

Upsurges from the Margin: Oppression and Exploitation in Kamble's *The Prison We Broke*

*Dr. Shachi Sood & Yasmeena Jan

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri, J&K (India)
Research Scholar, Department of English, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri, J&K (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Received: 09 August 2017

Accepted: 11 August 2017

Published Online: 17 August 2017

Keywords

Dalit women
Patriarchy
Oppression
Exploitation
caste

*Corresponding Author

Email: shachi.sood86@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present paper proposes to highlight the experiences encountered by Dalit women in an Indian patriarchal society. The Prison We Broke (2008) by Kamble is the English translation of "JinaAmacha" (1985) by Dr. Maya Pandit from the Mahar community of Maharashtra. The treatment of dalit women in an Indian patriarchal society is very different and multi dimensional. The paper explores the representation of women in Indian Dalit writing which is weighed with double subjugation: caste and patriarchy. Dalit women, therefore, has to face Brahmanic as well as Dalit patriarchy. They face the worst type of atrocities like rap ing, physical assault, murder etc.

The Prison we Broke written by Kamble is the first work that comes in Dalit literature by women. The writings in Marathi dalit literature started with the publication of this novel. It deals with the exploitation, oppression, and discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. Poverty was the unresolved problem among the dalits. They had to eat left over's. Women of Mahar community had to fight with the animals like cats, rats, dogs, and vultures for food. The condition of dalit women was even worse than an animal. Dalit girls got married at the early age of eight to nine. They became pregnant at a very young age due to which they got complications in their first delivery. When a dalit girl could not do her house hold duties she was harshly abused by her in-laws? The newly married women even could not go back to her home, in the fear of scolding from her father and brother. Kamble in her novel records the subjugation associated with the feudal pride of the family. She writes:

In those days, it was the custom to keep women at home, behind the Threshold, The honor enjoyed in the family was in proposition to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. When no one could see even a nail of women thus confined within the four walls of the house, then this 'honour' became the talk of the town-a byword among the relatives and friends in the surrounding villages. Then people would tell each other, how one pandharinath mistry kept his wife completely hidden in the house even the rays of the sun did not know her (Kamble, 05).

This shows that the women were treated like husbands own property and locked in a room as the bird is kept in a cage. Women were not defined by themselves but by the men in

power. This iniquitous ploy of patriarchy has been highlighted by De Beauvoir as she states:

Humanity is male and man defines women not in her but as relative to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being. Man is the subject, he is the absolute, and she is the other. He sets himself up as essential as oppressed to the other, the inessential, the object (Beauviour, 16).

The Prison We Broke presents the feelings Kamble experienced both in her life as well as in Dalit community. In an interview with Maya pandit she says;

I wrote about my community experienced. The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences became mine. So I really find it very difficult to think of myself outside of my community (Kamble, 136)

This self narrative clearly deals with the experiences of exploitation, domestic violence, caste discrimination, and oppression of dalit women in a dalit community. The most awful form of abuse of dalit women was to cut the nose who did not acknowledge the patriarchal norms. *The Prison We Broke* explores the Brahmanic domination and how they had turned Mahars as animals. Dalit women are portrayed in a very weird situation in which they have to conciliate both high caste Hindus and their Mahar men. They had to make themselves invisible and to cover the whole body if they watch the high caste men coming down the road. Moreover, they were not permissible to stand along the road side that was meant for high castes. It was necessary for the Dalit women to bow before the Brahmins, in a most humble manner and utter the following words, "The humble Mehar women fall at your feet mater" (Kamble, 52).

Caste and its various embodiments are expressed in the implementation of the dress code for the Dalit women. They were not permitted to wear sarees like high caste women. The exploitation of Dalits by the domineering and heavy-handed Hindu society has also been reflected in a famous poem by a Marathi Dalit poet Baburao Bagul. In his poem 'You Have Made The Mistake', Bagul states;

That's why I say-

You have made the mistake of being born in this country. (Poisoned Bread, 82)

Brahmins consider themselves as the master of Dalits. The sufferings in the life of the low caste people were the consequences of abusive practices perpetuated all the way through prevailing ideologies of the high castes. Commenting on the interrelationship between the ruling material force and the ruling ideas, Marx and Engels has aptly said:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of the material production at its disposal consequently also controls the means of mental productions so that the ideals of those who lack the means of material production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expressions of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas (Marx and Engels, 67).

This reflects that the dominant people maintain domination and subjugation by portraying their ideologies as the ultimate truth. They push the marginalized to the periphery by limiting their activities as slaves, laborers. They are enforced to mental slumber and they remain isolated from every kind of self-realization. Caste and patriarchy both relegate women to the status of slaves, prisoners, and servants of men. The high class people compel the Dalits to become superstitious by forcing their own ideology on them. They wish them to remain ignorant rather than knowledgeable. The superstitious nature of Dalits that is inflicted upon them by the malevolence of the caste system is reflected in the following lines:

Oh Mother, we are the stupid of stupid people, what do we know? We know nothing, oh Mother! You can see everything! You can see everywhere. But we are blind we cannot see please, Oh please Mother, forgive us (Kamble, 24).

The Dalit women have blindly surrendered themselves to the disposition of the gods and goddesses without questioning that if god has the omnipresent existence than why they have been exiled in such a wicked and inhuman condition? Since ages, all kinds of odd jobs like cleaning toilets, throwing garbage, dirt and dust were assigned to the low caste women. They even could not think of good living, respect, social acceptance and self dignity. Kamble questions the tyrannical upper class ideology by portraying the pathetic condition of the Dalits:

Who was responsible? Who else, but people of the high caste! They destroyed our reasoning, our ability to think. We were reduced to a condition far worse than that of the bullocks kept in the courtyard of the high castes (Kamble, 49).

Caste system enduringly binds Dalit women in fetters of slavery and there is no provision left for them to revolutionize their life. They suffer from sense of slaughter of self even in their own community. They become unjust with them by forcing them to remain uneducated. Kamble points out the atrocious nature of patriarchy and Indian women's sentiments towards kumkum in the following words:

We are so protective about the kumkum on our foreheads. We believe that if a woman has her husband she has the whole world; if she does not have a husband, then the world holds nothing for her. It's another thing that these masters of kumkum generally bestow upon us nothing but grief and suffering. Still the kumkum that we apply in their name is the only ornament for us. It is more precious than even the Kohinoor diamond (Kamble, 41).

Dalit women are one of the most helpless people in India because of their societal, cultural and economic predicament. The most contemptuous things which happen with Dalit women in the novel is that they don't feel secure in their own home and community. The writing of Dalit women are charged with the zest to curb out the age old traditions that have made their life worse than a beast. Gave them a life which is worse than that of animals. Kamble has highlighted the triple oppression faced by the Dalit women in this novel as first they were treated as subject to caste oppression at the hands of the upper caste. Secondly, they are treated as labourers by the upper and middle class or caste that forms the bulk of land owners. Lastly, as a women who were oppressed due to patriarchy at the hands of all men including men of their own castes.

Dalit women are always targeted by the Brahmanic and Dalit Patriarchy and Dalit men have become the beacons of brutality against their own wives and daughters. Women in this novel are shown as child producing machines and their primary duty was to satisfy their husbands even in working hours also. "A Mahar Woman could continue to give birth till she reached menopause". (Kamble, 82)

Women of high caste also become one of the threats and the major oppressors for the Dalit women. They have a sense of prejudice for the Mahar women. In the third part of the novel Kamble states when Dalit women offer a bunch of wood to high caste women, she replies,

Oh! You, wretched Mahar women, 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 bathe our gods. They will also become impure. (Kamble, 61)

This novel brings to forth the thirst of Dalit women for love, friendliness, care and concern which can neither be understood neither by high caste women nor by the low caste

men. It was Kamble, the Dalit feminist who brings to the forefront the emotional sufferings of the low caste women which had remained completely neglected before. Kamble gives a Dalit critique of patriarchy and exploitation structure, and compares it with another institution of exploitation- Chaturvarna system. She writes,

Just as chaturvana system created caste and sanctioned discriminatory practices, the cunning creator of the world established the practices of making women dependent on men. Men have therefore dominated women ever since (Kamble,102).

Caste beliefs and behaviours in India are rigid and they restrict the subjects intrapersonally, interpersonally and as a group within the community. Kamble like Ambedkar has expressed challenged the orthodoxy of Hinduism and has expressed her anger towards Barama and Satwai in the following lines:

Today, if we came across Barama and Satwai, We would like to give them both a sound thrashing and ask, 'Barama and Satwai', you ruined the lives of generations after generations of Mahars! You wrote our fates, didn't you? Religion must have bribed you quite well to do this. Otherwise why should have done this? Religion must have handed over a stamp to Barama instead of a pen to satwai, You kept stealing our fates with your writing! (Kamble,62)

Dalit women writers belonging to different social and cultural backgrounds have suffered the triple oppression of patriarchy like caste, class and gender. They have successfully depicted and articulated the whole variety of emotions- pain, deprivation, captivity, humiliation, anger and their survival through their writings. Dalit women's voices like Kamble have challenged both high caste politics and Dalit patriarchy. These writers have reconstructed the concept of Dalit women and have created their own identity despite of all odds.

REFERENCES

- [1] Kamble, Baby. "The Prison We Broke." Translated by Maya Pandit, New Delhi; Orient Longman, 2008. Print.
- [2] Beauvoir, Simone De. "The Second Sex." Translated by H.M. Parsheley. London; Picador Classics. 1998. Print.
- [3] Kamble, Baby. "The Prison We Broke". New Delhi; Orient Black Swan, 2008. Print
- [4] Dangle, Arun. "Poisoned Bread." New Delhi; Orient Black Swan, 2009. Print.
- [5] Marx, Karl and Engels, Fedrick. "German Ideology." Moscow; Progress Publishers, 1976. Print.