

# Finding Life From Domestic Violence In Baby Halder's "A Life Less Ordinary: A Memoir"

Baby Halder (or Haldar) (born 1973) is an Indian author, whose autobiography *Aalo Aandhari (A Life Less Ordinary - 2006)* describes her harsh life while growing and as a domestic worker. This novel is translated into 21 languages, including 13 foreign languages.

"I am a domestic help, not a writer," said Halder, who has two best-selling books to her credit and first shot to fame in 2006, with her work *A Life Less Ordinary*.

Halder was born in Kashmir in a lower middle class family. Her father's habitual drinking and irresponsibility towards the family made her mother to quit the family as she is the only individual to run the family with low income. The male chauvinism and arrogance of a man is shown in the character of her father where he married several ladies and shifted from place to place "childhood which is celebrated as the life of god" is just the dream in the life of Baby.

Baby was a drop out in sixth standard and her father's cruelty reaches the peak when he made Baby marry an old man 14 years elder to her, a small-time decorator. Ms. Halder was too young to understand the term marriage. After meeting her future husband, twice her age, the 12-year-old Baby tells a friend: "It will be a good thing to be married. At least I will get to have a feast." Even in the hours before her wedding, she writes, "I'd sing and jump about and play." This line implicit the atrocity and enforcement she faced due to poverty and by her parents. After strenuous torture by her father and husband also strangulation of her sister made her to quit from her family in order to save her three children. She took a freight train and reached Delhi.

Now as a single parent, she started working as a housemaid in New Delhi homes, to support and educate her children, sons Subodh and Tapas and daughter, Piya; and then encountered several exploitative employers. There she escapes destitution by sending her eldest son out as an under-age domestic servant and by working for abusive employers. Her bosses treat her harshly, forcing her to lock her children in the attic all day while she works. "One woman told me that this was precisely her story too, which made me very happy," she added. "There are so many other women in India who have left home like me. There is no support for them; life is not easy, and they are not able to speak out. If I can give them some confidence, then I will be satisfied."

Domestic violence is not exposed to many people in the world. One who reads newspaper continuously can find girl child being abducted and sold for cheap rates to do the daily chores in a family. The stressful life and the longing for the attainment of freedom have been clearly revealed in the novel. Each and every line of this book plainly replicates the agony and pain that she faced in her life. "This is not a book that can be read and tossed aside. It raises questions about the fate of the millions of domestic workers in our country and their ill treatment," a review in the newspaper *The Hindu* concluded. "Truly this

is a story of courage under fire.” It also illustrates how Indian society treats women who leave their husbands, stigmatizing them and pushing them to the margins of existence.

When a woman feels she has to desperate and lead a life there her problem begins. She is basically considered as a weaker sex filled with emotions and affection. When Halder left her house the first thing strike her mind was feeding her children. At this situation she is ready to bear all sorts of painstaking works. In a line when she mentions the domination of upper class people, she says “As soon as she sat down, I’d offer her tea, water, sherbet, whatever she wanted. Then I had to massage her head or her feet or whatever: the work was never ending.” Clearly states the audacity faced by women. Indirect violence plays a major role in developing country like India.

This is not only in the case of Halder but many. Few people articulate and remaining stay passive. When upper class people form clubs to eradicate all sort of social evils, why they have not opposed domestic violence until a domestic worker exposed the cruelty faced by them?. Here we have a question whether it is because they have people working in their home and this community is not willing to liberate or uplift them.

Halder who is a famous writer, has got a chance of writing when one day, Prabodh Kumar ,the retired anthropology professor handed Halder a pen and asked her to write her story in her mother tongue, Bengali. "I was nervous when I held the pen in my fingers. I had not written anything since my school days. But when I started writing, words began to flow effortlessly. In fact, writing turned out to be a cathartic experience," revealed Halder, who has studied up to 7th grade.

But for Baby, the best thing about her rebirth as an author is the regard of her new friends. "For the first time in my life, I feel confident that my story is worth telling, and in my own words." Mr. Kumar’s editing, the narrative is rough, and the horde of characters that flit in and out can be confusing. Nevertheless, her book provides a moving depiction of life for millions of impoverished Indian women, and of aspects of Indian society not usually the focus of novelists’ attention.

Halder has built a house in Kolkata with earnings from her books. "I need not work as a domestic help anymore, but I am not comfortable leaving my employer who is a father-like figure to me. But eventually I hope to move to Kolkata someday, which I think is the best place for people who want to write in Bengali," said Halder. “I want to be a writer and I will continue to write,” she said. But for now, she said, she cannot abandon Mr. Kumar, “so I will go on working here.” And then she left, to prepare lunch for her boss.

Even though she is a successful writer she cannot quit the boss. Though she had stuff to express her hardships she is not convinced to leave the employer and live a life of her own. She stings to the ideas of tradition. When saying about the physical labour "I appreciate the domestic help’s courage in taking on her powerful employer, who I believe short changed her in terms of salary. Unfortunately, there is no respect for physical labour in India. The rich and the powerful feel that they have a right to exploit their domestic help,"

she added. Halder’s memoirs are not the words of a single woman but representation of whole domestic community both men and women. Halder has shown and portrayed the original life of the basic laymen.

Domestic violence is not being noticed by any novelists until Halder gave breath to it. Each and every soul should be treated equally in this universe. Human being, though he is a laymen must be treated equally on par with other human folks. Like other jobs, doing domestic chore is also a job. Doing this job is not an irritating one. The maid servant is one who does all our works due our inefficiency of performing daily chores. A bottom layer worker also must be given same respect and importance as we give to our superiors. Think of a situation no scavengers, no maid servants, no gardener, no plumber then you will understand the essentiality of those people. Let's stand up and raise our voice against such violence and make them feel comfort and civilized.

