



Marathi Dalit Autobiography: “Oppressed Caste Identity In Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke”

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Abstract

A notable piece of Marathi Dalit literature, Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* exposes the multidimensional oppression that Dalit women endure. By analyzing Kamble's autobiography and concentrating on themes of insults, structural exclusion, and persistence, the piece contributes to the conversation on gender and caste oppression and highlights the need to take an intersectional approach to social justice.

Keywords

Dalit Autobiography, Dalit Women, Caste Oppression, Gender Discrimination, Social Justice.

Autobiography is a potent literary style that challenges societal conventions and gives Dalit writers in Maharashtra a platform to convey their own experiences. The Marathi Dalit autobiography genre offers a close-up view of the difficult conditions encountered by members of historically oppressed castes due to historical marginalization, socio-political struggle, and literary expression. These autobiographies highlight structural inequalities, question prevailing social conventions, and give voice to traditionally marginalized people. Dalit autobiographies are especially important in Maharashtra because of the state's strong history of social change and literature. They contribute to larger conversations on social justice and equality by documenting individual stories of prejudice based on caste and resistance.

The article examines the genre of Marathi Dalit autobiographies and examines how authors utilize it to discuss their experiences and promote social change. It seeks to provide readers with a thorough grasp of the genre and its contributions to the current Indian conversation about caste, identity, and social justice.

Historical and Social Context

The Dalit group has historically and socially been neglected and oppressed under the caste system, which forms the basis of the historical and social setting of Marathi Dalit autobiographies. Dalits are historically allocated menial and "unclean" employment. This systemic prejudice against them has been sustained by the hierarchical social framework known as the caste system. As a result, there has been a generalized exclusion from economic and educational prospects, which has strengthened the cycles of poverty and marginalization.

Leaders who promoted social change and the advancement of Dalits, such as Jyotirao Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, gave rise to the Dalit Movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ambedkar's efforts resulted in important legal and social reforms, including the creation of the Indian Constitution, while Phule's work, including the founding of the Satyashodhaka Samaj, attempted to educate and empower Dalits.

The autobiographical genre in Marathi literature has become a potent vehicle for Dalit writers to describe their personal experiences and question social injustices. Due to continuous socio-political shifts and increased public awareness of Dalit issues, this literary legacy has changed over time. The Marathi Dalit literary landscape has been significantly shaped by activism and education. The expansion of educational opportunities and the ascent of Dalit intellectuals have enabled the emergence of new writers who have used autobiographical narratives to articulate their experiences and promote social change.

Marathi Dalit autobiographies have developed further in recent decades, encompassing the community's continuous struggles as well as its achievements. Comprehending this background is crucial to realizing the importance of Dalit autobiographical stories and their influence on literature and culture.

Pioneering Figures and Influential Works

Many influential people who offer vital insights into the real-life experiences of the Dalit community have influenced Marathi Dalit autobiographies. Along with chronicling their own personal stories, these autobiographers provided a more comprehensive critique of the societal institutions that uphold discrimination against people based on caste. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) was an important figure in the movement for social justice and Dalit rights; his autobiography "Thoughts on Linguistic States" offers a thorough account of his life and the difficulties he encountered in pursuing Dalit rights. His works are extremely analytical and provide a critique of the political and social systems that exclude Dalits.

The autobiography "Golpitha," written by Namdeo Dhasal (1949–1997), is widely recognized for its honest and compelling depiction of Dalit life. It bravely presents the terrible realities of Dalit living, including social exclusion, poverty, and violence. A thorough narrative of his experiences as a Dalit, Shankarrao Kharat (1921–2003) sheds light on the socioeconomic challenges that Dalits confront as well as his own path to empowerment and education. It is praised for his open depiction of the difficulties and victories of surviving in a culture that still practices caste-based prejudice.

Arjun Dangle is a well-known author and editor who plays a significant role in Marathi Dalit literature. Daya Pawar's autobiography, "Daya Pawar: A Dalit Voice," offers an insightful analysis of the development of Dalit literature and the influence of autobiographies on social consciousness. In "Jina Amucha," Baby Kamble's autobiography, she poignantly recounts her life as a Dalit woman, underscoring the confluence between caste and gender. The autobiography "Aamcha Bap Aanamcha Bap" by Laxman Gaikwad, which describes his life and the socio-political obstacles he faced as a Dalit, is a notable piece of Marathi Dalit literature. He focuses on his path to social and economic advancement as well as the significance of social reform movements in his story. The autobiographical writings of Marathi Dalit pioneers have had a significant impact on shaping the genre and furthering debate.

Autobiographies written by Marathi Dalits have made a substantial contribution to the public's understanding of social exclusion and discrimination based on caste. Through sharing their own tales of adversity and resilience, they help readers from many social backgrounds develop empathy and understanding. More people are talking about caste concerns and their stories have become more relatable as a result of this heightened knowledge.

Autobiographies by Dalit writers are effective means of social campaigning because they draw attention to structural inequities and inspire readers to take up causes of social change. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings, for instance, have played a significant role in advancing social and legal reforms that remove caste prejudice and advance equality. Dalit autobiographers of today still utilize their stories to advocate for social justice and legislative improvements.

For the Dalit community, autobiographies are also exercises in self-determination and identity building. Dalit authors reclaim their voices and resist the preconceptions imposed by mainstream culture by recording their experiences and proclaiming their narratives, promoting pride and togetherness in the community. This process of self-affirmation and identity assertion is essential.

Dalit autobiographies have impacted activism and education in addition to literature by promoting conversations about social justice, prejudice, and caste. These literary masterpieces play a crucial and transforming role in the continuous fight for equality and justice, as well as shaping public conversation, promoting empathy, and bringing about significant social change.

Baby Kamble's "The Prisons We Broke"

Autobiographies, in particular, provide insightful accounts of the lives of oppressed populations in India, as found in Dalit literature. *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble is a landmark work that examines the dual oppression that Dalit women—who are oppressed by both their caste and gender—face. In order to effectively testify against systematic oppression and social injustice, this article will examine how these intersecting identities impact the lived experiences of Dalit women. It will also examine how these women's narratives of pain, endurance, and resistance are developed. This makes the complex process of marginalization in Indian society more widely understood.

In Kamble's autobiography, the everyday abuses and humiliations that Dalit women endure—such as social exclusion, denial of access to public areas, and untouchability—are vividly described. Because caste and gender inequality force these women to perform menial labor in dangerous environments, they are trapped in a cycle of exploitation and abuse.

The structural exclusion of Dalit women from the political, social, and economic realms is brought to light in Kamble's tale. Their social status is determined by the caste system, which prevents them from advancing in society or gaining access to political, medical, or educational opportunities. Generations of Dalit women are imprisoned in a condition of powerlessness as a result of this double exclusion, which also sustains poverty and marginalization.

Through extreme persecution, Kamble's art demonstrates the tenacity and fight of Dalit women. Her story illustrates their innate power and dignity as it describes their rebellion against the caste system. Kamble's quest for knowledge and her writing of her experiences serve as a symbol of the Dalit women's collective struggle, highlighting their unwavering determination and unceasing battle for equality and justice. Their perseverance and tenacity are demonstrated by her narrative.

Kamble's autobiography sheds light on the multifaceted oppression that Dalit women experience, encompassing discrimination based on both gender and caste. The struggles these women endure—domestic work, sexual exploitation and limited mobility—complicate the fight for Dalit rights and highlight the necessity of an integrative approach to social justice.

Conclusion

Baby Kamble, who recounts her experiences of humiliation, marginalization, and resiliency against caste and gender-based discrimination, narrates *The Prisons We Broke*, a compelling examination of the identities of Dalit women. It emphasizes how important it is to keep up the battle against injustice and give a voice to those who are marginalized in the struggle for equality.

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