



Original Article

Reflection of Indian Feminism in Baby Kamble's Autobiography the Prisons We Broke

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Abstract

The Prisons We Broke by Baby Kamble is a feminist narrative that redefines Indian feminism and an important piece of Dalit literature. Kamble's autobiography, which was published in 1986, highlights the Mahar community's struggle and the special status of Dalit women in India, exposing the double marginalization that they face. In addition to criticizing caste injustice, gender subordination, and Brahmanical patriarchy, the book paints a picture of resiliency, awakening, and emancipation. Several interacting axes, such as caste, class, religion, colonialism, and patriarchy, gave rise to Indian feminism. By opposing the harshness of untouchability, poverty, and repressive customs in their communities, Kamble's writing represents Dalit women collectively.

Keywords: Feminism, Patriarchal, feminist consciousness, Dalit Literature, subjugation

Introduction

Baby Kamble's powerful autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* originally written in Marathi -"Jina Amucha" was first published in 1986. It is a landmark text in Dalit literature. This autobiography presents a compelling feminist narrative. It attempted to redefine the true nature of Indian feminism. This is an epoch making presenting a Dalit woman chronicling her life and community. Baby Kamble helped to bridge the gap between caste and gender. She has offering a raw, factual account of the double marginalization experienced by Dalit women in India. This shows how her autobiography is something more than merely a personal life story. Besides, it becomes a socio-political document that captures the collective struggle of the Mahar community. It successfully presents the unique position of Dalit women within it. Baby Kamble critiques hypocrisy Brahmanical patriarchy, caste oppression, and gender subjugation, while also presenting a portrait of resilience, awakening, and liberation, all of which are central concerns of Indian feminism.

Indian Feminism: A Contextual Review

Contextualizing the evolution of Indian feminism is crucial before delving into *The Prisons We Broke's* feminist elements. Indian feminism developed from several intersecting axes, including caste, class, religion, colonialism, and patriarchy, in contrast to Western feminism, which frequently places an emphasis on gender equality and human agency in liberal terms. In India, upper-caste women have historically dominated feminist movements. Although they fought against gender-based discrimination, they frequently downplayed or denied the existence of caste oppression. The emergence of Dalit feminism, exemplified by authors such as Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, and Bama, has changed the discourse by highlighting the fact that caste and gender are inextricably linked. In order to demand a more inclusive, intersectional feminism, Dalit feminist rhetoric criticizes both Brahmanical patriarchy and the patriarchal systems that exist within Dalit communities. The Contribution of Baby Kamble presenting the voice of Dalit women is one of the earliest autobiographies authored by a Dalit woman entitled, "The Prisons We Broke." It is a potent expression of Dalit feminist awareness. Kamble's writings serve as a collective voice for Dalit women, who have traditionally been marginalized in both mainstream feminist and Dalit political discourses, in addition to documenting her own suffering and oppression. The cruelty of untouchability, the destitution of Dalit communities, and the repressive customs that continue to keep Dalit women in subordination even inside

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Their own homes are all addressed in Kamble's story. Her story exposes the lived realities of discrimination, humiliation, sexual exploitation, and hunger, challenging the idealized depictions of rural life. It's not just a victim story, though. As is typical of feminist writing, Kamble describes these events with a strong sense of agency, critique, and a desire for change. Her writings are a wonderful example of a lived feminism that arises from real-world hardships as opposed to idealistic concepts. The Prisons We Broke's intersectional viewpoint is among its most important contributions to Indian feminism. "Intersectionality," a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes the ways in which different types of oppression—such as racism, sexism, and classism—intersect in the lives of those who are oppressed. Feminist studies must take into account caste as a crucial axis of oppression in the Indian setting. Kamble's story eloquently illustrates how Dalit women are doubly marginalized by the intersection of caste and gender. For example, Dalit women faced domestic violence, early marriages, sexual exploitation, and illiteracy in addition to the public humiliation of untouchability imposed by upper-caste Hindus. Kamble criticizes women from the higher caste who treated Dalit women as less than human, perpetuating caste inequalities in spite of their own suffering inside patriarchal frameworks. In this approach, *The Prisons We Broke* asks for a feminism that acknowledges these interconnected structures of injustice and reveals how caste complicates in gender oppression.

Kamble's critique the ideology of caste as a second form of patriarchy. She makes harsh criticism of Brahmanical patriarchy. This is a central feminist issue in her autobiography. She reveals how upper-caste social and religious norms Hindus upheld a patriarchal system based on caste, according to which Dalit women were unclean and only suitable for sexual exploitation and manual labor. Dalit women, for example, were prohibited from entering temples and schools and made to carry night soil and clean upper-caste dwellings. Kamble also criticizes the hypocrisy of religious scriptures and practices that provided justification for the oppression of women. The Manusmriti and the caste system, which dehumanized Dalits and positioned Dalit women at the bottom of the social scale, are attacked in her autobiography. These criticisms are in line with a radical brand of Indian feminism that aims to destroy the structural and ideological underpinnings of casteism and patriarchy in addition to calling for equal rights. The significance of education and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's impact are transforming elements in Kamble's feminist narrative. In order to free Dalit women from the bonds of ignorance, superstition, and patriarchy, Kamble frequently highlights the value of education. Her own will to learn in face of resistance supports the feminist notion that power comes from knowledge. In her life, Dr. Ambedkar's ideology serves as a ray of hope and strength. He provided Kamble and other Dalit women with a new identity and purpose by emphasizing education, self-respect, and the eradication of caste. Inspired by Ambedkar, her conversion to Buddhism represents a rejection of caste-based Hinduism and the start of a social and spiritual revolution. Dalit women were able to express their hardships in a new language of dignity and resistance thanks to the Ambedkarite movement. Thus, Kamble's autobiography turns into an Ambedkarite female credo.

Challenging Patriarchy within the Dalit Community

Despite her criticism of Brahmanical patriarchy, Kamble is not afraid to call out the misogyny in her own society. She describes how Dalit men frequently encouraged physical abuse, polygamy, and restrictions on women's freedom of movement and choice. Dalit feminism, which aims to confront internal systems that impede women's freedom in addition to external oppression, depends heavily on this self-critical element of her story. For example, Kamble talks on how women's voices are silenced, how wife-beating has become commonplace, and how Dalit women have few possibilities to influence community decisions. In addressing these concerns, Kamble supports Indian feminist scholars who contend that, rather than merely occurring in the legal or public spheres, gender justice must start at home and in communities. Kamble depicts the Dalit woman looked upon as a body. In *The Prisons We Broke* we find the woman body as a place of oppression as well as resistance. She talks candidly about how the dominant castes stigmatized Dalit women's bodies as being unclean and too sexualized. They endured sexual assault, reproductive control, and public humiliation. However, Kamble also demonstrates how women utilized their bodies to resist, whether it was by facing down harsh in-laws or walking miles to attend Ambedkarite gatherings.

Women's lived experiences are brought into the public eye through her candid depiction of sexual exploitation, childbirth, menstruation, and domestic violence, shattering traditional taboos. One of the main concerns of feminist writing is the embodiment of the female experience, and Kamble's writing supports the global feminist movement to liberate the female body from silence and shame. Kamble's feminist message is greatly influenced by her narrative style, which is characterized by emotional intensity, oral storytelling, and collective memory. She uses language that is straightforward, confrontational, and approachable, and she writes in a voice that is unapologetically rooted in her neighborhood. Her narrative is replete with the voices of neighbors, moms, and grandmothers, transforming the autobiography from an individual memoir into a community testimonial. Women's methods of knowing and remembering are validated by this focus on oral tradition and communal voice, which also opposes elitist, male-dominated literary conventions. By proving that memory, emotion, and lived experience are legitimate sources of knowledge and resistance, *The Prisons We Broke* advances feminist literary theory in this way.

Conclusion

Baby Kamble's groundbreaking work *The Prisons We Broke* greatly enhances Indian feminist debate. It provides a potent critique of caste and gender injustice while highlighting the lives of Dalit women. Based on lived experience, Kamble's story is strengthened by group fight, Ambedkarite thought, and a strong yearning for freedom. Her work creates a place for intersectional, self-reflexive, and radical Dalit feminist consciousness, challenging both the male-centric Dalit movement and the savarna-centric mainstream feminism.

What it means to be a feminist in India is redefined in Kamble's memoirs. It advocates for a feminism that listens to marginalized perspectives and is not limited to urban, upper-caste issues. By achieving this, *The Prisons We Broke* transcends its status as a life story and transforms into a groundbreaking work that will continue to motivate readers and advocates for social justice, equality, and dignity for decades to come.

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Conflicts of Interest

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