

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Impact Factor 6.4

Vol. 9 Issue 3 June 2023

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com



PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF DALIT WOMEN WRITERS (URMILA PAWAR AND BABY KAMBLE)

Dr. Jyoti Pandey

**Associate Professor, Department of English
SGRR PG College Patthri Bagh
Dehradun, Uttarakhand**

.....

Abstract

Writing autobiography has been a difficult genre for women due to the fact that it was not a well accepted tradition for a woman to write. A woman's autobiography is about her relationships within her family through which she establishes her identity in society. However, on the contrary, a man's autobiography is primarily related to his personal experiences bringing about success and achievements. Therefore women's autobiographies deal mostly with the emotional unrest of their lives, their desires and aspirations. Through their autobiographical works they express their anger, resentment and a deep sense of frustration at being victims of discrimination and marginalization, following the dictates of their husbands and losing their individuality. Autobiographies by Dalit women are a bold account of the victim's experience of injustice and inequality in a male dominated, caste-oriented world. The present paper focuses on autobiographies of Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble who being Dalit women have fearlessly expressed their social inhibitions and who have been victims of the hegemonic patriarchy and cultural taboos imposed on them by the Indian society. While *Aaydan* (2003) by Urmila Pawar, (translated as *The Weave of My Life*) narrates the difficulties of a Dalit woman experienced in the educational system that in India has been Brahminical for centuries and the inferiority associated with her caste, Baby Kamble's autobiography *Jeena Amucha* (translated as *The Prisons We Broke* in English) highlights the plight of Dalit women in the Mahar community and their subordination to the upper caste Brahmins and the atrocities imposed by the patriarchal system on them. Through their autobiographies both Pawar and Kamble have poignantly exhibited the socio-cultural realities of discrimination due to their gender, caste and class and how they were subjected to oppression in all forms and became victims of the discriminatory social and religious practices.

Keywords

Identity, Discrimination, Marginalization, Dalit, Patriarchy, Hegemony, Gender, Oppression.

.....



PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF DALIT WOMEN WRITERS (URMILA PAWAR AND BABY KAMBLE)

Dr. Jyoti Pandey

Associate Professor, Department of English

SGRR PG College Patthri Bagh

Dehradun, Uttarakhand

.....

It was only till the beginning of the twentieth century that women autobiographies could speak in an authoritative voice regarding the trial and tribulation of their lives. All that they could talk about was about family or religion. However in the later part of twentieth century, autobiographies of modern Indian women writers like Amrita Pritam (*The Revenue Stamp*), Kamala Das (*My Story*), Shobha De (*Selective Memory*), Dilip Kaur Tiwana (*A Journey on Barefeet*), Saranjeet Shan (*In My Own Name: An Autobiography*), Mrinal Pandey (*Daughter's Daughter*) and Taslima Nasrin (*My Girlhood: An Autobiography*) frankly expressed their sufferings in reaction to the social and cultural taboos imposed on them by society.

Besides Dalit men, Dalit women also began to exhibit their suppressed conditions in the form of writing sonnets, short stories, and memoirs in regional languages translated in English. In Maharashtra, Baby Kamble, Kumud Pawde, Urmila Pawar, and Sumitra Bhavé wrote about their traumatic experiences being Dalit women. Also, Bengali writers like Manju Bala and Kalyani Thakur Charal and writers from the south like Ruth Manorama, Swathy Margaret, Bama Faustina Soosairaj, Sivakami, Sukirtharani, Meena Kandasamy, Gogu Syamala and Challapalli Swaroopa Rani contributed in a large way to Dalit literature.

In the autobiography *Aaydan* translated in English as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* (2008), Pawar discusses the oppressive social milieu she has lived in, and the discrimination she experienced due to her caste, class and gender and how she overcame these barriers in order to find self-fulfilment. It also deals with the difficulties Pawar experienced in the educational system that has been Brahmanical for centuries. She writes about the experiences of inferiority associated with her caste through her self-narratives through which she describes Dalit patriarchy and records her bitter experiences resulting in the loss of her identity and her inner struggles with poverty granting her the strength to empower herself and achieve happiness.

At home, the Dalit men follow all the patriarchal social norms they inherently learn from the upper caste society. They treat women as objects not human beings; they expect their women to work the whole day along with them in labour jobs, cook food for the whole family, do all the household jobs, take care of the children and then serve them in the bed at night. If

any woman dares to resist any of these responsibilities thrust upon her, there occurs violence. Urmila Pawar writes that she was held responsible for the illness of her husband Harishchandra leading to his premature death, the death of her son, and the other difficulties the family faced in hard times:

Even in his last days, I got squarely blamed for Harishchandra's illness. First it was said that he was completely heartbroken by his daughter's rebellious marriage. Gradually, my education, my job, my writing, my social work, my meetings, my programs, and, last, I, because of what I was, were held responsible for his illness. (Pawar 198)

Aaydan is a compelling voice bringing to the fore the misery of subaltern women owing to gender discrimination, coming face to face with the ugly reality in the society around her and therefore, her writing is also an attempt at spiritually healing herself as well as others. Urmila Pawar in her autobiography offers glimpses of several instances from the lives of the women from her community bringing out their suffering, at the hand of their husbands, their family members, and also at the hands of the society at large. Pawar begins to document the instances of women's suffering, along with giving glimpses of her life story from a very young age. Her family lived in a village in the Konkan region of Maharashtra, where life for all the people was only hard work and constant drudgery, but for women it was just like hell. Pawar's mother used to weave bamboo baskets and according to her since the weave involved pain, suffering and agony in her life, her own act of writing about her life is essentially the same as weaving a bamboo basket, linking the lives of a mother and daughter. Outside the Konkan region, the nomadic tribes, such as the Burud were assigned the job of weaving bamboo baskets, but in the Konkan region, her tribe, that is the Mahars, undertook the profession. The issue with this arrangement is that the particular caste members have little option to choose from any other professions available even if their caste profession hardly pays for their subsistence so they are destined to live in perpetual penury. Pawar writes that during their childhood days, at her home there was always a lack of food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities of life. Moreover, her father died when she and her siblings were quite young and her mother had to be frugal with the income since the earning from bamboo basket weaving was extremely low.

Pawar draws a compelling picture of this reality in the daily lives of such outcaste children from her community. The Mahar children, as described in Pawar's autobiography, were hit with stones if they committed errors and the teacher wouldn't touch them even to punish them physically. She relates incidents of mistreatment and social stigma of the Mahar children at the hands of upper caste teachers at school. Children from lower castes like the Bhandaris, Kunbis and Mahars attended school with the Brahmin boys felt humiliated as they were asked to sit outside in the courtyard while the teachers who taught them observed them writing on slates from a distance in order to avoid caste pollution which naturally discouraged the children who eventually lost all interest in learning and finally refrained themselves from the school. For their caste as well as for their gender, Mahar girls were in a still more difficult situation since they were not allowed to enroll or even if they did, as Pawar's father wanted his daughters to get proper education which was thought to be a useless activity for them as in the end they were supposed to lead only life of a housewife. Pawar writes about her elder sister whom she calls 'Akka.' who had a difficult time in the family since nobody at home was in favour of her going to school and staying far away from home. The women at home were the first to complain, "Bah! What do women have to do with education? Ultimately she would be blowing on the stove, wouldn't she?" or "Is she going to be a teacher, a Brahmin lady, that she goes to school?" (Pawar 30).

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

www.expressionjournal.com ISSN: 2395-4132

The life of a Dalit woman is confronted with a major issue and that is the so-called 'upper' caste Hindus avoid all social contact with them denying them all opportunities of social integration. Jaydeep Sarangi commenting on autobiographical works written by Dalit women mentions:

The Dalit women in India undergo acute caste discrimination and domestic violence. Certain literary works by Dalit women give a detailed description of the living conditions of the Dalits 'at an untouchable distance.' Most of them refer to the unhygienic cluster of huts, swarming with pigs and other animals which are an aversion to the caste Hindus, and the menial jobs which are imposed on Dalits. (Sarangi 4)

Upper caste men seeking sexual gratification from lower caste women, either through influence or by force, is commonly expressed as an issue in Dalit narratives. Although Indian constitution grants equal status to all Indian men and women and states that no person will be discriminated against because of his or her caste, creed or gender, yet in Indian society a strong prejudice and discrimination prevails based on caste and untouchability, the reason being that a Dalit woman faces double oppression owing to her gender oppressed in the upper class society for her caste and class and at the same time she remains oppressed at home because of her gender.

The Weave of my Life brings to light the patriarchal social ideology inscribed in the lives of these women in India which teaches women from their early childhood, that a woman can be happy only with her husband, at her in-laws' place, however tyrannical her husband and her in-laws may be. Pawar quotes the instance of her cousin Susheela who was married to a man who was a drunkard. Also her mother-in-law was a tyrant and to add to her miseries both of them used to beat her up mercilessly on the slightest cause "throwing her out of the house with her young children even on stormy dark nights" even when her face was swelled up and body felt broken in pain. The most pathetic situation for Susheela when she came in such a terrible plight and if Pawar's father saw her, he would utter "Who's that? Susha? All right, give her something to eat and send her back the way she's come. She must stay with her in-laws!" (Pawar 38)

Babytai Kamble, a renowned Dalit activist and writer through her autobiographical work *Jina Amacha (The Prisons We Broke)* gives a vivid narration of her lived experiences was translated into several languages. There have been many chronicles of Dalit lives written before her time, but there wasn't much literature on Dalit women therefore her writing has been innovative. *The Prisons We Broke* gives a deep insight into the world of patriarchy from both sides i.e. a Dalit women suffering from oppression by gender and caste. The autobiography not only brings out the causes of Dalit women falling prey to the menace of exploitation and discrimination by the patriarchal norms inherent within their own Mahar community but being a Dalit narrative it also offers a deep insight into the oppressive caste and patriarchal system prevalent in Indian society.

Written in Marathi as *Jina Amachainin* the year 1985 and translated into English by Prof. Maya Pandit, Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* discusses relevant issues of gender and caste discrimination and women subjugation and deals with the lives of Mahar men and women in Kamble's village, Veergaon in Maharashtra. Kamble paints an agonizing picture of the oppressive caste and patriarchal beliefs of the Indian society where girls like her were married off at the early age of eight or nine which was a huge disaster. The newlywed daughter-in-law was expected to prepare bhakris as her prime duty indulge herself in all the household chores and in case a girl could not fulfill these duties, she was subject to

abuse and humiliation by her in-laws. Furthermore the work of the women extended to plastering their house with cow dung and cleaning utensils and clothes. Kamble relates how mothers-in-laws sought pleasure in inflicting unnecessary pain on the immature younger girls, giving the same harsh treatment to them as they had received from their own in-laws and how they were forced to lead a pathetic life in their husband's home. The daughter-in-law was perpetually the target of physical and psychological assault at her in-laws' home. The Mahar women in particular were the worst victims of patriarchy, gender distinction and domestic violence and led a wretched and miserable life. They behaved like slaves in presence of their upper caste Brahmins and accepted them as their masters, the upper caste Hindus who in return only hurled them with insults and abuses. Generations after generations, the Mahars served their masters very obediently while they were exploited by the latter.

The Prisons We Broke realistically portrays the journey of the Mahar community. Kamble paints a distressing picture of the tortures that a Dalit woman had to undergo suffer domestic violence just because of her birth and inferior caste. Recalling her younger days in an interview with Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, she states, "...not a single day of my youth was spent happily. Beatings, quarrels, crying and starvation these were routine. I was convinced then that a Dalit woman is really insecure" (Kamble 294). She further declares:

The other world had bound us with chains of slavery. But we too were human beings. And we too desired to dominate, to wield power. But who would let us do that? So we made our own arrangements to find slaves—our very own daughters-in-law! If nobody else, then we could at least enslave them. (Kamble 87)

One of the main purposes of Indian women's autobiographical writing is to reveal the extremely conservative and chauvinist attitude of their men towards womenfolk. These autobiographies namely Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* challenge the male dominated society and redefine relations between men and women and between the upper caste and lower caste. Though in India many legislative changes have been brought about for women's empowerment, gender equality still remains an unfulfilled goal.

Works Cited

- Kamble, Baby. 'Jina Amuche' translated by Maya Pandit as *The Prisons We Broke*. Orient Blackswan, 2009.
- Pawar, Urmila. *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Women's Memoirs*. Translated by Maya Pandit. Granthali, 2003.
- Pawar, Urmila and Meenakshi Moon. *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement*. Translated by Wandana Sonalkar. Zubaan, 2008.
- Sarangi, Jaydeep, editor. *Writing as Resistance: Literature of Emancipation*. Gnosis, 2011.
- Shaily. "Trauma of Dalit Women as Thrice-Suppressed in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*." *Literary Herald*, vol. 3, no. 2. 2017, pp. 306-310.