

**Dalit Women's Hunger, Suffering and Survival with Reference to *The Prisons We Broke* by
Baby Kamble**

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Abstract

Dalit Literature is a voice of marginalized people. It unveils Dalit women and men's hunger, suffering, caste discrimination, social inequality, economic exploitation and religious discrimination in Hindu society. Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* is one of the first Indian significant autobiographical works in India like Bama's *Karukku*, Shantabai Kamble's *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (1983), Viramma's *Viramma, Life of an Untouchable* (1997), Urmila Pawar's *Weave of My Life* (1988), Shilpa Raj's *The elephant Chaser's Daughter* (2017), etc. These autobiographies demonstrated their life stories and inhuman live experiences in systematically weaved hierarchical society. In *The Prison We broke*, the writer attempts to discuss on Mahar Women's hunger, physical and psychological suffering, rise voice for survival and to emancipate from the above in human practices done by upper caste people. She says women have subjected into a subaltern state and treat them as "other". But Dalit (Mahar) women treated as other than other, it means Mahar women are faced double exploitation, first from their husband and another from Brahmin ideology of patriarchy in existed society. The present paper covers to deliberate on women's hunger, suffering, and struggle for existence/survival with the influence from Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. In this we can see protest against prejudice and Hindu hegemony.

Keywords: Hunger, subjugation, subaltern, suffering and voice for survival

Babytai Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* has depicted real situation of particular community and society with her own horrible experience. In India, Dalit community is most targeted and marginalized, also this community's women's condition have been more worse while compare to the another community women. Regarding this, in the 'Introduction' of *The Prisons we Broke*, Maya Pandit, a translator of this book says, "If the Mahar community is the 'other' for the Brahmins, Mahar women became the 'other' and an 'object' for the Mahar men" (Kamble, XV)

This novel throws light upon protest against the inhuman conditions in Hindu caste system. Dalit patriarchy made their women yelled and kept in suffocation and also considered women as inferior to men means to their husbands. Women of Mahar community 'always bear husband's desires, his doubts, abusive languages, harsh behavior and continuous beating are considered as plights of Dalit women' (Kamble, 133). The novel has also contained (experience of writer) picture of the caste and gender of Dalit women's struggle become a part of Mahar women's labour in the fields and the corn gets wet with their

sweet. The same corn goes to make your pure, rich dishes. And feast on them with such evident relish! Your places are built with the soil soaked with the sweat and blood of Mahars. But, does it rot your skin? You drink their blood and sleep comfortably on the bed of their sadness. Does it pollute you then? This is all that your selfish religion has given to us. But now we have learnt how utterly worthless your religion is.... (Kamble, 56). In this way writer explores loopholes of their socially adopted taboos and religion, and she puts questions as representation of her community and demands justice.

In the book, sensitively narrates regarding discrimination between upper caste and Mahar caste school children. Brahmin girls and boys stay away from the Mahar girls in the school because of untouchability. The upper caste girls feel fear of getting polluted and cover their noses. Among them one girl who told that she has to bath after left school because her mother had come to inquire those Mahar girls also studies with the Mahar caste girls. This situation had lively experienced by baby Kamble herself like other Mahar girls in school days. These Mahar girls and boys will always sit in the corner of the school. Where school teachers indirectly supported that system. In some special occasion, school teachers brought all students for tour where upper caste children shared their food but rejected Mahar children offered food. These all incidents show the discrimination in hierarchical society.

Regarding to the women's oppression and suffering, Mahar and other community Dalit women (Matanga, Dhora, Chambar, etc) are also faced horrible

situations. All these community women are oppressed and exploited as daughters, wives, and mothers but they enslaved as daughters-in-law and face the cruelest treatment not only by the male of the family but also by female heads also. All most all Mahar women not have liberty to walk free at outside home. These are completely restricted and imprisoned in their home. They must not tossed head, cover their face, not to participate in any public function, must not speak single word against elders in own and in-laws family and follow 'pativrata dharma' even suffered lot and bitterly beaten by her husband. For instance, Writer's mother has not allowed out of home by her father, she must spend most of the time to take care of her husband, children and family works like cooking, cleaning and bring wood for cooking only. Sometimes her mother bitten inhumanly by her father, and not allowed to read books and write anything even in economically little bit good conditioned home of the contractor Pandhrinath. This shows the experiences of all Mahar women, supporting this Kamble depicts pitiable conditions of daughters-in-law as

The daughter-in-law in any house was kept busy all twenty four hours of the day. The men-folk would bring loads meat in baskets on their heads. The meat needed to be preserved. This was a very arduous task. And many a time, the duty fell on the daughter-in-law. More often than not, she would not be more than eight or nine years old. She had to sit down with sharp knife, cut the huge piece of meat into smaller ones of about half kilo each, and stretch these into long snake like strips (Kamble, 73-74)

In Mahar community the young girls at the childhood age of eight or nine years are married off and become the victim of physical assault. In so many times mother-in-law of the house assign many works like making bhakris and other, if she fails to do, she would be yelled like: "Look at the bhakris this slut has prepared. She cannot even make a bhakris properly. Oh, well, what can expect of this daughter of a dunce?" (Kamble, 94). Far that, mother-in-law will call daughter-in-law as evil and many times beaten bitterly and drag/thrown out away from the home for silly mistakes.

In next step, Kamble emphatically portrayed daughter-in-law's real life suffering in their pregnancy period. She tells like, "A Mahar women would continue to give birth till she reached menopause" (Kamble, 82) The continuous pregnancy and give birth to children would affect physically and she fall into a victim of vulnerability. During her pregnancy, she gets only stale rotis and gruel of jowar. "Pregnancy period and delivery were nightmares for the Mahar women... treatment of the old women were in life threatening", and untrained midwives inhumanly create pains and wounds during pre delivery and deliver stage (Rather, 03). If there would be an emergency, they were put all efforts on the mercy of God. This miserable situation happens again and again in their life due to the poverty, prohibition of educational opportunity, blind beliefs and stanchly following of superstition values and social taboos constructed by Brahmins, etc.

Similarly, Dalit women suffered and oppressed more from their own Dalit men who already controlled under the upper caste people in all perspective and always

obliged to their words are as orders. When upper caste people want Mahar poor girls, their wives, daughter-in-laws for sexual pleasure they send them without single word. This inhuman exploitation on women strongly condemned by Kamble, and she starts give awareness to her Mahar women about social discrimination, sexual exploitation and to stanchly follow Dr. Ambedkar's words are as give education to our children even they (Mahar male/female) having hungry, prohibit worshipping gods, stop following superstition practices, don't respect orders of Brahmins and stop eating dead animal's meat. With the influence of Ambedkar she started small business, later petty shop for balancing everyday expenditure and supporting her children to get education in school. This shows economic stability of Mahar woman like Kamble. Apart from this, she sincerely tried to spread Dr. Ambedkar's views on women's education as "women should be entitled to equal status with men of Brahmin/Mahar and they must have right to education" among the Mahars even she had lot of threats from her husband, son and upper caste people.

In last part of the autobiography, writer discusses about the survival from caste discrimination, atrocities, women exploitation, patriarchy and gender discrimination etc. Dalit patriarchy is seemed weak in front of upper caste patriarchy. But in the house of Mahar male people always put their holding on wives and females. Hence she awakes Dalit young women to fight against above exploitation by having education and independence in caste prejudiced society. Here, writer not ready to celebrate Dalit culture because it is full of superstitions; rituals imposed by

upper castes. Against this she rebelliously narrated and condemned violence on Mahar women. Mother-in-laws in their family in most the time who fortify/poison her son's mind to do physical violence and keep control over his wife, because to have hegemony / stop these like her son would be snatched away from her; he would forget his parents and begin pampering his wife.

To emancipate from all fluctuations/ideologies of patriarchy she again remembers Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's words would the solution to all that who openly talked about Mahar community's transformation and survive from Brahmin and Dalit patriarchy and bad social system. Pertaining this, Sharankumar Limbale has supported transformative thoughts of Ambedkar which bested the Dalits to little bit heighten their social and economic status. He says like

From now onwards you have to follow a different path .You must educate your children. Divorce your children from god. Teach them good things. Send them schools. The result will be there for you to see. When your children begin to be educated, your conditions will start improving. Your family, your life will improve. Your children will bring you out of this hell. We are humans. We, too, have the right to live as human beings. (Limbale, 65)

References:

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In this way, writer professes realistic and painful agony of Dalit women's condition in patriarchic and caste discriminated society.

Conclusion:

Thus, we can observe hunger, suffering and survival in the autobiographical work *The Prison We Broke* as an account of writer's 'self'. The suffering of women is probably caused by patriarchal society. In hierarchical Hindu society, Varna system has been existed since thousands years ago, it has adapted/ directed various responsibilities and rights, in which Brahmin male is always in first stage and woman is kept in second stage, this system may universally linked to Mahar community's male and female in marginalized state. Among them, in existed Hindu society put Dalit women always in segregated position, that (their condition) we couldn't be imagined. For that, Kamble disappointed lot and rebelled against such inhuman practices and recorded all her experiences as well as experiences of society in the form of writing. Which was first published in a Marathi journal 'Stree' and got acclaimed. Through which she spreads awareness and encourage her children, grandchildren, in-laws and her Mahar people and oppressed community to keep conscious about how various types of exploitation happen on Dalit women and men, and fight for justice against these to get survive.

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