

Women's Empowerment in *The Matriarch of Kamathipura*, a part of Hussain Zaidi's *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*

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ABSTRACT

Women's oppression and discrimination occur in many places in the world, especially in developing nations. To end this oppression and discrimination, it is important to empower women so that they know that they are oppressed and discriminated against. Women's empowerment also makes women independent, skillful, educated, and able to compete against their opponents. This study focused to analyze the women's empowerment reflected in *The Matriarch of Kamathipura*, an episode of S. Hussain Zaidi's *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, especially on how the main character, Gangubai Kathiawadi, fought to empower women in her area to get the equality as the men had. The researchers used the theory of feminism to analyze this study. The study's main source was the book *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, while the supporting data were derived from English literature journals, e-books, and other internet sources. This research used a qualitative method which was based on library research. The collected data were analyzed, discussed, and presented to the readers. The study found that Gangubai successfully empowered women from the lower class to have the same rights, services, and equality in society using the ability, capability, and networking she built. Gangubai empowered them by advocating their rights, fighting against discrimination, and demanding the performance and patterns that generate difference and segregation. This study was expected that it would make readers know that men and women are equal in that they have the same right and responsibilities, and they will disagree with the oppression and discrimination against women.

Keywords: gangubai, women's empowerment, equality, discrimination, feminism

INTRODUCTION

India, as one of the most populated countries in the world, has a very complex problem, especially women's problems. Women in India still experience serious problems, especially the ones who live in reported areas where they do not get a better education. The violence against women is high. Because of that situation, India is mentioned as the world's most dangerous country for women. In India, sexual assault, sexual harassment resulting from civilizing and classical practices, and the unlawful practice of buying and selling people for the purpose of whoredom, slave labor, and other forms of exploitation are all issues that women must deal with (Goldsmith, B. et al, 2018).

In India, women are subjected to some forms of unwanted sexual activity including marital rape, the inability to obtain fairness in forced sex cases, sexual aggravation, and the compulsion of sex as a means of bribery. Domestic rape, often known as marital rape, is a sort of rape that occurs in an intimate relationship between a husband and wife or another person (Trazy, 2021). Indian law does not consider domestic rape or marital rape as a crime only if the wife is not under 15 years old. Once married, women do not have the right to refuse sex with their husbands. Husbands have the right to have sexual intercourse with their wives in direct contravention of the human rights principles and husbands have the right to rape their wives (Abhayan, 2021).

Traditional and religious practices also have an important role in violating women's and girls' rights. Girls have to experience genital mutilation, forced marriage, physical abuse, and female infanticide. Bohra tradition, called khatna, is a tradition in which the clitoris of six or seven-year-old girls is commonly cut. This practice is causing real pain for women and girls. This tradition is carried out since they believe that the clitoris is the unwanted skin, a source of sin that makes them stay out of their marriage (Baweja, 2022).

Forced marriage is also a serious problem in India. Girls are forced to get married to a man she does not know, a man she does not love or are in love with. It takes place usually among the people who live in rural places. This takes place since they do not afford to earn their daughter's life. Marriage is the family's way of eliminating the economic burden, this tradition usually happens among people in the same castes. Girls are not allowed to marry men from a different community. It happens because both the parents of the girls and the men agree to make their children married. Children's agency, consent, and personhood are violated in forced or child weddings, as they are compelled into unions they do not want to be in (Mrudavi, 2020). Children's marriage is a kind of violation and oppression of their rights. Children have the right to direct their lives and to find their destinies. When their marriage is arranged by their parents, they cannot have the power to protest against

the parents' decision. They have to get married to people that they do not know, people whom they are not in love with. The result is the number of divorced couples is increasing. These broken families can lead the widows and daughters involved in prostitution.

Even though it is against the law in India, human trafficking is nevertheless a major issue. This unlawful action has been going on for a while. Women are trafficked to be used as sex slaves, factory employees, domestic helpers, beggars, and other forms of forced labor in addition to commercial sexual exploitation. They may be trafficked by members of their own family or by a third party, such as their husband or partner. Teenagers, as well as adult ladies, experience it. Even though they are still minors, they are made to work as servants, factory workers, and, worst of all, sex workers in brothels. Human trafficking can result from several factors, including poverty, a lack of educational possibilities for women in rural regions, pressure to work abroad to help support their parents, domestic abuse against women, poor status of women, etc (Vidushy, 2016).

Indian women and girls also experience discrimination. The discrimination against Indian women and girls starts at their birth. Indian people think having a baby girl is a curse, not a blessing (Chauhan, 2016). Many abortions take place after they find out that their infants are baby girls. When they are not aborted and were born as babies and grow up, they continue to experience discrimination in their childhood. Girls, especially the ones who live in remote areas, are refused to get an education. This results from the lack of literacy, which makes girls are easy to be humiliated. Adult women also experience discrimination in the workplace. Women's wages or salaries are lower than men's, although they have equal qualifications and positions.

This study focused to analyze the empowerment of women in India as reflected in Hussain Zaidi's *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, especially the second part of the book entitled *The Matriarch of Kamathipura*. This chapter presents the life and struggle of the main character, Gangubai Kathiawadi, a girl that comes from an educated and respected family who is sold by her husband whom she just gets married for 1000 rupees to a brothel of Shelaa. She is forced to have sex with the customer of the brothel. At the beginning of her profession as a sex worker, she is very frustrated and sad, but she manages to control her life and become a strong woman. A. Zaidi's Gangubai Kathiawadi, which is based in large part on the book *Mafia Queens of Mumbai* by journalist Hussain, reads like a sanitized account of the true story of the renowned prostitute who championed women's rights at the beginning of the 1960s (Roy, 2022).

Hussain Zaidi was an investigative reporter who turns into an author. Most of his books are about the Mumbai underworld life. His books *Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia*, *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, *My Name is Abu Salem*, and *Byculla to Bangkok* are all focused on the Mumbai mafia (Rashid, 2015). He is well-known as India's most productive crime author (Ians, 2020).

Writers with an International reputation like Misha Glenny in *McMafia* and Vikram Chandra in his book *Sacred Games* have drawn on his large-scale research on the Mumbai mafia. Years of meticulous research, fact-gathering, and his honest and artistic depiction of events make him a master storyteller. During the early 2000s, Zaidi's stories breathed new life into gangster cinema and the underworld in Bollywood (Sen, 2022). Zaidi is best determined for his books *Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia*, *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, *Black Friday*, *Headley and I*, and *My Name Is Abu Salem*, all of which were adapted into films (Ians, 2018).

The lives of 13 women who participated in criminal activity in Mumbai are told in the book *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*. The researchers want to investigate one of its parts, *The Matriarch of Kamathipura*, in particular, what Gangubai, the main character, does to empower women and girls, particularly their sex workers and their children. Although Gangu claims to have great values, she is far from a saint. She is conceited, moody, haughty, and always seen with a split of alcoholic beverages in her hand (Bunbury, 2022). Thus, people are constantly on her side. They stand by her as she gives up her common name, Ganga, and her manners to become Gangu, the feckless but fiercely educated promoter of the 4000 women who make their living as sex workers in Mumbai's Kamathipura red-light area. (Soni, 2022). They wallow in her anguish when she discovers that she has been betrayed.

To analyze this study, the writers used the theory of feminism. Feminism is a motion to eradicate an end to sex discrimination, bigoted exploitation, and oppression and to obtain full equality of gender in law and practice (Gender Matters, 2022). Feminism helps women to comprehend how they are harassed and monopolized and influences them to make a broader social change (Turner & Maschi, 2015). To help women to understand their life and make a broader change, they need women's empowerment. Empowerment increases the individual, mutual, and political power of exploited and diminished populations for personal and cumulative transformation (Lee, 2001).

Empowerment is needed to make women know that they get oppression and discrimination against. Empowering women and girls will make them independent, skillful, and educated so they can compete against the opposite sex. To empower women, it is important to fight for their rights and those of girls, to end discrimination, and to challenge the roles and stereotypes that lead to unfairness and segregation (Kapur and Narayan, 2020). The empowerment of women will enable girls and women to attain gender equality. Men and women are capable of having equal power and access to chances for individual development and engagement in the economy.

This research focused to analyze how the main character, Gangubai, empowers women, especially sex workers to get equality in their life, and how she fights against men's oppression and exploitation. Women's empowerment is needed by society since women's discrimination and

oppression still take place now. To make women be able to gain equality, women must be educated, skillful, and independent so that they can compete against the opposite sex. This research is expected to increase readers' good responses toward the problem of women's oppression and discrimination that take place anywhere in the world.

This study can be one of the few studies that were conducted in analyzing Hussain Zaidi's *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*. To analyze this study, the researchers needed to read and study what other researchers have done with the book *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, especially about Gangubai Kethaiwidi in a chapter of the book, *The Matriarch of Kamathipura*. The first study that the researchers read was the one that was conducted by Basu. In his study, Basu stated that what drives Ganga to leave her family for Mumbai is her id or her dream of becoming an actress. Her id makes her besotted by Ramnik Laal who exploits her by selling her to a brothel. However, her ego withholds her from losing her virginity before marriage and she marries Ramnik privately without her familial agreement (Basu, 2020).

The researchers also read some reviews, one of which was made by Kukreja. He stated that Gangubai Kathiawadi invents a universe of her own that is filthy, bloody, and careless but overflowing with feelings. Gangubai Kathiawadi changes from a helpless victim to a fierce warrior. The narrative is split into two sections. The second half shows Gangubai's ascent to "gharwali" status (Madame of a brothel), her subsequent fight for the rights of sex workers, and her campaign for Kamathipura's presidential elections. The first half of the play details the transformation of Gangubai, a prostitute who was sold as a child, into Gangu (Kukreja, 2022).

The researchers also read a study by Sarkar and Rai (2022), who looked at Gangubai's experiences of oppression and helplessness as well as her valiant resistance to patriarchal dominance to obtain access to rights for prostitutes and their children to live according to their customs.

METHOD

In analyzing this study, the researchers use the descriptive qualitative method based on library research. Data were collected from several sources. The primary data were collected from the book written by Hussain Zaidi entitled *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, especially one of the parts entitled *The Matriarch of Kamathipura*. The secondary data were collected from English literature journals, e-books, book or novel reviews, and other sources on the internet. The gathered information was organized, examined, discussed, and then presented to the audience. To obtain the data, the researchers took several steps. The researchers started by reading books and reviews of articles about women's empowerment around the world, particularly in India, and doing some online research. Second, the researchers took notes and highlighted the relevant information. The researchers then sorted and selected the data to get the primary data. The researchers then classified the data by the purpose of the study. The researchers then used the theory of

feminism to analyze the data that had been collected, demonstrated and presented their findings using language and data that had been organized by the study's main points, and finally concluded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

How Gangubai Empowered Women in Kamathipura

Gangubai is the main character in a part of Zaidi's *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, entitled *The Matriarch of Kamathipura*. This chapter was written based on the true story of Ganga Harjeevandas Kathiawadi. She comes from an educated family that comprises reputed lawyers and educationists and shares strong ties with the royal Kathiawadi family.

Ganga Harjeevandas Kathiawadi was brought up in the village of Kathiawad in Gujarat. Her family comprised reputed lawyers and educationists and shared strong ties with the royal Kathiawadi family (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 54).

Her father and brothers are strict disciplinarians and interested in her education, an unusual thing for rural families, but she is attracted by movies and acting. She has a dream to be an actress and is obsessed with the desire to visit and live in Mumbai. Ramnik Laal, the new accountant of her father, has succeeded to heighten her dream. He promises to get a role in a movie for her and asks her to marry him, but he betrayed and sold her to a brothel to be a sex worker when she is still 16 years old. Finding that her husband betrayed and sold her to a brothel makes her very disappointed and depressed for several days, but finally, she can rise herself to be strong enough to face her faith. She knows that once a girl enters prostitution in Kamathipura, she cannot go back to her family since she has embarrassed the family and damaged the family image. When she comes back to the family, she will be hanged in front of the villagers.

'Like you, even I had run away. I was your age when my husband sold me off . . . I never returned because if my family learned that I had come from Kamathipura, they would have killed me. There was no option but to make this place my home (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 63).

In order to empower women and girls, it is important to fight for their rights, end discrimination, and dispel the stereotypes and roles that lead to inequality and exclusion. Gangubai, as an educated woman, knows how to survive. She knows that she is a prostitute or a sex worker, but she cannot be oppressed and humiliated. She fights to get her right as a woman, and the rights of the sex workers in the brothel, such as wanting all the sex workers at her brothel to have a day off every Sunday and not to have any visitors. All sex workers are free not to give any services to any quest on Sundays. Sex

workers have the right to enjoy their day off such as by going to a movie without being humiliated by men or any other people.

The only solution to the problem is by treating sex workers as equals. I will believe that society has achieved 'women's empowerment' (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 65).

Gangubai knows that human trafficking is a serious problem. Women and girls are sold for many different purposes and reasons. It can be caused by the poverty and lack of education that makes the family send their girls to work leaving their villages. They can be domestic workers who work as a servant or a factory worker, but if they are unlucky, they can be forced to be sex workers in a brothel or on street. Because of the poverty and lack of education, parents can sell their daughters, or husband can sell their wives to sex workers, just like Gangu, Madhu, and many other unlucky women or girls.

Gangubai knows that women and girls, especially the sex workers in Kamathipura need someone who can empower them, so they can get their rights and equality between women and men or sex workers and the common women. Although she has to face a lot of hardships in her life, she is determined to work for the betterment of all sex workers. She starts by herself that she never forces women and girls into prostitution. When she is called to see Madhu in one of the brothels in Kamathipura, she has to spend a lot of money to save or take Madhu from the brothel because she does not stay there to be a sex worker.

'Let her go, she is not meant to stay here.' Madam Rashmi was shocked. 'But we have paid a thousand rupees for her. How can we let her go?' 'I am aware of that. You can attribute it to business loss. In the future, I don't want any girl being pushed around against her will. Do you understand?' Gangubai asked (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 64).

When she finds a girl or woman who is forced into prostitution because she is sold by someone, she will give a choice whether to stay and face the reality or leave the brothel to go back home with the risk to be killed by the family and when she is lucky that she is not hanged by the family, Gangubai still welcomes her to go back to the brothel. For her, all women and children in Kamathipura are her children and she cares for them very much like a mother.

'There was no option but to make this place my home. And even if you do return to your family, what's to stop them from ostracising you? There was a girl here, Vinita, who thought her family was different and went back to them.' (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 63).

As mentioned before that to empower the sex workers, Gangubai wants the owner of the brothels to give their sex workers a day off every

Sunday, so the sex workers are free to do their respective activities without having a mandatory to have visitors. And she starts it by inviting the sex workers who stay at the same brothel with her to go to a movie just like common women. She is very angry when one of the men in the movie tries to seduce and humiliate her. She fights against him and asks people to respect all women, although they are just sex workers. She does not want the sex workers to be humiliated, since they have the same right to enjoy their time and live like normal people. This is one of her ways to empower women, especially the sex workers in Kamathipura. She wants sex workers to be treated equally as common women in general without any discrimination both by the male and the female.

How Gangubai Fought against Men's Oppression and Exploitation

Her fight against men's oppression and exploitation can be seen when she is raped by one of her visitors, Pathan Sahuquat, who is found out as one of Abdul Karim Khan's men. Abdul Karim Khan, known popularly as Karim Lala, is the leader of the Pathan organization called the Pakhtoon Jirgai Hind, one of the gangs in Mumbai. Pathan raped her sadistically and made her hospitalized for weeks with some wounded in her body. When Gangu learns that Sheela does nothing to address her issue, she becomes enraged not only with Sheela but also with herself for being so impotent. Pathan is the only person she can deal with, so she resolves to meet Karim Lala. Gangu is aware that if she keeps quiet right now, it will create a precedent for even worse issues later.

After having a bitter argument with Sheela, Gangu finally took it upon herself to deal with the Pathan. Gangu realized that if she remained quiet now, it would set a precedent for bigger problems in the future (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 58).

As a sex worker, seeing Karim Lala is a kind of courage. She knows that she will not be welcomed by him, but her eagerness to protect herself and the other sex workers from a man like Pathan Sahuquat Khan is more important. She must search for help from Karim Lala because she wants to avenge Pathan for exploiting her sadistically. It is done not only for her safety but also for all sex workers. To get Lala's protection from a man like Pathan, Gangubai has to say that she is ready to be Lala's mistress. Her negotiation with Lala has astonished him which makes him willing to help to avenge Pathan. And for his willingness to help her, Gangubai wants to make him her brother. It is a very smart tactic because making him her brother will make her have a network with the gangs and give protection for her and her women and children in Kamathipura. The new bond between Lala and Gangubai also provides significant financial assistance to Gangu that she uses for the betterment of her sex workers.

‘Karim bhai, it has been years since I tied a rakhi for anyone because ever since I was brought here, I never felt safe with any man. Today, by offering me protection, you have only reinstalled my faith in brotherhood (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 59).

As a brothel madam, Gangubai prioritizes her business, money, and women. The business that she runs under the protection of Karim Lala is used to empower sex workers. She will spend money just to save girls or women who are sold or forced into prostitution. Even she has to sacrifice her lover to marry one of the daughters of a sex worker at her brothel to avoid her being forced to be a sex worker when men find her. As a brothel madam, she never forces them to be sex workers. She protects the sex workers from any abuse, humiliation, and exploitation or from any men who want to get the advantage of the sex workers by promising to marry them and get sex without paying the sex worker. Under the guidance of her rakhi brother, Gangubai forges close ties with both the police and the criminal underworld. Gangubai is protected by the sex workers in Kamathipura because she is feared by men due to her connections with the police and the underworld.

Her connection with the most feared gangster in south Mumbai put her on another pedestal altogether. Nobody dared to take advantage of her. Under the tutelage of her rakhi brother, she began to develop strong ties with the Nagpada police and the underworld (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 60).

Gangubai also fights against a movement that tries to remove the brothel from Kamathipura since it is close to a school complex. The school wants the brothel removed from Kamathipura since they think that the brothel brings negative effects on education. Gangubai answers this movement by taking the children of the sex workers at the brothel to the school to register them as students there, but they are refused to be registered as students. Gangubai fights for the equal right of the children of the sex workers to get an equal education since they are also the future of the country. Education for them is very important since by getting an education the children of the sex workers will have the knowledge and qualification to develop to be empowered women that will change the future betterment of the country. She wants the children of the sex workers to have the same opportunities to study and become a certain profession in the future, like doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, and so on. She does not want the children of the sex workers to have better futures and professions, not like their mothers.

When the anti-prostitution sentiment swelled, sex workers sought Gangubai’s help and she successfully spearheaded the movement against the evacuation of sex workers from the belt (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 67).

Gangubai is a liberal woman. With her connection, charisma, courage, and dedication to her gender, she rules as bhareghorwau, or president of Kamathipura. As a liberal woman who fights for women's empowerment, she has an opportunity to speak in Azad Maidan when she talks about the causes of sex workers for legalizing prostitution. She talks about the equal rights that sex workers can obtain such as getting better protection, education, health care, respect, and equality in front of the law and society. She wants to erase the discrimination that sex workers always experience. She wants society to learn about equality and unity from the brothel where there is no discrimination. Society always talks about unity and equality and should be ashamed since they still discriminate against sex workers from others. Different from the brothels, anybody, old or young, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, good-looking or not, without seeing any kind of religion, they are not discriminated against. All are welcome and have to pay the same tariff and get the same service.

Why is a jawan rewarded and given national honors, while prostitutes are insulted and treated like pariahs? (Zaidi & Borges, 2011: 65).

Gangubai also challenges the roles and stereotypes that create inequalities and exclusion. In India, especially in rural places and among the poor and uneducated society, people still hold the roles and stereotypes of women. They believe that women do not have the same right as men. They do not need education since they have to be housewives and stay at home to care for the family. Even, parents will be ashamed to have baby girls. Baby girls will be their burden and they believe that having baby girls is a curse. Gangubai thinks differently, women and girls must have the same rights as men. Society cannot just take advantage of women, such as by using them to vote for them in the election, abusing and oppressing them. Gangubai fights against that kind of discrimination and changes the stereotype of women.

She does not stop just fighting for women and sex workers to get equality in Kamathipura, but also nationally. Once she has to see the Prime Minister talk about the problems faced by sex workers. The only brothel madam or prostitute who is granted a secret meeting with the nation's leader is Gangubai. She discusses the significance of Mumbai's red-light district and the need to save it. When the Prime Minister questions her about why she operates her company and requests that she stop, she responds that she will stop operating as a madam of brothels if the PM will make her Mrs. Prime Minister. She also imparts the advice to "practice before you preach" to him.

'Don't get angry Pradhan Mantriji. I just wanted to prove a point; it is always easier to preach than practice.' Nehru remained silent. At the end of the meeting Nehru, who had bluntly rejected her second proposal, conceded to Gangubai's first demand and also promised to look into the matter (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 69).

Finally, the Prime Minister approves her proposal to protect the red-light areas, meaning to protect the sex workers. It is one of the biggest victories that Gangubai can achieve in gaining protection for women from men's oppression and exploitation.

Gangubai never gets married, but she adopts several children and live with her in Kamathipura, and she never returns to her hometown and family. Most of the adopted children are orphans and homeless. They can be the sex workers' children. They are looked after by her, and she ensures they get a good education.

While she never got married, she is said to have adopted several children who lived with her in her small room in Kamathipura 12th Lane. Most of them were either orphans or homeless. Gangubai took a keen interest in bringing them up and ensured they received a good education (Zaidi & Borges, 2011, 68).

The study of how Gangubai fights against men's exploitation and oppression expected the readers to know that men and women are equal in that they have the same right and responsibilities, and they will disagree with the oppression and discrimination against women. It is expected that the study can increase people's care about the equality of any class of people that forms society.

CONCLUSION

The empowerment of women not only in India but also in other countries, especially in developing countries is very important. By empowering women, they can get equal rights and obligations. They can get an education and have the same right to direct their future. Gangubai as one of the educated women who have experienced as a victim of human trafficking knows how hard how to live as a sex worker who is always disrespected, abused, humiliated, and discriminated against by her society. She has succeeded in empowering women and girls through her dedication to her work and relationships with the nation's leaders. She does this by standing up for their rights, combating discrimination, and challenging the roles and stereotypes that lead to inequality and exclusion. Equality and being free from oppression and discrimination can be obtained, when women's empowerment is given to make them know that they have the same right and the same responsibility as men do.

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