



CHALLENGING PATRIARCHY AND POVERTY THROUGH EDUCATION: A CRITICAL
STUDY OF AASHA APRAD'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY *BHOGLE JE DUKH TAYLA*
(*THE PAIN I ENDURED*)

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ABSTRACT

Aasha Aprad, recipient of many Maharashtra state level literary awards, is one of the Muslim Women Writers from Maharashtra. She writes in Marathi. Her autobiography *Bhogle Je Dukh Tayla (The Pain I Endured)* is praised by many Marathi literary critics and writers. My attempt through this paper is to introduce Muslim Marathi Literature to the English-speaking literary world and how Aasha Aprad struggled to challenge patriarchy and poverty through education. The poor Muslim in Maharashtra who are natives of rural area are not introduced properly to the basic teachings of Islam. Most of them are illiterate suffering from poverty and marginalization. They spend their whole life in fulfilling their basic needs. All sorts of religious misunderstanding and patriarchal exploitation dominate in their lives. Aasha Aprad observes her life critically. She decides to challenge patriarchy and poverty through education. After long struggle she becomes successful. The autobiography represents the life of rural area Marathi speaking Muslims. She also introduces the *Muslim Satyashodak Chalval (Muslim Truth-Seeking Movement)* founded by writer and social activist *Hamid Dalwai*.

Keywords- patriarchy, *Muslim Satyashodak Chalval (Muslim Truth-Seeking Movement)*, marginalization, Muslim Marathi Literature

1. Introduction

Bhogle Je Dukh Tayla (The Pain I Endured) is an autobiography of Aasha Aprad, a Marathi Muslim writer. By profession, she was a Professor of Hindi and recipient of much state level Marathi literary awards and honours. She worked on social controversial issues of Muslim community related to women. She passed away recently. Her autobiography *Bhogle Je Dukh Tayla (To the Pain I Endured)* is not yet translated into English. My endeavour in this paper is to critically examine the life of a Muslim woman of Maharashtra who is struggling to take education to challenge patriarchy and poverty.

Patriarchy is all pervading phenomenon in all the cultures of the world. The Muslim community of Maharashtra cannot be an exception to it. The life experience of Aasha Aprad becomes unique due

marginalization of Muslims after partition and eruption of communal violence thereafter and the presence of an illiterate tyrant in the form of mother in her life. Contrary to the expectations of Virginia Woolf, Aasha Aprad doesn't have any room of her own to brood to give expressions to her afflictions. To have a room of her own, she spent three quarters of her life. At last she becomes successful to gain independence and freedom from the patriarchal society through education.

Discussion

1. Thrown into Poverty

In the beginning of the autobiography, the writer states that she took birth in a Muslim family. It denotes that the life experience of the Muslims is different as compared to the other communities in the society of Maharashtra. Her father, Ismail Amirso Desai had a patch of land granted by Britishers. He also possessed a comfortable house in the middle city of *Kolhapur*, a district in Maharashtra. Under the British rule he worked as Treasurer and Bilingual, as he was M. A. in English. He communicated through *Marathi* and sometimes would speak in Muslim dialect. He was handsome and plain hearted fellow. The intricacies of practical life were beyond his comprehension. As India got freedom from Britishers, her father lost his job and land. The house was mortgaged for the loan of his friend. In the meantime, her father's friend died, the house was sold. And the family settled in a rented house. The only source of income was the cycle shop, her father had but it was also looted in the communal violence erupted after the assassination of *Mahatma Gandhi*. The family was thrown into poverty. Her paternal grandfather was in charge of a *Dargah*¹ and he was also a *Talathi* (Village Accountant). He took part in a business with his brother by selling all the gold his wife had and after some days passed away due to heart attack. Consequently, the family became poor and they had to work on daily wages for living. In such utter poor conditions Aasha Aprad took birth on 14th April 1952.

2. Kind father, Tyrant Mother

It was her father who named her as Aasha. Her father led life very systematically even in poverty. He taught her healthy habits and to draw letters on slate. Her mother was very arrogant and constant complainer. She would say addressing indirectly to her husband, "What is the use of his past richness, big house, jewellery, we got nothing". (p. 05, Translated by me) When Aasha was eleven months old, she suffered from Diphtheria. Her father took every care of her. Aasha was quite strong; she successfully struggled to overcome the disease. But her mother never cared for her. In her angry mood, she would say, "Had you died when you fell ill, it would have been good. Lizard faced, of widow's fortune. When I conceived you, my brother in law died, her father had lost job, after her, I delivered all girl babies." (p. 6 to 7 Translated by me). Aasha was admitted in school by her father. She liked the new school uniform, the books and slate and new friends. Recitation of tables, alphabets and rhymes was an enjoyable experience for her. In the evening her father would teach her spelling of English words. But every time they were interrupted by her mother. She would say, "Do you want your daughter to be barrister, who will do this work, your father or my father?" (p. 9, Translated by me). She was illiterate and carrier of patriarchy. Aasha's father would get payment in coins from the press where he worked. He would hand over the entire amount to his wife. She could count up to twenty and would pay the milkman, grocery shopkeeper, vegetable man and the house rent. Whenever she would find that she could not make both ends meet, she used to quarrel with her husband and would go to sleep empty stomach. She was so dominant in the house that nobody would dare to eat anything without her permission. The writer says, "We endured many such starving nights." (p. 10, Translated by me)

Aasha Aprad liked school life. She was good at languages and participated in essay writing, elocution competitions and won prizes. She secured either first, second or third position in class every year. Life was moving with struggle under her father's support. But in the 1966, on first November, her loving father passed away due to heart attack. Everything fell apart and life under the impact of her mother's cruelty became challenging.

3. Child Marriage

Some close acquaintances of her father visited the writer's house offering their help to continue Aasah's education. They promised her father when he was alive to help the family to continue Aasha's education. But her mother determinedly said to them, "Your Babu (Aasha's father) died, left a group of daughters behind. What can I do? I don't have shelter, money. Who will take care of this house? You are ready to take care of Aasha but what about my other daughters. I have decided. I will arrange Aasha's marriage with my nephew. He is a driver. He will take care of all of us." (p. 38, translated by me) At that time Aasha passed 8th class. She was fourteen years old. Her school was stopped. In the meantime she had to work at home. She assisted her Aunty in washing clothes. They have to carry the bundle of wet clothes to the river bed. It was far away from home. The way passed through a grave yard. During to and fro Aasha observed the burning bodies. At first she was frightful but got used to the smell of burning dead bodies. She felt that the silence of the grave is far better than the torturous atmosphere of her house. She comments, "My heart was burnt like the dead bodies. My aspirations, hopes and wishes burnt to ash. Whatever my mother is going to do with my life hereafter is, I feel, *Pind Daan*²". (p. 42, translated by me) The experience of life of marriage for an immature girl is like death in life.

4. Life After Marriage

Aasha Aprad got married on 7th June 1967. (p.48) Right from the next day of her marriage, there was constant quarrel in the house. Her mother quarreled with Aasha's mother in law and later targeted Aasha. Aasha was thinking about the coming exploitation. Her husband was elder to her by twelve to thirteen years. He was ready to carry out the responsibilities of the house. As per the custom the bride doesn't participate in the household work for five weeks. But there wasn't any formality observed. After marriage, Aasha started to work the very next morning. Her mother enjoyed the hard earned money of her husband. She would buy new clothes for herself. But Aasha was given the old used and tattered saris by her mother. Aasha never complained. During Aasha's first pregnancy, she faced all kinds of tortures by her mother and sometimes her husband also would join his mother in law. The heavy household work, health problems due to pregnancy and insulting treatment led her to compare herself to the goat, sacrificed at the altar of *Dargha*. She comments, "What kind of the game of life is! Everything was like the pieces on chess board. The player places the pieces as he wishes. Nothing is meant for herself. My interest in life got dry. In both the lives before and after marriage, I was exploited. I was leading life of a discarded dog. I hated myself." (p. 62, Translated by me) Aasha not only worked at home, her mother used to send her as help maid to the houses of the relatives where her other sisters got married. Once the family faced earthquake but fortunately all of them escaped. Her mother's occasional quarrel and her hunger strike resulted into ill health of Aasha. During her second pregnancy, she was sent to work at her sister in law's house. There she suffered from electric shock. For three days she could not even move. Once she was bit by scorpion. Life was troublesome and challenging for Aasha. She gave birth to second girl child. After some months her husband lost his job as truck driver. The family was thrown into poverty. She took two steps to support her family. She bought sewing machine and learnt stitching work. Next step she took is to open an account in microfinance by taking twenty rupees share. Microfinance is financial help to poor women initiated by *Mohammad Yunus*³ proved useful to her. Among Indian illiterate Muslims it is a custom to visit Darga and sacrifice a goat. Unfortunately, while travelling to *Darga*, by a tractor, the family meets an accident. One of the close relative dies in the accident and Aasha's husband suffers from severe injuries. He was hospitalized and the treatment continues for a year. She suffered from insomnia. She gave serious thought to her life:

"There is no way to come out of this troubled life. I was tired of thinking. At the very moment there was a flash in my mind. If I were educated, I would have found ways to overcome the troubles. I could have earned some money. Instead of suffering, I would have got power to struggle in life. A seed of thought sprouted, if I pursue my education. I can become a teacher after completing D. Ed. or B. Ed. Now I have decided... I will appear for the SSC examination." (p. 113, Translated by me)

She requested her husband to permit her to continue education. She got his permission but her mother and mother in law opposed it. But this was the first time Aasha took no heed to the two illiterate women. The journey to challenge poverty and patriarchy started.

5. Challenging Patriarchy and Poverty

By taking the decision to take education, she challenged the two illiterate women who are the agents of patriarchy. Mohammad Yunus helped her indirectly. With the money she collected in the microfinance account, she paid the exam fees, bought books, notebooks and pen. The whole day she worked hard, took care of her husband who was advised to take rest after the accident and her three daughters. In the night time she would study long. Education filled her heart with hope. While working she mediated the lessons. The study was the only thought in her mind day and night. The torture by her mother and mother in law continued. One day she lost her mental balance, and she swallowed seven to eight sleeping pills. She felt great weakness consequently lost her consciousness. Next morning she woke up. Doctor was called up on time. Somehow her life was saved. The thought to commit suicide continued. She thought, "What will happen to my daughters if I die?" (p. 127, Translated by me). The duality in thoughts persisted for long echoing the universal question of *Hamlet*, "To be or not to be that is the question." (*Hamlet*, p. 59) After careful consideration she determines to fight back. Education becomes solace for her. She neglected the pinching words of her mother and lost herself into studies.

Just before two weeks of her SSC examination, she delivered her fourth daughter. No one accompanied her to the hospital. She alone returned home with the baby. The strength, she collected to face the inhuman treatment is from education. Just after two weeks, she faced the SSC Board exam. She writes about her first day of SSC examination:

"I was very emotional at that time. My chest was full of mixed emotions of happiness and sorrow. This was not just examination of SSC but it was examination of my fate, examination of the injustice done to me and my resistance to it. It was first step I took towards achieving my aim in life. It was exam of my intellect. I want to enlighten my life with education. O! God give me strength." (p. 138, translated by me)

After two months result was declared. Aasha passed in all the subjects except English. After careful study, she again appeared for the exam. This time she became successful. She continued her education. In the year 1978-79, she was in the final year of Bachelor in Arts. In the April 1980 she passed B. A. (p. 167). Despite financial burden and difficulties in life, in April 1982, Aasha passed M. A. with fifty-five percent of Marks. After one year she got admission to Bachelor in Education. After successful completion of B. Ed., she got appointment as Junior College Teacher after long struggle. In due course of time all her daughters took good education and settled in life. Aasha Aprad bought a good house and a lead peaceful life.

6. Social Commitment

As the writer informs us, in 1986, Women Vigilance Committee was formed by the philanthropists. (p. 206) She joined the committee as Assistant Secretary. Many women used to approach with their affliction for counseling. Some are victims of husband's torture; some are tortured by either mother in law or sister in law, divorcee, victims of rape etc. This as the writer observes is exploitation of human being by a human being. Traditions and religious dogmas are created by humans and by using these traditions and dogmas women are exploited. Aasha Aprad tried to find out the root cause of the exploitation of women. She read many books and joined *Muslim Satyashodak Chalval*⁴ founded by Hamid Dalwai. In this social movement women's problems are given prominence. As a Muslim she needs to know the basics of Islam. She read Hindi translation of the Quran and found disparity between the teachings of the Quran and the practice in society. She observes that Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar showed the right path to Dalits. Unfortunately, Muslims were deprived of such an intellectual leader. She later joined *Mahila Dakshata Pathak (Women's Vigilance Group)*. The scope of the work in this group was wide. She solved many problems of Muslim women. (p. 210-212)

7. Conclusion

The autobiography presents the life experiences of Muslim illiterate women of Maharashtra. The patriarchal social conditions made them to suffer. Lack of education and marginalization of Muslim community after partition resulted in suffering. Muslim women are the worst sufferers. Aasha Aprad finds out solution for her every problem through education. Hard work, constant thinking over the lot of women and education made her powerful to challenge poverty and patriarchy. Her autobiography is a torch to find way towards

independence and self respect for the women of down trodden society who have been suffering from poverty, lack of education and patriarchal social order.

Notes:

1. **Dargah** is a “shrine or tomb built over the grave of a revered religious figure often a Sufi saint or dervish. Sufis often visit the shrine for ziyarat, a term associated with religious visits and pilgrimages.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dargah>)
2. **Pind Daan** is “a sacred ritual performed by Hindus after the death of a family member. According to Hinduism, this ritual is mandatory for the peace of the soul that has left for the heavenly abode. It is performed for the dead to provide them relief from the earthly attachments and find ultimate salvation.” (<https://www.starstell.com>)
3. **Muhammad Yunus** “ (born 28 June 1940) is a Bangladeshi social entrepreneur, banker, economist and civil society leader who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for founding the Grameen Bank and pioneering the concepts of microcredit and microfinance. These loans are given to entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for traditional bank loans.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Yunus)

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