

**Ethnography of Marginalized self: Reading of Baby Kamble's "The prison we broke"****Kirtikumar R.Pimpliskar**

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Do Taaki, , Mumbai, India**Abstract:**

Autobiography appeared first in the west in the 18th century. It represents more about private, social, public, political and moral life of a writer. Nevertheless individual achievements, personal experiences, oppression, imprisonment and struggles of an author occupy core part in autobiography. Manohar Jadhav opines that autobiographies are the revivals of memories of a hateful past and usually have the description of three generations. Dalit women autobiographies reflect and discuss various socio-political-cultural issues pertaining to Dalit community. There is no fictional motif in Dalit women autobiographies. Unlike Dalit men, only a few Dalit women have written their autobiographies and most of them have been written in regional languages and that they have hardly been translated into English.

Baby Kamble's autobiography, *Prisons We Broke* (2008) describes tension between tradition and modernity. Through it she recapitulates her mental and physical trauma, her marriage, problems as housemaid, brutalization, dehumanization, despair and agony in an artistic manner and argues that dalit feminist problems are understood only by dalit women, as dalits' problems are understood only by dalits and not by non-dalits. Dalit women recounts bitter experiences, pains with realization that other dalit women also must have suffered the same.

Key Words:-autobiography, Dalit, feminist, identity, marginalized, self, Ambedkar's Influence.

Autobiography appeared first in the west in the 18th century. It represents more about private, social, public, political and moral life of a writer. Nevertheless individual achievements, personal experiences, oppression, imprisonment and struggles of an author occupy core part in autobiography. Manohar Jadhav opines that autobiographies are the revivals of memories of a hateful past and usually have the description of three generations. Middle class dalits and dalit politicians do not prefer dalit autobiographies as they are not ready to mingle undesirable past into the cultural present. Dalit autobiographies, instead of depicting in first person 'I', lay more stress on the collectivity of dalit community. Narrator is the protagonist and he/she is the witness to the events narrated. N. S. Suryavanshi's *Things I Never Imagined* (1975), Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (1978) mark the rise of dalit autobiography. There are many autobiographies which vary in length but not in content. Monotonous voice is found in all dalit autobiographies. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A memoir* (2003), Bama's *Karukku* (1992), Vasant Moon's *Growing up Untouchable in India* (2001), Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2003), Aravind Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007), Baby Kamble's *Prisons we Broke* (2008), Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2008) are some of the best examples of dalit autobiographies which spit fire against existing Hindu norms. *Baluta* (1978) by Daya Pawar is the first dalit autobiography which shook the upper caste people. *Baluta*, the autobiography in Marathi traces the

origin of autobiography, that is, the diary of Kalappa Yashwant Dhale written during the period 1911-28 that describes exploitation and its resistance through education. Pawar gets the diary from Dhale's family who had kept it carefully for over seventy years.

Self recognition is the main motto of dalit autobiographies. There are many incidents which ultimately threaten the stability of the 'self'. Writers make query regarding the dominance of the upper caste and trace out the evolution of an 'individual self' as well as depict the collective suffering of the community. Highly influenced by Ambedkar Movement, many Dalit writers in the post-Ambedkar period produced excellent works, who include, Urmila Pawar, Jyoti Langewar, Hira Bansode, Surekha Bhagat, Pradnya Lokhande, Mina Gajbhiye, Baby Kamble, Shantabai Kamble among others. Telugu has produced such stalwarts as Challpalli Swaroopa Rani, Gogu Syamala, Vinodini and Jupaka Subadra and Siva Kami, Bama and Veeramma have been writing powerful works in Tamil.

Dalit women autobiographies reflect and discuss various socio-political-cultural issues pertaining to Dalit community. There is no fictional motif in Dalit women autobiographies. Unlike Dalit men, only a few Dalit women have written their autobiographies and most of them have been written in regional languages and that they have hardly been translated into English. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (original *JinaAmucha* in Marathi, translated by Maya Pundit: 2009) is an autobiography of nota Baby kamble but an entire community. *The Prisons we broke* gives an

evidence for the Casteism in India. The fact that caste system not only stigmatizes Dalits as untouchables by reason of their birth and forces them into dirty jobs, but also segregates a large chunk of the population as lower castes and also forces them into various menial jobs by virtue of their birth. Casteism has not just killed millions of Dalit but also destroyed generations of these enslaved people by keeping them away from civilization, development and social honour. Millions of people, for generation to generations together were reduced to a level much lower than dogs, cats and rats. Casteism caused deaths of not only the body but also killed honour, self pride and the living spirit of a whole race for hundreds of years. Casteism does not kill directly, but kills the spirit and consciousness of a person or society.

In the early decades of 20th century, women's writings were regarded as a different form of literature by the male centric society. The feminine narrative in autobiography raised a great controversy as the autobiography had been the monopoly of males till then. Writing autobiography requires certain potentialities. Depicting of individuality is the pre requisite of writing autobiographies.

Mukta Sarvagod's autobiography *Closed Doors* (1983) portrays how the writer has been influenced by Dr. Ambedkar's humanism. Baby Kamble's autobiography, *Prisons We Broke* (2008) describes tension between tradition and modernity. Through autobiographies, dalit women writers recapitulate their mental and physical trauma, their marriage, problems as housemaid, brutalization, dehumanization,

despair and agony in an artistic manner and argue that dalit feminist problems are understood only by dalit women, as dalits' problems are understood only by dalits and not by non-dalits. Dalit women narrate bitter experiences, pains with realization that other dalit women also must have suffered the same.

Baby Kamble, who has been influenced by Ambedkar movement and its ideology, sets an agenda that Ambedkar's ideology is the right solution for the emancipation of women in the Indian context. She exhorts that Ambedkar has envisaged an egalitarian society by introducing Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament for the upliftment of the Indian women. Kancha Ilaiah argues that for a long time the position of women was perceived as a private domain, and therefore political scientists took little interest in studying the views of both male and female thinkers on women.

Baby Kamble presents in *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) the development of herself as well as her community. In an interview with her translator Maya Pandit, she says, "I wrote about what my community experienced. The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences become mine. So I really find it very difficult to think of myself outside of my community." (Kamble, 136)

The *Prisons We Broke* she describes the mental and physical violence against women by the public and private spheres. Maya says, —If the mahar community is the _other' for the Brahmins, mahar women

become the 'other' for the mahar men. Here Kamble has memory of her community's history and she trying to recasting this history through her writing. Memory becomes weapon to inspire for resistance in future generations. This book also provides the Hindu caste system as the doer of terrible crime against humanity.

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (published in 2008) is considered the tactic of Dalit women. As Maya Pandit examines, —Like most Dalit autobiographies, *The Prisons We Broke* is an expression of protest against the inhuman conditions of existence to which the Hindu caste system has subjected the Dalit for thousands of years? She notes that after Phule and Shahu Maharaj, it was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who provided the intellectual and ideological foundations for a sustained critique of the caste system and that under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, Dalit protest acquired the form and force of a militant political movement and challenged the very foundations of Hinduism. Kamble raises certain important issues like caste discrimination, women subjugation and the influence of Dr. Ambedkar on Dalit women to get themselves educated both socially and culturally.

Born to an industrial father, the author's —family background hardly keeps her above the miserable poverty. Her English-speaking aajas or grandfathers were butlers to European sahibs. As she says: all the people of the maharwada were illiterate except for my aaja. Therefore, she has nothing much to suffered as her people

suffer but she had experiences of her community her people who suffer a lot.

The narration deals with her family background, village customs like worshipping local deities, superstitions, Mahars and yeskar duties, school education, experiences of discrimination, marriage customs, experiences of new brides with their in-laws, cooking beef, Dalit culture, exploitation of the upper castes, the influence of movies, the influence of Buddha and finally the arrival of Dr. Ambedkar as Dalit messiah and Kamble's active involvement in Ambedkar movement.

The experience of insecurity is one among the major aspects in Kamble's autobiography. The position of Dalit women in a Dalit family, which is full of experiences charred by insecurity, domestic violence and social violence, is an important theme in her autobiography. The patriarchal system in India made the Dalit women feel insecure and dependant on men.

Another aspect of domestic violence that Dalit women experience is the hegemony of husband and the dominance of in-laws at the bride groom's place. The author illustrates, "But we too were human beings. And we too desired to dominate, to wield power. But who would let us do that? So we made our own arrangements to find slaves – our very own daughters in-law! If nobody else then we could at least enslave them." (87)

In the Indian context autobiography representing a unified self appeared on the literary scene as part of emerging modernity

resulting from colonial encounter. However there was a tradition of self-reflexive writing in the autobiographical mode (Ramaswamy and Sharma, 2009) and autobiography representing a reflective individual can be read as a “resolutely public utterance” (Udayakumar, 2008: 419). A large number of autobiographies written by men during the 19th and 20th century were occupied with the subject of historical change. Therefore autobiographies as self-narratives are sites where there is an intersection of autobiography and history (Udayakumar, 2008). With reference to women’s writing in India, women could write about only a few things in the absence of a sustained high level of formal education. Beginning in the 19th century it was the high caste Hindu women, who started writing autobiographies, which were located in the new emerging material and social condition resulting from reforms and legislative innovation in the public sphere (Sarkar, 1999). Women’s autobiographies then become a cultural site, where tensions were articulated resulting from colonial modernity. The dominant ideology of 19th century cultural nationalism celebrated India’s spiritual superiority over material West but remained silent over caste/gender based humiliation. The autobiographies of upper caste women have to be located within this framework. The question of caste was invisible in their writings. Sharmile Rege has drawn attention to this erasure:Brahmin women’s autobiographies have been narratives of upper caste women, their struggles with tradition and their desire to be modern. It is this ‘self’ that claims to be universal, modern unmarked by caste

through its journeys of companionate marriage, modern institutions and marital discord. Dalit autobiographies were part of Dalit literature, whose arrival on the scene of Indian literature caused much anxiety among the gatekeepers of literary establishments resulting in a shift in existing literary paradigms. G.N. Devy has identified Dalit writing as one of the forces, which has challenged the bourgeois nationalist perspective in Indian literary historiography. Dalit literature is not merely a collection of texts, but mark the emergence of a new self consciousness influenced by the philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar and the writers in this movement show a “clear awareness of belonging to a distinct literary culture and society”

(Devy, 2006: 126).

Within Dalit literature, autobiography as a literary and cultural expression has created a praxis, which has challenged existing literary structures through their articulation of cultural and caste

discrimination: It focuses on the question of otherness, difference, marginality, canon and the categories of aesthetics. In order to voice the protest of the marginalised,

What Kamble points out that is, the dilemma of dalit women whose painful life she shows. She also depicts God, religion and unjust widespread traditions, social customs and the exploitation of dalit woman. For ex. When the girl becomes 5 to 6 year old, she was forced to marry. Even she did not know the meaning of husband. At husband’s house, she must have to wake up early, to cook for them, to fill the jars at river which was far away from home. If she committed any mistake, she used to suffer a lot. When

she became physically mature, her mother-in-law did not allow coming together with husband. She used to suffer for false charges of her mother in law. In her menstruation, she had a difficult test to go at river for bath. She had no other piece of cloth to wear. In this way, dalit woman used to exploit. Sometimes, she used to elope from her husband's house due to tyranny to her father's house. There also, she was badly beaten and forced to go at her husband's house. Her mother-in-law spread fake rumours of her character to poison the married life of her son and daughter-in-law. This mother-in-law used to say to her son, "Eloped wife brings shame to family and to her husband. The bitch must have affair with someone. You should cut her nose, don't be eunuch, and be a 'man', proud to be you are son of ours. Bring dignity to your father's name." (P.58)

Dalit woman's father-in-law also used to participate in this tyranny. He used to help his son to cut the nose of his daughter-in-law. The community and relatives did not support the woman. No one used to permit the woman to enter in their house. What they used to suppose this dalit woman, that is, a wretched and shameful to the honour of family and relatives.

Baby Kamble also discusses superstitions, traditions, marriage, rituals, the fair of the buffalo, eating the meat of dead animal, baths and worships in the month of Ashadh of mahar community.

The third part of this autobiography about social life and social system of dalit community. It speaks about her uneasiness towards the suffering of her community.

When dalit woman offers a bunch of wood to high caste woman, she used to say, "oh! You, wretched mahar woman, take care not a thread of your cloth would come in my house. Otherwise, we have to clean everything of our house. Even we have to bath our Gods. They will also become impure." (P.61)

It is up to the women themselves to take their lives into their own hands — for a start girl should be given the same treatment as the boys (even the fair-minded grandmother gave food to her grandsons first). Baby Kamble recollects in her autobiography how Kamble was a victim of her husband's male chauvinistic mentality, "Once we went to Mumbai to attend a meeting, we travelled in a general compartment that was very crowded and some young men happened to stare at me. My husband immediately suspected me and hit me so hard that my nose started bleeding profusely....."

In her autobiography Baby Kamble presented the existing representation of Mahars life in past 50 years living in Western Maharashtra. She bluntly illustrates her anger toward the Chaturvarna system of Hinduism as well as against the patriarchal order predominant among Mahars which gave a lower status to their women. The autobiography is a self-analysis of the patriarchy and superstition prevalent among Mahars. It is also a document which recorded the poverty and hunger of Mahars. The autobiography is a social critique of the Hindu Social system as well the patriarchal order of Mahars. Baby Kamble's self and truthful analysis made her autobiography totally different from the

autobiographies of higher caste women as well as Dalit male autobiographers where the presence of Dalit women as an independent human being rarely felt. Through her narration Baby Kamble bring to the fore the plight of Dalit Women

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