
ETHNOGRAPHY OF MARGINALIZED SELF: READING OF BABY KAMBLE'S "THE PRISON WE BROKE"

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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.

Keywords:

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 raise 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.

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.

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.

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.

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. 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. 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.

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.

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).

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.

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, “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 as the patriarchal order of Mahars. Baby Kamble's self and truthful analysis made her autobi

ography totally different from the autobiographies of higher caste women as well as Dalit male auto biographers where the presence of Dalit women as an independent human being rarely felt.

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