



PRISONS WE BROKE: AN EXPRESSION OF CHANGE

Dr. Shameemunnisa Begum

(Post Doctoral Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana.)

ABSTRACT



Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* is a revolutionary autobiography of Dalit woman. In chapter IV, I conversed Dalit feminist argument in terms of caste struggle and patriarchy by evaluating and discussing the first Dalit woman's autobiography—Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* in the context of Maharashtra. I have tried to show how these writing forms a socio-political critique of the existing power structures in the context of caste struggle and patriarchy. Baby Kamble recalled the diabolic mind of upper caste individuals who have been exploiting Dalits. As Maxine Berntson affirmed in the introduction to Marathi version of *Jina Amucha* that, "The customs, rituals, festivals and the Jatras that she describes are indeed a source of unexplored treasure for a sociologist" (qtd. in Maya Pandit's Introduction xiv). *The Prisons We Broke* is the enunciation of protest against prejudice and Hindu hegemony. Kamble portrays the physical and psychological abominations of Mahar women in public and domestic realms. Their struggles are portrayed as "social agents" for the improved renovation in society.

Keywords: Dalit, Women, Caste, Gender, Discrimination.

Citation:

APA Begum,S.(2018) *Prisons We Broke: An Expression of Change*. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature- JOELL*, 5(2), 271-280.

MLA Begum,Shameemunnisa. "Prisons We Broke: An Expression of Change."*Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.5, no.2, 2018, pp.271-280.



INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I examine Baby Kamble's (1929-2012) autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (2008). It is translated from the original Marathi *Jina Amucha* into English as *The Prisons We Broke* by Maya Pandit. The life of the untouchables was poverty stricken, accompanied by ignorance and superstitions and it leads to an unhygienic environment. Kamble graphically describes the life conditions of the Mahar, who lived on the margin of village in *Maharwada* (Dalit colony/settlement). Their huts were nothing but stones arranged vertically with some mud coating. People covered in thick layer of dust and dirt and their hair always untouched by oil, wearing tattered clothes somehow eked out an existence. When Hindu reformist worked for the abolition of untouchability, they attributed the cause of it in unhygienic living of the untouchable, which made the Hindu repulsive of them. As Sharmila Rege observes: "The Hindu national discourse on caste viewed changes in diet and hygiene of the lower castes as crucial for the removal of untouchability" (Rege 26). They overlooked the cause of untouchability. As the writer introspects on the condition of the Mahars and the attitude of the Hindus, she strongly criticizes Hindu philosophy, which discarded them as garbage but exploited their labor. To get rid of the suffering, generations of the untouchables wasted their lives in senseless worship of stones. Along with lower social status, the economic factor was also equally responsible for the degrading condition of the untouchables.

Kamble's autobiography, *Jina Amucha* (*The Prisons We Broke*) is an important text which offers us an insight into the possibility of understanding caste, community, identity and the meanings of Ambedkar, Dalit movement and Dalit identity. Kamble grew up when the Phule-Ambedkarite movement was at its peak, and she was exposed to it right from her childhood. She provides us a graphic account of what the life of the Mahars used to be like, and how it changed due to Babasaheb Ambedkar. The Phule-Ambedkarite movement made Kamble more conscious about her caste identity. She learns to question the deprivation that the Dalits have not only endured for ages, but also regarded as their destiny. She acknowledges

herself as "a product of the Ambedkarite movement" (Kamble 76). And it is thanks to the movement that she had chance to go to school, to participate in political meetings. In fact, following Ambedkar's advice she started a small business along with her husband, being one of the pioneer women who dared to cross the threshold of her home. These accounts in Kamble's autobiography show that she had a great influence of Ambedkar and the movement raised by him.

Besides this, Kamble dwell upon how not only her identity as women and as a community, but also her use of language and the very food she eats are integrally related to her Dalit identity. Kamble tells us about how the Dalits are forced to survive on dead animals and leftovers of the upper-castes. It is important to note here that while trying to define a Dalit self, as an inclusive category, on the one hand, their critique of the Dalit community is prominent. The text depicts how upper caste people exploit the Dalits, and the same time they expound how Dalit men abuse Dalit women. On the other hand, the text also traces on the creation of homogenized Dalit self, that is, the self inclusive of the lowest of the lower stratum of society, giving a call to Ambedkar's movement.

Kamble's text constructed her identity or 'Mahar' identity as a unified identity of Dalit (Mahar identity as Dalit identity). In the first part of her autobiography, the writer narrates the lives of Dalits in pre-Ambedkar period. The Hindu rituals and customs regularized their lives. The status of Mahar among themselves was dependent on the rituals, number of Gods and the size of platform made of stone and mud for these gods. These gods were not lord Krishna or Ram but smooth round stones representing *Laman Pathan*, *Margi Mata*, *Yetal Sahib* etc. it shows that though the untouchables were considered Hindus, they were not only geographically alienated but also culturally stood apart from Hindus. The life of Mahar community was deeply drenched in superstitious belief and customs, so they took pride in offering their children to the God Kondiba. The eldest son was offered to the deity as *Waghya* or *Potraj*. This Potraj begged for alms from village to village and the entire family would survive on this begging. Kamble, also provides an insight into the



understanding the exploitation of the Dalits that was made invisible to them, in the name of rituals and beliefs. It was common belief among Mahars that the goddess Satwai and god Barma came to the house of newborn to write its fate on its forehead. This belief was a system to internalize the wretched life condition of the untouchables by making them believe that everything in life is predetermined by gods. This belief is simplified version of the theory of Karma that prevented them to stake a claim against injustice done to them. It leads the victim to adopt an attitude of resigned fate. As Dr. Ambedkar analyzed, "the theory of Karma from the point of view of those, who are educated to servility, seeks to manipulate the servile into acknowledging their wretched life condition as the part of a natural social arrangement. This theory saps the rebellion of the untouchable in as systematic way" (Narain and Ahit 26).

Speaking about the Dalit movement and the involvement of Mahars, Kamble describes various events that awaken the self-respect and social justice of the downtrodden. She writes that to awake Dalit's self respect Ambedkar started fortnightly *Mooknayak* in 1920 and *Bahishkrit Bharat* in 1927. This deeply stirred their lives, as the writer describes all Mahars would gather at chawadi, a public place in Maharwada and the educated among them read out the articles of Dr. Ambedkar then people would argue and debate over Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts. She writes that in 1927, in Mahad conference, Dr. Ambedkar explained the exploitation of the Mahar in the name of Watan system. Due to Watan system, the Mahar community was totally dependent on the mercy of Hindus. They failed to develop self-respect and took to a low look of themselves which make it easier for them to accept their exploitation. She writes that the Watan was legislated by colonial government in the Bombay hereditary Offices Act: 1874. Moreover, the colonial government took into account the value of the food obtained by begging in fixing the remuneration of a Mahar, if he was to be employment in government job. Further, she writes, Ambedkar mobilized the Dalits against these exploitative systems and finally in 1958 this act was abolished by Bombay Inferior Village Vatan Abolition Act. Continuing further she narrates that the sociopolitical struggle to improve the life of the Dalits

built up their self-confidence and widened their horizons. As the writer in her life story shows that it was those who were working in cities understood the importance of Dr. Ambedkar's movement for the emancipation of Dalits and worked for the mobilization of Dalits in villages. Even Dalit women started to address meetings, like the writer's grandfather's sister Bhikai who addressed Dalit meetings in the villages (Kamble 65).

The Mahar community used to observe all Hindu rituals but with the advancement of the Dalit movement, they created their own cultural tradition. As the writer describes in 1938, the Mahar community chose 14th April, the birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar to celebrate the New Year instead of celebrating the festival Gudi Padva, the beginning of New Year in Maharashtra. The festival celebrated by the Dalit is not merely ritualistic; they re-signified it by organizing a cultural program for the mobilization of masses. The Mahar community has had a long tradition of singing and playing musical instrument. In Maharashtra, Mang, one of the untouchable castes, had the strong tradition of making musical instruments and playing than but both these castes had their caste specific musical instrument. "The musical tradition of the Dalit was tailored the cultural needs of the society of high castes. This cultural subordination of the Dalits was prevalent in all regions of India" (Guru 164). With the advancement of the Dalit movement, the cultural activism of Dalit did not remain fettered to the cultural needs of feudal lords. They attempted to move progressively away from mere feudal entertainment to the more radical level of revolutionary ideology of Dalit emancipation. The performance of 'Ambedkari jalsa' by the activists of the Dalit movement signifies that the Dalit have created their own cultural life. Dalit activists borrowed their critical inputs from the Satyashodhak Jalsa tradition of Mahatma Phule. The writer's brother prepares Jalsa for the celebration of Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary, to educate Dalit masses.

This way Kamble, acknowledges the Ambedkar, Dalit movement and the influence of Ambedkar on Mahar. She has suggested that this Mahar identity and the project of emancipation structured around it are shaped in the context of the



Ambedkar movement and the discourse on Dalit identity. In her narrative, she portrayed Mahar identity as Dalit identity and understood the meaning of 'Dalit' as a unified identity that subsumed the difference within the untouchable community.

II

Unlike the autobiographies of the famous individuals, autobiographies by Dalits emphasize the ordinariness of their life rather than their uniqueness in order to establish themselves as the representative of their community. For Dalit autobiography, "the entire life-narrative is based on the idea of communal identity and the subjectivity in these autobiographies is thus complicated by the deep connection between the individual self and the communal self" (Pandian 54). Besides this, the strength of Dalit autobiographies lies in its act of exposing the continuation of caste-based discrimination and the power structures and belief systems that support the practice of untouchability. Moreover, for Dalit writers, autobiography often constitutes their political act of assertion. Thus, for the Dalit community, autobiography is not simply a kind of literature but is a form of assertion of one's identity and resistance in its own right. Similarly, it has been already said that the Dalit autobiographies are the representative of their respective communities and they assert their specific caste group identities through the personal narration of their life experiences.

Kamble's *Jina Amucha* is a life story of a woman who was directly involved in Ambedkar's movement. Her autobiography is not merely a life story of an individual but of Mahar community (now called as neo-Buddhists) of Maharashtra. It traces the history of Mahar struggle and asserts its specific identity from pre-independent time to present. The author narrates the inhuman condition of Dalits to which they were enforced to live. She brings out the potential women played in Dr. Ambedkar's movement as well as in the transformation of their community and its identity. Besides, *Jina Amucha* is considered to be the first Dalit women's autobiography which has created many dimensions to think about normative issues like dignity, self-respect and also focuses on the much debated contemporary issues of tradition, modernity, gender

struggles and identity issues in India. Born in 1929, in Veergaon, in Pune district of Maharashtra, Kamble is one of the women activists of Dr. Ambedkar's movement. Kamble's activist life is very central to her Mahar identity and generally to all the autobiographies written by Mahars.

Kamble narrates a journey from the past lives of 'Mahar' (one of the major Dalit communities in Maharashtra) to the present Buddhist Dalits. Her description of poverty-stricken lives of the Mahar does not reduce to pity rather she tells it with a sense of humor, for instance Dalit women referring to their huts as a palace, which they would polish with cow dung. While putting their past life under critical scrutiny, the writer criticizes the philosophy of Hinduism. She challenges the devaluation of their labor and servility by pointing out the productivity and utility of their work. The narrative style of Kamble challenges the bourgeois genre of autobiography by replacing 'I' to 'We'. The self in this autobiography is both individual and collective. This self acquires larger meaning only in the context of narrative of the community because it represents a promising future for the individual and community. Sharmila Rege in her book writes:

...The writer wrote her account to record the making of history by Dalits and making the young generation of Dalits realize the great deeds of Dr. Ambedkar so that they will not be ashamed of their history of struggle which they have to take forward. Some Dalit readers of Dalit autobiography question the relevance of highlighting the past life, which has been neglected by the community (Rege 21).

However, Dalit autobiography cannot be accused of bringing an undesired past into the present for they are most direct and accessible way in which silence and misrepresentation of Dalits has been countered, for instance, Dr. Ambedkar's decision of conversion to Buddhism is misinterpreted as political move and an individual decision. Kamble's autobiography shows that it was a collective decision. Gopal Guru in the afterword writes "Dalit people held meetings in villages to discuss the matter and there was a tension between conservative Mahars and reformist Mahars on giving



up there ancestor's religion and embracing another. After such debate, the decision was taken collectively" (Kamble 64).

For Dalit movement, past also offers a stepping stone to articulate a new future. Dalits cannot dismiss their past as paltry thing. The past ought to be owned objectively and reassessed for an alternative history to be chalked out ahead. Mahatma Phule saw the history of India as the battle between the aborigines, shudra-atishudra and the Aryans. The historical writings of Ambedkar introduced a new narrative of Indian history as Buddhism against Brahmanism. Both of them traced the plight of the lower castes and women in the history and at the same time, it retrieved the subjectivity of Dalits. It created the identity of Dalits not as the untouchable but of fighters. This legacy is carried forward by Kamble through her autobiography as a critical construction of Dalit history. One has to link up the present struggle with the fight of the past especially when the past has been misrepresented and simply forgotten. The autobiography of Kamble summons the truth from the past; truth about the poverty and helplessness of Dalits in pre-Ambedkarite as also the resistance and struggle of Dalit movement. The writer describes the past lives of the Mahar but the thrust of her narration is on the struggle of Dalit movement and the dynamic personality of Dr. Ambedkar who brought dignity to their lives and this is one of the remarkable aspects of her autobiography.

The above mentioned general themes of Kamble's autobiography form the base for a closer analysis of her autobiography and focus more specifically on the question of identity as Mahar and Dalit. Mahar identity has been constructed and supposed to be a Dalit identity, but the internal conflicts within the communities problematize the representation of a unified Dalit identity.

Kamble maintains her community's identity (Mahar identity) intact but also focuses on the lineage and the internal conflicts within the community. She writes that, there are three groups' within the community, such as 'Modern Mahar' (Malhari), 'Traditional Mahar' (Karbhari) and Yeskar Mahar. All these three sub-castes of Mahars have differences among each other. Kamble narrates the

incidence from her childhood where there is a debate between the two Mahars (Malhari and Karbhari). The debate is about the intervention of Ambedkar in the cultural/inner matters that have built up around the religious practices of Mahars. The traditional Mahar (Karbhari) seeks to resist any attempt of intervention in this cultural or religious domain. The modernist Malhari, from Mumbai, attempts to force the dialogue on tradition, and is vehemently opposed by the conservative Mahar who tries to protect the cultural inner. The conservative Mahars resistance seems quite firm. He says to the Modernist "Ambedkar has spoilt your head with his strange foreign knowledge. He has become the Christian. This is not he polluted?" (135). The above statement by a traditional Mahar has to be closely scrutinized because it traces the identity of Mahar as traditional community that was dominated by the upper caste mentality.

Another example of this growing tension between traditional Mahar and modern/reformist Mahar is quite visible when the two had a conversation on the religious sanctity of the Murali custom in the Mahar community. Kamble describes, the custom of offering a girl child to the gods was rampant, and they were called Murali. It is surprising to note that, though dedicating girls to a temple was also in custom in south India, known as Devdasi system, there was a vast difference between the conditions of these two community girls. "In south India, Devdasi belonged to a particular non-Brahmin caste but not untouchable castes. So, for them, there was some economic arrangement for the girl's survival and the girl could exert her power to some extent due to her high ritual status" (Chakravarti 88). On the contrary, Murali mostly took to prostitution for her survival and served clients. The caste system exploited the reproductive labor of low caste women and gave it religious sanctity. As the writer in her autobiography narrates, when Dr. Ambedkar appealed to the untouchables to do away with the customs of dedicating their children to a deity, there was a tension between the conservative Mahar and the reformist Mahar, Kamble's grandfather Malhari, who served as a butler to an Army officer, constantly argued and debated with his people to give up this custom. The conservative Mahar sought to defend



the custom by elevating its spirituality. They would argue that the marriage of Dalit women with god Khandoba is a rare privilege, while the reformist Mahan would argue that this elevation is reduction of the human being to the worst form of exploitation.

Narrating the specific experiences of Mahars, the writer describes that the whole community survived on the stolen bread given to them as remuneration for their service. Unlike, other castes, the Mahars had no caste specific occupation and their job was to assist the Patil, the headman of the village in both public and private tasks, carrying message across villages, and assist him in receiving official visitors. They were responsible for the disposal of dead cattle, public notification of deaths, cleaning funeral pyres etc. though the Mahars were government servants, their remuneration was not paid by the government but by the villagers; it was called 'Watan'. While performing their job, the Mahar had to carry the folded blanket on their shoulder and a stick with a bell which they respected a lot and took pride in carrying it. This pride was an illusion, which the high castes had created in their minds. Though the Mahars took pride in the 'Watan system' and considered it as their honor, this bubble burst once they reached Patil's office, the headman of the village. They had to stand bending their back for the whole day in utter supplication and salute every Hindu who passed from that office. Since, the Mahar community survived on the left over food of the Hindus, they never thought of raising their voice against their humiliation. The Karbhari, headman of the Mahar argues with the grandfather of the writer that "they are born for this work, it is their sacred duty" (Kamble 67).

Kamble, focusing on the present day educated Mahars, becomes quite harsh and criticizes the tendency of educated Mahars towards the community welfare. She argues that Dalits have made a progress in education and many of them are in government jobs, living comfortable life in urban areas but majority of Dalits still live in villages or city slums. Increasing number of atrocities against Dalits proves the strong hold of caste system on Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar's movement succeeded in giving human rights to Dalits. The rights of Dalits are protected in our constitution but the claim of Dalits

to equality has been challenged now and then. Due to lack of unity among Dalits, the problems of Dalit masses are being neglected. The writer points out the detachment of educated Dalits from the masses.

Self-criticism is one of the significant aspects of Dalit writing. It is always easy to protest against our enemy but the difficult thing to protest against ourselves. As an activist woman writer, she attacks the sense of inferiority and superiority complex among Dalits. In the beginning of the autobiography, the writer brings out the inferiority complex of Dalits, which shackled them to slavery, and the great achievement of Dr. Ambedkar in breaking it. At the end of her autobiography, the writer criticizes the superiority complex of the educated Dalits. Kamble observes that some white collared Dalits with government jobs presume themselves to be superior to their fellow beings. Such Dalits in order to be accepted by the high caste people imitate their cultural life this is what M. N. Srinivas, a sociologist calls, "the process of sanskritization" (Srinivas 42).

The Hindu society is a stratified one in which there are innumerable small caste groups each of which tries to pass for a higher position in caste hierarchy. The best way of staking a claim to a higher position is to adopt the custom and ways of a higher caste. This process is called sanskritization. The low castes were prohibited from following the customs and rites of high castes since these customs and rites are considered as markers of their being high castes. "The sanskritization of customs of the lower castes have happened due to economic betterment, the acquisition of political power and the desire to move up in the hierarchy" (47).

She laments on the pitiable condition of Mahars and writes that even after the historic conversion of the Mahars to Buddhism in 1956; the Dalits of Maharashtra are following up the cultural life of high castes. They have forgotten their own past which they considered as not worthy of owning. They turn their back to their fellows in a village that brings embarrassment to them due to their poverty and ignorance. The writer reminds such Dalits that the comfort of life they are enjoying today is the fruit of Dalit struggle. The process of sanskritization demands an isolation of a person from his fellows



since they are not of superior status one aspires to achieve. The sanskritization of Dalits means the futility of struggle lead by Dalits. In his speeches, Dr. Ambedkar stressed that the future progress of Dalit community depend on the educated generation of Dalits. While explaining the importance of education to Dalits, Dr. Ambedkar said that the educated generation of Dalit would transform our society by addressing the problem of Dalit masses.

The writer observes, the detachment of educated Dalits form the masses; their indifferent attitude towards the problems of Dalits saddens her and compels her to remind them that it was the sacrifice of Dr. Ambedkar that enabled them to enjoy comforts of life. Her autobiography is not a mere account of memories of past life; she pays attention to the present problems of Dalits. For her, life does not mean mere wealth and comfort, because it destroys the sense of duty. The writer lives her life by this principle that is why she argues all, to help the poor people in whatever way they can. Sanskritization obscures the realization that all social divisions were part of the same engine of social oppression. It requires an acceptance of the basic hierarchical premises of the caste system. It means that some educated Dalits are being co-opted in the same system by which they were victimized in the past. The writer reminds them of conversion to Buddhism in her words, 'the path of truth and righteousness' that Dr. Ambedkar showed them.

All the above descriptions of a Mahar community narrate the specific experiences of the Mahar identity. The term Dalit used by the autobiographer is basically to refer to Mahars. These experiences have been generalized in the making of Dalit identity. The Mahar community has been represented as Dalit identity but the experiences narrated in the text are exclusively Mahars. In the earlier days of Dalit struggle led by Dr. Ambedkar, the Mahar community was the first prime mover of social, cultural, religious and political upheavals in Maharashtra, who rebelled against the caste based oppression and exploitation done by the upper-caste Hindus. Mahar was an untouchable caste and assumed to be a Dalit. It was Ambedkar's historic movement when Mahar was thought to be Dalit and therefore, inclusive of all untouchable castes. But

does that feature reflect in Kamble's text is the question.

On the one hand, Kamble's text can be read as speaking for unified Dalit identity that subsumes the differences among the Mahar community but in it writer avoids the discussion on caste hierarchy in Dalit community of Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, Mang, Dhor, Chambhar, Nomadic Tribes and Mahar constitute Dalit community. In her narration, we do not come across the Mahar community's relation with other Dalit communities, their relation with the Ambedkarite movement. Thus, it tends to be exclusively the history of Mahar community; this can be read as a critique of her autobiography. On the other hand, her autobiography also focuses on the tensions within Dalit identity, if not on the local level but in the larger framework of Dalit communities.

III

Kamble's autobiography has descriptions of caste violence in various forms. For her the very rituals of Hinduism such as Dalits taking part in consumption of liquor, sacrificing the animals and finally left with the only option to beg food from caste Hindus was the constant violence under which Mahars live. The basic human dignity is denied to Dalits. In spite all this they were made to believe that the only way to keep people of the community alive is to participate in such rituals (14). There is a certain progress in the political understanding of Mahars which is very visible in her lifespan under the influence of Ambedkarite Dalit movement. Mahars were influenced by Ambedkar's philosophy and accepted Buddhism. They have become part of Dalit movement and rigorously questioned the upper-caste dominance in many ways. In the context of Ambedkarite struggle, the educated youth who are working for the movement received a telegram from Ambedkar to protest against the visible caste symbols by seeking entry into the temples and hotels. Educated Mahar youth made plans overnight to enter the Viththal temple. The news has reached the Brahmins and they also wanted to stop this attempt. But the Mahar youth somehow managed to enter the temple and touch the idol. This made Brahmins very upset and they chased them with lathis. Of course Dalit boys escaped this violence. But



the priests have announced that Dalits have polluted idol and the temple, due to which God is very upset. Only after the constant worship and ritual purification for one and a half month they claimed to restore the purity of the temple.

Dalits collectively face such violence in the society from upper-castes when they become assertive. Here, Dalits have not only subverted the norms of caste system which made them untouchables they have also subverted the power of Brahmins over the religion. Brahmins have monopolized the religion that when a Brahmin announces that the idol is defiled, every other caste including lower-castes believed and wanted to work towards purification. Dalits attempting to enter temples is not to take part in Hinduism but to subvert the caste system. Even the ignorant attempt of an untouchable would have made upper-castes rage against him/her and lead to caste violence. Subversive practices of Dalits and stepping out of caste position through education, self-respect and economic prosperity would directly refute the power of upper-caste which would lead to their animosity towards Dalits.

IV

Kamble's autobiography turns into the discussion on Dalit patriarchy from the constant violent struggle of all Dalits for survival in caste prejudiced society. She is not ready to celebrate Dalit culture, since it is full of superstitions; rituals imposed by upper-castes and imposed food habits of eating dead animals. It is something that needs to be rebelled against. Similarly she would point out the violence within the families of Mahars against their women. Apart from the poverty stricken life, superstitious beliefs, lack of medical care at the time of deliveries, she has to endure severe physical violence by husband and in-laws (104).

Abusing daughter-in-law is very common in Dalit families. Controlling women is not exceptional in Dalit families. Masculinity is associated with the patriarchal power. "Keep her under your thumb, otherwise you will be disgraced in public" (96). Those were the most common expressions in Dalit families. For Dalit families, Dalit women were the easy victims available to take their frustration. Father-in-law, brother-in-law, mother-in-law and

husband, anybody can do anything with the daughter-in-law. Girls who are tortured have no place to runaway. A few girls would runaway from the in-laws' house to natal house are disgraced by father and brother and beaten up by them and will be sent back to the in-laws' house. There is no right to divorce the oppressive husband in Dalit societies.

Second marriage is not a question at all in their lives. In fact the women who were mutilated or thrown out the in-laws' houses are considered to be bad omen and they find no shelter anywhere else (103). Thus Kamble writes that the assumption that Hindu Code bill (102) is more helpful for upper-caste women is not entirely true. It is important for Dalit women also who are bound to the shackles of marriage. But Dalit women who are not educated and well aware their rights are not able access such rights even today.

Among many upper-castes, child marriage was a common practice. The reason is shown that if a girl is married off before reaching the age of eight, the probability of getting a "virgin" to marry is more (Sarkar 225). Pranjali Bandhu points out that the early marriages take place in Dalit families also for different reasons. "Early marriage between the ages of 14 and 16 prevails due to the girl's vulnerability to sexual oppression by upper-caste men, or the fear of an inter-caste or inter-community marriage. If an older son is being married it is economical to marry off a much younger daughter at the same time" (Bandhu 111).

Child marriage is violence against the childhood of girls which confine them to patriarchal oppression forever in life. Kamble writes that Mahar women who run away from the husband's house are perceived to be sexually immoral and the only remedy is to get rid of them. She would whisper into his ears:

Dhondya, what good is such a runaway wife to you? Some bastard must have made her leave you. She must be having an affair. You are her husband, but obviously the bitch prefers someone else. I suspect that this somebody is from our own community. This bitch will bring nothing but disgrace to us. No, no! I don't want such a slut in my house. She wants to ruin



your life. Don't let her off so easily. Dhondya, cut off the tip of her nose; only then will my mother's heart breathe easy! Don't bring shame on your father's name (Kamble 100).

Such atrocities of mutilating, killing Dalit women were very common incidents as described by Kamble. It is difficult to say the question of honour and sexual morality is not present in Dalit communities which perpetrated atrocities on Dalit women. The imitation of upper-caste culture also could have been one reason behind child marriages in Dalit communities. The formation of caste did not happen suddenly. Castes and communities do undergo lot of influences and changes with the passage of time. Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon point out. "In the formation of caste, according to Ambedkar, the Brahmins bound themselves first of all and created a caste for themselves, the rest of society imitated them and so other castes came into being. It is possible that the concept of female chastity in the tying of the marriage bond, and the practice of child marriage, came to the untouchables from the upper-castes through imitation of this kind" (Kamble 104).

The belief that Dalit women are treated as slaves in the families is not very extensively examined idea in Dalit movement or Dalit male writing. One reason could be that Dalit male writers would want to celebrate Dalit culture in order to bring self-respect for Dalits. I believe what is important for Dalit politics is to bring self-respect for the individual Dalits but not to the caste because Dalit is the category that fights against the caste and advocates the caste free society. The category Dalit needs not celebrate any of untouchable caste's culture which is only an imposed culture by the caste system. Whether there is more equality or not (compared to upper-castes), castes in their basic form are oppressive and individuals have not formed its norms to make it more liberal. The quality of every caste is decided by the caste system in larger framework. Hence, it is not helpful or necessary to celebrate caste culture.

It is the category Dalit that struggles to establish a new society where there is social justice, equal opportunity for all (among sub-castes as well)

irrespective of caste. Scholars like Kancha Ilaiah celebrate Dalit caste cultures as free from gender oppression. Dalit women writers have stood against the celebration of Dalit culture. They have described more about the rituals, superstitious beliefs and enslavement of women as the qualities prevalent in Dalit families for the reason that untouchable castes are also part of the caste system. Kamble describes many atrocities committed against Dalit women (Jogdand 104). These atrocities are no different from the Brahminical way of humiliating Dalits:

Then both father and son would make a plan for chopping off the girl's nose. The sasra would go to her mother's place and with sweet words, bring her back. Meanwhile, the son would keep ready a razor sharpened to an edge. At night, he would sit on her chest and taking his own time, cut off her nose. Then they would drive the poor girl out of the house, with blood pouring out from mutilation (Kamble 101).

The atrocities such as Sati and restrictions on the mobility of upper-caste women in the public which are more visible forms of violence gain more attention than the atrocities that are committed in Dalit families. Dalit women writing brings out such atrocities committed on Dalit women which were less visible due to the lack of Dalit women's representation in education and politics. Kamble also describes the incident in which another Dalit woman who was axed down being enticed by her husband into the forest for the reason of smiling at his cousin once. Masculinity is shaped in Dalit families also by the strength of dominating women in the family and community. Just as how caste system keeps each caste either superior or inferior to another caste, gender dynamics continue to exist in all the castes. Dalit men who lack the power within the society would dominate Dalit women who are next in order. The need for Dalit women's political organizations is stressed in the Dalit women's autobiographies.

Right to divorce does not seem to be a common practice among Dalit families as described in *Prisons We Broke*. Though Dalit women are not completely economically dependent on Dalit men,



they are socially bound to the concept of marriage. Bama writes that the family and marriage are not everything in the lives of Dalit women who struggle for everyday survival. They struggle for food and there not much economic support from their men in the families. Dalit women have their deliveries at home and many of them die due to lack of proper diet but they are not left with the option of going to hospital due to poverty. Due to this poverty and struggle for everyday survival, there is not much scope for Dalit women to observe the visible practices of married women as in case of upper-caste women who follow all the rituals of marriage even in their day to day life. This does not imply Dalit women have more freedom when compared to upper-caste women:

If a man dies, there is no rule that says his wife must immediately go into white saris nor that she must behave in such and such manner. She will carry on in her usual way. And this is because, even when her husband is alive, it isn't compulsory that a woman must bear a bottu on her forehead, nor bangles and other jewelry about her person, nor smear herself with turmeric. Where does she have the jewelry in the first place? And where does she have the time to smear herself with turmeric, have a bath, and dress herself up with bottu and flowers? She runs to work at dawn and comes home after sunset. So whether her husband is alive or dead, she will follow the same routine. She might, perhaps, remove her tali. On the other hand, some women never wear a tali, though they marry and live with their husbands. Talis are not that important among us (Bama 90).

As Bama describes, symbols of marriage like padapuja, kumkum, flowers and ornaments play a very less important role in Dalit women lives due to their poor conditions of life. Dalit communities are perceived to be free from patriarchal violence by critics such as Gabriele Dietrich and Kanche Ilaiah due to absence of visible practices of patriarchy like performing rituals of married woman such *padapuja*, observance rules of widowhood and so on. This

struggle for survival could be another reason that Dalit castes do not have more restrictions on divorce as well. But many women who live under the constant patriarchal violence described by Kamble, Urmila Pawar and Bama do not find divorce as a solution for their lives. Since there might be not find much relief in taking divorce. Even caste Panchayats are male dominated that they might recognize wife battering as common practice and not provide any justice to Dalit women.

WORKS CITED

- [1]. Bama. *Sangati*. New Delhi: OUP, 2005. Print.
- [2]. Bandhu, Pranjali. "Dalit women Cry for Liberation." Ed. Anupama Rao. *Gender and Caste*. Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003. Print.
- [3]. Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste through A Feminist Lens*. Calcutta: Stree, 2003. Print.
- [4]. Guru, Gopal. "Dalit Cultural Movement in Maharashtra." Ed. Ghanshyam Shah. *Dalit Identity and Politics*. Vol.2. New Delhi: Sage, 2001. Print.
- [5]. Jogdand, P.G. *Dalit Women In India: Issues and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing, 1995. Print.
- [6]. Kamble, . *The Prison We Broke*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2008. Print.
- [7]. Narain, A.K. and Ahir. *Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Change*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2008. Print.
- [8]. Pandian, M. S. S. "Dalit Women's Testimonios". *Caste and Gender*. Ed. Anupama Rao. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003. Print.
- [9]. Rege, Sharmila. *Writing caste/writing gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006. Print.
- [10]. Sarkar, Tanika. *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001. Print.
- [11]. Srinivas, M. N. *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*. Bombay. Asia Pub. House, 1962. Print.