

BOOK REVIEW: A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

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Writing about oneself is considered important, especially for marginalized groups. Through self-writing, one reveals the challenges and manifestations of oppression. If a marginalized and oppressed woman tells her life story, she wants to assert an identity that is the driving force behind which she builds her story. This review addresses the self-construction of Indian domestic worker-turned-writer Baby Halder, who emerged as an independent and victorious self despite various forms of social and psychological oppression.

Baby Halder's autobiography, *A Life Less Ordinary*, is about a domestic worker who defies societal norms to define herself rather than be defined by others. Baby Halder's autobiography, *Aalo Andhari*, was originally written in Bengali and was translated into English as *A Life Less Ordinary*. It was a huge success in India, where it was first published in Hindi before being translated into eight other Indian languages and fourteen other languages.

Baby Halder is a young woman who works as a domestic helper in a Delhi household. Baby, who married at the age of 12 and became a mother at the age of 14, writes movingly and poignantly about her life as a young woman in her girlhood and beyond. Her father's long absence, her mother's hardships, and her mother's decision to leave the marriage and leave her household to Baby and her sister shaped Baby's early life. As her wedding approached, Baby, who was still a child at the time, longed to play and learn, but while facing significant violence from her husband, she had the responsibility of being a wife and a mother. Many years later, when her young baby became a mother of three, she fled to the city in hopes of finding a job. Baby worked as a domestic helper in Delhi and was fortunate enough to find an employer who encouraged her to read and then write voraciously. A baby's life story is a lesson in courage and survival.

Baby Halder is a Delhi-based domestic help turned writer. The book begins lightheartedly, with Baby reminiscing about her childhood in Jammu and Kashmir. However, difficulties arose when her father moved her family to Murshidabad, West Bengal, leaving her at her brother-in-law's home. Her father rarely brings money to her home, making it difficult for her family to make a

living. Despite her difficulties, her parents, especially her mother, were enthusiastic about her education. The baby's mother, unable to cope with her husband's long absence and limited financial resources, abandons her children and leaves home with her youngest child. Her family could not find her. Her mother's disappearance caused her father to remarry twice, leaving the latter's wife for the third time. A baby's life turns into a tragic chain of events without her mother's love. Baby Halder's childhood was one of adversity and sorrow for her. Due to her father's long absence and inability to support her family, Baby's mother went to the market when she was four years old and never returned. Her father was a cold and cruel man. He hit her for petty reasons like telling a classmate that she had no food at home." brought home one after another. The baby's intermittent schooling is cut short due to financial problems and domestic turmoil. He showed little interest in the child and made no attempt to understand it. The book also highlights a lack of knowledge about women's health and hygiene procedures. The baby is no longer a child when menstruation begins, and the father deliberately avoids contact with the baby. She can also return to Pisima's house and do her business in the fields with her stepmother without her fear. Her older sister married without difficulty because her father was no longer able to support her family. When Baby is only 12, her father marries her to a man twice her age.

Baby is too young to understand the significance of her wedding preparations and would prefer to play in the street with her friends. "It will be a lovely thing to be married," Baby tells a friend after meeting her future husband. "At the very least, I'll still get to eat properly." Even hours before her wedding, she writes, "I'd sing and bounce around and play." Her marriage was devoid of joy, with frequent animosity and physical assault. Halder was terrified of her husband's violent attacks and frequently fled to her relatives' houses, where she was sometimes accepted, and sometimes not. She recalls her husband's assaults on her vividly, which ranged from being dragged by her hair to being beaten with a stone. She also describes times when her husband, envious of her, restricts her movement. Rani, Baby's older sister, is asphyxiated by her husband, and her neighbor is burned to death after her inebriated husband discovers her watching television in someone else's house. Baby is advised not to visit a specific neighbor because she is estranged from her spouse. Baby realizes that her in-laws' home is a safe haven for her. She is treated as a "daughter," not a "daughter-in-law," and she is not allowed to stay indefinitely and must return to her spouse. To avoid the ultimate

drudgery, she begins taking tuition, but even that is put on hold due to the frequent violent domestic eruptions at home.

The guy, like any other patriarchal household, was the breadwinner and sole source of income. Despite the fact that her situation was completely opposed to her decisions, Baby was completely reliant on him for all of her wants. Baby, exhausted and desperate, took charge of her destiny and traveled to Delhi in 1999 with her older brother and three children. She found work as a maid in some of the city's most affluent homes, but casteism soon rears its ugly head when her boss indignantly remarks on how a neighbor can hold Baby's child but not her own. Baby notices that poverty does not bar one from being touched. She tells another horrifying story about working as domestic help and how a pet dog at the house treated her better than her boss. Halder was expected to meet her employers' stringent demands, resulting in a massive workload that frequently left her with no time to care for her own children.

Baby also remembers becoming truly in love with another man who genuinely cares about her and her children. It is described as "similar to sensations". She also states that if Dural was literate, she would have written him with the same message. Such honest and the genuine sentiment is easily realized on the site.

Baby's boss, Dr. Prabodh Kumar Srivastava, a retired anthropology professor (and grandson of the great Munshi Premchand), saw her love of literature and decided to write the book. Kumar noticed Baby fixating her gaze on his bookcases, eagerly staring at the books. He encouraged her to read and write more frequently. Kumar helped her read his books and newspapers, which she devoured with relish. Baby's sense of dignity and respect was strengthened when she was taken to work at Doctor. He was shocked to hear her names such as Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nasrul Islam, Sharachandra, Satyendra Nath Dutt, and Sukumar Rai, so she was surveyed for their reading interests. When he learned that she loved her literature, he combined her eagerness to talk about herself with her ability to write and encouraged her to do so. He remembered Ashapurna Devi, who stayed up late at night writing after household chores were done and everyone went to bed. He then offered her to write her own life story. "Write something in this notebook," he instructed, handing her his notebook and pen. "You can spend your whole life on it if you want," he said,

"whatever has happened in your life since you became self-aware. She said Taslima Nasrin's She started writing a little bit each night while reading Amar Meyebela. She started writing in Bengali fragments and gradually she gained confidence. She shared her work with Prabodh Kumar and was part of his literary circle. I read it, corrected it, and even translated it into Hindi with the help of other Bengali colleagues.

The story of Baby's life is full of incredible events. Her decision to have a tubectomy is admirable, as is her rebuttal to the doctor that she is educated enough and does not require 'approval' from her husband. She knows early on that if she cares and is concerned about what others think, she would be bound and burdened down by patriarchy for the rest of her life.

The act of reading and writing frees Baby from sexual and caste stigma and allows her to redefine her own existence, and self-expression. Her mentor and her work awakened her dormant literary spirit, and since then she has never looked back: she has already completed two other works of hers, both are waiting for English translation. Her autobiography testifies to the dire plight of so many women. Their voices and words are not heard or read, their suffering is not recorded, and their lives and innocence are erased. Because they are systematically oppressed, oppressed, and expected to play primitive and rigid roles. Subject them to the higher authority of men. Baby stories capture the state of women at their most vulnerable. Baby describes a disease that affects the entire Indian society. Women's intentions and aspirations are governed by patriarchy. they have no free will. She is not a self-contained entity.

Baby Halder chose to exist in society as an individual with her own identity, independent of her husband, father, and brothers. She was an ordinary woman who would have spent her life like any other ordinary woman marginalized in multiple ways until she recognized her ability to write about herself, interrogating the most critical incidents of her life, making life-changing decisions, and feeding her desire to be independent. Her triumph lay in her long-awaited discovery of literacy. She is a feminist in the sense that she shows courage, takes responsibility for her children, shows self-esteem, and is always optimistic.

A Life Less Ordinary is a disturbing look deep within a world of poverty and tyranny that only a few outsiders are aware of. It's an inspiring true story about a remarkable woman's courage, tenacity, and determination to rise above her circumstances. The novel is an accurate depiction of women's social standing and how they are constantly objectified and humiliated. Is a woman's dignity and respect only apparent when the 'male' is the main protagonist in her life? Is that what she thinks about throughout her story?

The book is more concerned with the struggle to exist than with the meaning of life. It all comes down to living. It is the story of a lady who flees her familiar but terrible circumstances in search of a normal ordinary life and ends up with something extraordinary. Baby's story is compelling because it addresses the issue of regaining one's freedom and autonomy over one's life. Whether it was deciding not to return to her husband despite constant societal pressure or deciding to tie up her tubes so she would not have any more children, these were powerful examples of establishing her independence.

The book conveys the idea that the struggle for women's rights occurs not only at the highest levels of society but also in everyday actions. Women on the outskirts are waging resistance. Baby's existence, in the most basic sense, demonstrates the importance of education and independence for women. This is a story of strength and empowerment in a society that condemns every woman's behavior and is plagued by violence and abuse of women's bodies, making this book a must-read.

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