

Caste and Gender Discrimination in Baby Kamble's "The Prisons We Broke"

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Abstract:

This study examines Baby Kamble's autobiography, *The Prisons We Broke*, as an essential book in the collection of stories of Dalit women. Kamble's narrative challenges patriarchal and casteist norms that have historically silenced Dalit women's voices by emphasizing their lived experiences. This article studies how Kamble expresses the distinct intersectional problems that Dalit women face through a thorough examination of theme aspects such as caste oppression, resistance, and identity creation. This study explains how Kamble's story not only captures individual and societal pain but also stands as a potent tribute to the fortitude and agency of Dalit women, using a feminist and subaltern studies perspective. The study results add to the ongoing discussion on Dalit literature and emphasize how important it is to include disadvantaged voices in literary and academic discussions.

Key words: Baby Kamble, Dalit Women, Caste Discrimination, Gender Oppression, Marathi Autobiography.

Dalit literature:

Dalit literature is a vibrant and crucial part of Indian literature that emerged prominently in the mid-20th century. It is written by Dalits, formerly referred to as "untouchables," who belong to the lowest strata of the caste hierarchy in India. This genre of literature serves as a powerful medium for expressing the struggles, aspirations, and resistance of Dalit communities against systemic oppression and caste-based discrimination.

The origins of Dalit literature can be traced back to the works of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an eminent social reformer and the father of the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar's writings and speeches provided a voice to the marginalized and inspired a generation of Dalit writers to articulate their experiences and challenge the socio-economic structures that perpetuated their subjugation.

The genres of Dalit literature are diverse and include plays, essays, memoirs, fiction, poetry, and fiction. It emphasizes topics such as caste-based violence, poverty, humiliation, and the pursuit of justice and

dignity. It is distinguished by its unvarnished and honest depiction of the terrible reality of Dalit existence. Among the notable Dalit writers are Urmila Pawar, Omprakash Valmiki, and Namdeo Dhasal.

Baby Kamble:

One of the pioneers of Dalit writing, Baby Kamble (1929–2012), is especially renowned for her contributions to Dalit women's tales. Kamble was raised in Maharashtra, India, in a family of Mahars, a Dalit caste, and she saw firsthand the injustices and oppression that her group endured. Her motivation to record and disseminate the hardships of Dalit women was inspired by her own experiences with caste persecution.

Writing in Marathi first and published in 1986, Kamble's autobiography *Jina Amucha* (The Prisons We Broke) is a significant piece of Dalit writing. It is a graphic description of the systemic abuse Dalit women experienced as well as the sociocultural circumstances that led to their enslavement. Kamble's narrative is exceptional because it not only illustrates the relationship between gender and caste but also the autonomy and resiliency of Dalit women in the face of pervasive persecution.

In *The Prisons We Broke*, Kamble portrays the daily struggles, work, and identity and self-respect searches of Dalit women. The autobiography stands out for its direct and vivid portrayal of the inner workings of Dalit communities and how Dr. Ambedkar's teachings have influenced them. Through challenging caste and patriarchal norms in Indian culture, Kamble's work has played a significant role in elevating the realities of Dalit women.

Because Kamble provided Dalit women's voices a platform and had a significant impact on the discourse around gender and caste, she is an important figure in the study of Dalit literary works and women's narratives. Her work continues to inspire scholars, activists, and writers because it emphasizes the various ways that oppression intersects with the resilient spirit of resistance.

The narratives of Dalit women bring to light the intersections between gender and caste oppression. Dalit women have particular difficulties as a result of patriarchal norms and their low caste status. Through studying their narratives, academics might gain a deeper comprehension of how such interconnected power structures function and impact disadvantaged populations. Developing a more complex and thorough knowledge of social structures and discrimination requires an intersectional study.

Baby Kamble's use of autobiography allows her to give a very genuine and intimate depiction of the realities of Dalit women. An intimate look into her life and the lives of the women surrounding her is provided via the first-person narrative voice. This method creates a direct line of communication between the reader and the narrator, encouraging empathy and a feeling of immediacy. The personal voice gives the story legitimacy and genuineness, which heightens the impact and relatability of the depictions of persecution, resiliency, and identity.

Caste Oppression in 'The Prisons We Broke'

In *The Prisons We Broke*, caste discrimination is shown as a widespread and systematic problem that affects all facets of Dalit life. The narrative demonstrates how caste-based discrimination is a systemic issue that affects the social, political, and economic domains rather than being a singular issue. Caste hierarchies are deeply ingrained in society, as evidenced by Baby Kamble's detailed account of the everyday violence, marginalization, and humiliations imposed upon Dalits.

Caste oppression in Kamble's story includes economic exploitation as a major component. Particularly Dalit women suffer from significant economic disadvantages such as low pay, limited employment prospects, and abusive working conditions. The book describes how Dalit women are relegated to the lowest-paying and most menial employment, sometimes in hazardous and demeaning environments. Their inferior caste position is furthered by their economic marginalization.

The social marginalization and segregation that the higher castes enforced on Dalits is highlighted in Kamble's account. Dalits frequently face discrimination while trying to access social services, educational institutions, and public areas. The biography highlights incidents of segregation, including the restriction of Dalits' access to water supplies or places of worship, as well as their social exclusion. Their marginalization and inferior rank within the social order are sustained by this exclusion.

The Prisons We Broke's depiction of violence and intimidation highlights the negative effects caste discrimination has on people's bodies and minds. According to Kamble, upper-caste people or groups have committed violent crimes like beatings, sexual assaults, and vandalism. This violence functions as a control and intimidation tactic, intended to uphold the caste system and quell Dalit dissent.

Kamble's autobiography underscores Dalit women's acts of agency and resistance in the face of the pervasiveness of caste discrimination. The narrative describes the ways in which Dalit women, by their tenacity, activism, and camaraderie, confront and subvert the exploitative system. Their ability to withstand the limitations imposed by the caste system is evidence of their strength and resolve.

Kamble's narrative clearly reflects the ideology of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who served as a source of empowerment and hope for the Dalits. Ambedkar offered a framework for comprehending and combating injustice via his teachings on social justice, equality, and the rejection of caste-based discrimination. Kamble's allusions to Ambedkarite principles highlight how important they are in opposing the caste system and promoting the rights of Dalits.

Caste oppression is placed within a larger historical and cultural framework in Kamble's view. The narrative examines how historical actions and cultural norms have sustained caste prejudice throughout time. Through the framework above, Kamble's work facilitates readers' comprehension of the historical foundations of caste discrimination and its ongoing effects on Dalit communities.

A strong case for social reform is made in *The Prisons We Broke*. In addition to highlighting the difficult circumstances encountered by Dalits, Kamble's thorough portrayal of caste oppression promotes structural

change and the breakdown of the caste system. The autobiography challenges readers to face and rectify the inequalities inherent in the caste system and strive toward a fairer and more inclusive community.

Gendered Caste Discrimination in ‘The Prisons We Broke’

Baby Kamble depicts the combined weight of caste and gender prejudice that Dalit women face in *The Prisons We Broke* powerfully. Due to the way that it combines the repressive systems of patriarchy and caste, this type of discrimination is distinct from others, leading to complex levels of marginalization. An outline of Kamble's autobiography's depictions of gendered caste oppression is provided below.

Due to the combination of caste and gender, Dalit women face double marginalization. Kamble's account demonstrates how discrimination against Dalit women occurs on the basis of their gender and status as members of a lower caste, which exacerbates their disadvantages. Their social standing, access to the economy, and personal safety are all impacted by this twin oppression.

Dalit women suffer from extreme economic abuse. Kamble explains how people are frequently forced into the most menial and underpaid employment, such as domestic work or agricultural labor. Gender discrimination exacerbates this economic marginalization since Dalit women are paid less than their male counterparts and are more likely to be exploited and experience employment insecurity.

The intersection of caste and gender limits Dalit women's access to essential resources, including education, healthcare, and social services. Kamble's account highlights how caste-based segregation and gender bias restrict Dalit women's opportunities for upward mobility. The lack of access to education and healthcare perpetuates their disadvantaged status and reinforces their marginalization.

The social marginalization that Dalit women experience—they are frequently shunned and separated from mainstream society—is illustrated in Kamble's autobiography. Gender norms further exacerbate this marginalization by limiting their engagement in public and social life. More often than not, Dalit women are excluded from public areas and communal resources, which further isolates them from larger social connections.

In Kamble's narrative, gendered violence plays a big part in caste inequality. Dalit women are more susceptible to sexual and physical abuse at the hands of upper-caste people. The caste system is upheld and control over the communities is maintained through this violence, which also targets and intimidates Dalit women. To demonstrate how widespread and institutionalized this kind of violence is, Kamble provides examples of it.

As Kamble's portrayal of internalized oppression shows, caste and gender discrimination may affect how Dalit women see themselves. Dehumanizing actions and social stigma can lead individuals to internalize feelings of helplessness and inadequacy over time. This internalized injustice damages their mental health and sense of value, further cementing their disadvantaged condition.

In "The Prisons We Broke," Baby Kamble eloquently conveys the combined burden of prejudice against women of Dalit descent owing to gender and caste. Her story illustrates how these oppressions combine to give them a particularly painful reality where institutional and cultural barriers exacerbate their marginalization. Kamble's experiences are indicative of a systematic exclusion that is fueled by gender prejudices in addition to caste-based discrimination.

Due to their combined experiences of discrimination, Dalit women are unable to break free from a cycle of social and economic deprivation and are therefore unable to attain equality. By sharing her own story, Kamble not only emphasizes how ubiquitous this intersectional oppression is but also how strong Dalit women have been in the face of such ingrained injustice. In order to remedy these compounding injustices, her work eventually advocates for comprehensive changes that take into account a more sophisticated understanding of the intersections between gender and caste.

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