DALIT AMONG DALITS: DALIT WOMEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BABY KAMBLE’S THE PRISONS WE BROKE

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ABSTRACT
Baby Kamble’s translated work The Prisons We Broke, is writing on the lives of the Mahar, “We were just like animals, but without tails.” Baby Kamble recovers memory to expose the Mahar’s pitiable situation in Maharashtra. This text provides a realistic picture of the oppressive caste and patriarchal beliefs of the Indian society. She is tried to depict the life of her community and people showing that how brahminical domination had turned the mahar into slaves. Furthermore, in 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.

KEY WORDS: Community, Memory, Patriarchy, Superstition, Subjugation and Humiliation

Introduction:
In this paper I wish to present the distressing effects of the caste system on the social and cultural status of dalit women. Through this paper I want to highlights the harsh reality of struggle, suppression and suffering of dalit women as they face every day of their miserable lives. As we know dalit women are positioned at the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy. As they faced discrimination, humiliation and subjugated in three ways: first being as Dalits (caste) secondly being a poor (class) and thirdly being as Women (gender). So they are subjugated by patriarchal structures, both in universal society and within their respective family and community. As a result, dalit women are subjected to inhumane living conditions, violence and discrimination which deny them to give opportunities, choices and freedoms in all sphere of their life.

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 suffered by her community. 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.

In this autobiography, Kamble speaks out for the women of her community, presenting an unflinching portrait of its women, subjugated by both caste and patriarchy. Especially newly married younger women suffer the worst fate. Usually married off at the age of eight or nine, immature, even without knowing what a husband meant yet the child has to go her in –laws’ house to lead a married life. However, for the girl ‘marriage meant nothing but calamity.’ After arrival of the young bride at her in-laws’ house, she would be asked to make two basket full bhakris. The poor child would sit down to make them but she could not able to do that properly, may be bhakris burnt in some places and remain uncooked in some. Then the sasu would call all her friend for the presentation of the tiny-burnt bhakris, ‘Attyabai, come and see what happening here is. Didn’t you think that I’d brought the daughter of a good woman into my house? Look at the bhakris this slut has prepared. She cannot even make a few bhakris properly! Oh, well, what can on expect of this daughter of a dunce? (94).’ If the sasu is not satisfied again with her making of bhakris properly, she started abuses on her and her mother, “what’s your aai really? Tell me! Is she a good married woman at all? Or does she know only how to run after the pot-maker donkeys? Didn’t she teach you anything? I pamper you... my own sasu was spitfire. A burning coal! Holding a burning coal in one’s palm was easier than living with her!” (95). so the tradition of oppressed her own daughter in—laws is continued till days.

This young daughter-in-laws lives became unbearable and miserable because of their sasus. These sasus ruined the lives of innocent young girls forever. As Kamble says, every day the maharwada would resound with the cries of helpless women in houses. Husbands are beating their wives, as they are animals. As Kamble narrates, “they had no food to eat, no proper clothing to cover their bodies; their hair would remain uncombed and tangled, dry from lack of oil. Women led the most miserable existence.”

The theme of untouchability is second midpoint in this autobiography. There are many Comical incidents where the narrator comment on Hindu caste’s false ideologies, such as the one where the narrator as a young girl, together with her classmates, enters a temple to “pollute” the idol of Ram, is almost metaphorical. The girls terrified by the idols of the god’s guards. This group of girls thought that Ram must have sent the five-hooded cobra after them because they had polluted Him. Or must have set demons on them. The sound of their screaming makes aware the Brahmin priest and they told him that, “we are Mahar girls and the god has sent demons after us because we have polluted him’. (131) the Brahmin priest who chases them out of the temple became god for them who had come to save them from demons. The other incident where a mahar boy touches the idol of Viththal and this became great commotion everywhere. After that, the priest in the temple announced that, “the Mahars had polluted the temple. They also declared that god Viththal’s face had become contorted and that tears were flowing from goddess Rukmayi’s eyes. Soon the news of the Mahars having polluted the divine couple Viththal and Rukhmayi spread all over Phaltan. In fact, it reached all the eighty-four villages in the state of Phaltan. Priest organized the chanting of scriptures and purificatory rituals to wash away the pollution with milk and gomutra. Finally, after one and a half months of incessant chanting, ceaseless worship, and of course substantial grants from the king, the Brahmin priest managed to cleanse the gods of the pollution, restored the original expression lord Viththal’s face and stemmed the flow of tears from Rukhmayi’s eyes(127).” For marriage occasion, the Brahmin priest would be invited to solemnize the marriage. The fear of polluting the Brahmin priest is stand at a distance. Interesting he would never make any compromising on his Dakshina including money, two kilos of channa dal, one-and-a-half kilos of rice, three kilos of wheat and a huge plateful of
jiggery. By taking of this stuff, the Brahmin priest never feel polluted. Even the upper caste’s
god is not their god. He does not accept their prayer. He is not even capable of feeling their
misery. As Keshav Meshram challenges this god in 'One Day I Curse That...God', in these
words:

One day I cursed that mother-fucker God.
He just laughed shamelessly.
My neighbor – a born-to-pen Brahman – was shocked.
He looked at me with his castor-oil face and said,
‘How can you say such things to the
Source of the Indescribable,
Quality less, Formless Juggernaut?
Shame on you for trying to catch his dharma-hood
in a noose of words.’….‖

As the poet Meshram writes in his poem about Hinduism and their god because he hates
Hindu culture, god and society because they don’t behave like human with ‘Dalit’.
The upper castes had never allowed this lowly caste of ours to acquire knowledge.
Generations after generations, our people rotted and perished by following such a
superstitions way of life....‖ because of superstition, the mahar people never get proper
education, knowledge and profession.

Why this people considered as lower than Hindus or who considered themselves as
higher. They have two legs two hands two eyes and two ears and unchanged blood color, red.
How one can different by birth? May be he/ she can dissimilar by skin, behavior or looking
but not by birth, caste and class. No one can answer Kemble’ questions regarding his or her
(dalits) existence, “we never rebelled against you, did we? We did not perform namaj when
you worshipped, did you? You considered the cow holy; we never insulted her, did we/ we
obeyed every diktat of your Hindu religion, we followed all your tradition-why did you single
us out for your contempt? We were the people who lived in your house, yet we dared not
drink ever a drop of water there. We never dared to cross your path. We dedicated ourselves
to the service of the civilization and culture that was too precious to you, in spite of the fact
that it was always unkind and unjust to us. Why, we would even spread out our hands like
spittoons for you if you wanted to spit! Then why did you treat us with so much contempt?
Coarse we may have been, but we always reminded so loyal to you! You have always been
treacherous to us but we never deceived our mother. We ate dry husk and told ourselves we
were eating rich food; we considered our huts great mansions; we considered our terrible
poverty as the golden peak of affluence. We dreamt and floated among the clouds, waiting
for one little ray of hope to lace our dark dreams (38).‖ It presents the seeds of a revolution
through images of unprepared speeches and bold entries into temples.

Kamble covers interesting aspects of the Dalit movement including the ‘Riddles
controversy’ and the argument between Gandhi and Ambedkar. During her school education
all mahar girls are neglected by upper caste girls because the fear of polluting. Even if upper
caste girls pass by them they would cover their nose, mutter chee, chee, and run away from
there, as they are great danger. One of the upper caste girls says, ‘you know, I have bath
again after I go home from school. My mother has come to know that mahar girls sit in our
class and she doesn’t allow me to enter the house unless I have a bath.’ Very young age,
even these upper caste girls do not understand around their surrounding they talks about
untouchability. The act of attending school by mahar girls, the higher caste girls got together
and comment on them, “that Ambedkar has educated himself, that’s why these dirty Mahars
are showing off! That filthy mahar’, Ambedkar, eats dead animals but look at the airs he gives himself” (109)

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar decided to awaken his people who had ruined to the level of subhuman. He began to organize meeting to the people. Ambedkar’s Speeches make people against religion, custom, tradition and superstition. As he said about worship of god Khandoda in Jejuri, “... the stone steps in front of the god’s temple have been worn away by hapless people beating their heads against those steps in utter supplication. But has he ever taken mercy on you? What good has this god ever done to you? Your people have served the village, the upper caste communities, for ages. You clean all their dead filth. And what do they do for you? They feed you with their dead animals. Even then this god does not take pity on you. Do you know something? You don’t worship god; you worship your ignorance! Generations after generations of Mahars have ruined themselves with such superstitions. And what have you got in return from this god?”

Further he said that, “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 to 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. Your children will make you aware of this (65).”

The Effect of Ambedkar’s speeches is seen in the last part of Kamble’s text, when Rani Sahiba organizes Mahila Mandal in Phaltan, she called Brahmins, Maratha and mahar women for this Mandal. The second round meeting was organizing in dining hall where all the Brahmins and Maratha women occupied the chairs. Unfortunately mahar women stood on one side at the same time when Rani Sahiba and her followers move towards stage; suddenly Thakubai shook shoulder and told her, “Your women are not allowing our women to sit on the chairs. Our Ambedkar has told us to demand our rights. I am going to forcefully remove your women from the hairs and sear my women there.’ The Rani Sahiba was taken a back for a moment. But she immediately arranged chairs in the front for all of us (133).”

The Prisons We Broke is important because it draws the progress of the Mahar community from pre-Ambedkar days to its rapid transformation through education and mass conversion. Dalit Literature represents a powerful, emerging movement in the Indian literary tradition. Dalit and African American literature in a course entitled ‘Literature of Protest’ is introduced in various Indian Universities. Their stories earlier told in Marathi, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Telugu are now being translated into English, French and Spanish. With the growing translation of works by Dalit writers from various regional languages into different languages, its reverberations are now being heard all around the globe. To conclude this paper I would like to say that, the situation of dalit women in India needs special attention. They are one of the biggest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world. There is no doubt about the traditional taboos are same for dalit men and women. But dalit women have to deal with them more often.
References


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