on them. The study concluded that none of the women undergoing the trauma of violence thought of ending the relationship. They continued to stay on in the relationship despite frequent rant and rave of their spouse.¹²

Another woman said that her husband began drinking with his friends but he is good at heart and does not beat her. When he comes home drunk he simply goes to bed without creating a ruckus. He also helps her in household chores and takes good care of the children. She said that a wife can get respect only when she stays with her husband. So she should be obligated towards him in all circumstances.¹³ A woman retorted that the men had a right to beat their wives and if the wives retaliated then they would be thrown out of the house and would have nowhere to go.

Retrospection

Spousal Violence against women is continuing in families unabated and a large section of the women still do not have ready access to the criminal justice system. Though women hold their fate and their household conditions responsible for their grave condition yet there is a dire need for the dissemination of laws and policies made for their redressal on a war footing to help women break the shackles of violence and lead a dignified life. Many a times women muster courage and seek help from the law and the police but they show them the way to reconciliation and send them back to their violent and abusive homes. The traditional norms of our society which focus on gender based discrimination add to the woes of the women in the private realm. Men's superior status in the

society spiced up with their dominant nature justifies their atrocious behaviour.

It is an irony that women want to get rid of male violence but do not complain against their atrocities because they feel pain in their heart when their husbands are beat brutally or tortured. The womanly virtues of love, compassion and affection come into play and women feel themselves emotionally weak to take the hard step. It is true that legal help and interventions related in this matter are limited but at the same time it cannot be denied that legal help can be rendered to such women victims only when they muster courage to come out from their den of danger and imbibe characteristics which reflect not only their physical strength but showcase their emotional strength. A complete overhauling and transformation of personality is needed to bring the desired change in the lives of the suffering women.

The perception of the dalit women regarding their own selves needs to be changed. A revitalization of their lost spirits may transform their persona into a being full of self esteem and self confidence which is not mired by the undesired and disgraceful actions of their husbands. The body of work that has been produced on domestic violence specifically intimate partner violence basically focuses on the incidence, causes and effects of domestic violence reducing the phenomenon to an everyday affair or an all-or-nothing affair and reducing women to sheer victimhood. Masculinity and femininity are commonly defined as aggressive and passive respectively through the eyes of the perpetrators and the victims. Women express the violence they encounter at the hands of their husbands in terms of a gendered life that has to be lived in continuous and inexorable loss and resilience.

Dalit women like their fellow women too have a right to lead a dignified life free from the everyday oppression and subjugation. They have as much the right to expression, autonomy and conscience like other women. The National Federation of dalit women stated this in its Declaration of Dalit Women's rights 2002. Dalit women have to be provided adequate support for their empowerment and liberation from the subjugation so deeply embedded in their lives so that they can stand on an equal pedestal with the other citizens of the country.¹⁴

This goal can be achieved only if these women hold hands together to regain their lost rights, make up their mind to come out of the shell of age old dominance, give up their subservient attitude and raise voice against the injustice being inflicted to them within their own homes by their men. In order to restore the dignity and self esteem of dalit women we will have to extend our help and cooperation to them. Jyoti Lanjewar, a dalit woman poet aptly pens down the agony of a dalit woman in her poem caves:

*"their inhuman atrocities have carved caves
In the rock of my heart
I have been silent all these years
Listening to the voice of right and wrong*

¹² Field Study, Durjanpur village, Bahadurpur Block, Allahabad district, dated January 2016.

¹³ <http://www.sheepfoldofaz.org/resources-studies/are-you-a-victim/theories-of-domestic-violence/>

¹⁴ National Federation of Dalit Women, Declaration of Dalit Women's rights, declared at 5th national Convention: Dalit Women's Assertions: Advancing their Socio-economic rights and political Agenda, Chennai, 2002.

But now I will fan the flames
Of human rights'

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