

# The Dalit of all Dalits: An Insight into the Condition of Women as Portrayed in Dalit Literature

**Marjana Mukherjee & Joydeep Banerjee**

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, M. G. Avenue, Durgapur 713209, India

Email: marjana.mukherjee86@gmail.com

**Abstract** This paper highlights the emergence of Dalit autobiographical literature as a means of voicing not only the woes and pitiable plight of the Dalit women but also highlighting various instances of Dalit women who have fought against this unjust system and attained fame and respect for themselves in particular and their society at large. Throughout the world women face the ubiquitous problem of subjugation which gets heightened in case of the subaltern women. Only the pen has the voice to bring forth a massive change in the entire structural set up. Literature is not the platform for evoking sympathy from others but it's a means by which fervor for change can develop in the minds of those who have been subjugated. It is universalising a personal pain by making it a literature of the oppressed. A reference is drawn from Baby Kamble's autobiography 'The Prisons We Broke,' to show how the Dalit women were oppressed by their own community as well.

**Keywords** Dalit Autobiographical Literature; Dalit women; fame; voice; universalism; 'The Prisons We Broke.'

**Authors** **Marjana Mukherjee** , Research Scholar at Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Durgapur, West Bengal, India; **Joydeep Banerjee**, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology , Durgapur , West Bengal, India.

S. Srinivasan has aptly brought forth the aggression through the following lines of Sukanya Maruti:

“Enough of this life on earth  
The blame and the humiliation.

Why does the roaring ocean not  
Open its belly and swallow me?" (Srinivasan 274)

### Origins and Evolution of the Caste System

The concept of caste dates back to times immemorial. The Vedas and Manusmriti highlight the importance of a society based on the segregation of people into social groups where the enjoyment of rights and liberties would be determined by dint of one's birth. This hierarchical biased system of division evolved into the Hindu caste system. According to the Vedas, a social order emerged at creation from the body of Purusha, or primitive man: Brahmins from his head; Kshatriyas from his arms; Vaisyas from his thighs; and Shudras from his feet. All members of Purusha's body represented the necessary parts of a functioning society. How the Vedic social order evolved into the more rigid Indian caste system is unclear. Some scholars believe Brahmins manipulated the Vedic texts to gain power. Others are of the opinion that around 1500 B.C., Aryan invaders institutionalized the caste system to subdue the indigenous population of India. In either instance, the notion of untouchability emerged at some point in the development of the caste system.

Those who are beneath the entire caste system — and are therefore literally 'outcaste' as well as 'untouchable' — call themselves 'Dalits'. The word "Dalit," meaning "broken" or "ground down," is used by 'outcaste' people themselves to describe at the same time their oppression, their identity and their collective power for emancipation. The use of the word 'Dalit', encouraged by great Dalit leader Dr. Ambedkar, has enabled the development of a collective identity among all the 'outcaste' people, whatever their sub-caste, ethnicity or religion. The government nevertheless use the term 'Scheduled Castes' for Dalits.

The use of the term itself is the root cause of various evils that still pervades our society. Everywhere we are talking about upliftment and shunning segregation. But the term itself is a constant reminder of the oppression that had prevailed in our society and still continues to do so. Waman Nimbalkar highlights the opinion of Baburao Bagul, an eminent Dalit writer, that,

"Dalit means one who wants to destroy the system of Varna in the society along with its complete thought base...Dalit means one who wants to restructure this world and life...Dalit means one whose hands in this age have been made intelligent and transformable and for whom all weapons and sciences have been made available." (Nimbalkar 30)

But still the issue that haunts us is whether we ourselves are indulging in this uncouth practise of discrimination by categorising them as “Dalits.” We need to seriously consider if this endeavour for emancipation will prove futile if they are not given any name?

In this paper I would like to identify the troubled position of the ones who are doubly oppressed. Their oppression is caste as well as gender based. They are the “Dalit Women.” Simone de Beauvoir has termed women as ‘The Second Sex’, highlighting their position in a patriarchal society. The term “Dalit” further adds to the already existing system of domination meted out to women at large. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has also said that the Dalit women are the most Dalit of all. We have various instances of women belonging to the upper castes who suffer from extreme pain and agitation. It is rooted in the intense social crisis that economic liberalization has produced in much of the world. It also highlights the deep-seated misogyny and patriarchalism that still pervades our society. B. R. Ambedkar takes the help of *Manusmriti* to highlight the subservient position of women in the Indian society:

“The wife should even treat the husband as God though he is characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities. . . . If the wife disobeys the husband when he is given to bad habits or becomes a drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away. . . Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males of their families . . . her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.” (Ambedkar 429 - 432)

The same notion is highlighted in Baby Kamble’s novel *Jinne Amuche* (Translated by Maya Pandit as ‘The Prisons We Broke’). Baby Kamble mentions that the women in her village lived in dire poverty and the only valuable possession of the women was the vermilion mark on their forehead that symbolised their married status. She observes, “We guarded our *kumkum* more than our lives at the feet of the husband — the world exists only if he does, without him the entire world was barren. The husband may have filled our lives with sorrows that last a lifetime. But the *kumkum* applied in his name was the only jewel we got in our lives” (Kamble 40).

Prof. Kancha Ilaiah, an Indian political scientist, writer and activist for Dalit

rights believes that the history of Indian literature was looked up as Hindu literary history. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata figured as the central discursive engagement of constructing modern India by connecting to the Indian past. He elaborates Manu's views on women:

"Manu deprived women of their basic political rights even at home. Forbidden to decide anything for herself, she was to be completely deprived of her initiative...If a woman flouted this law, according to him, society should condemn her, and the sovereign should punish her." (Ilaiah 182)

Prof. Ilaiah further mentions that Vatsyayana had categorized women into two types — the ganikas and the wives. The ganikas were a source of recreation for men and the wives purpose was procreation. Politics and state affairs were far from her reach. Prof. Ilaiah states that:

"Vatsyayana reduced the position of women to mere toys in the hands of men by prescribing at length what a ganika should do to keep a customer happy. He gave a detailed list of things that a citizen should possess: the decorated rooms and equipment for feasts and festivals where the women could be used for amusement." (Ilaiah 183- 184)

Aristotle had a more conservative way of thinking when he points out that, "Women are naturally inferior to men, and that they are therefore naturally ruled by them.... Women's main function is reproduction. The man via his semen always provides the soul of the offspring, while the female via her menstrual discharge provides the matter" ( Ilaiah 202).

But there was another stream with a deep past of its own which was started by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule. Dalit literature has come a long way from tentative, inchoate, half formed narratives of life's stories to modern ones and calibrated mapping of reality in contemporary India. Dalit literature emanates from different locations and languages having specific local characteristics of their own. Despite this it yet has commonalities that make for Pan- Indian solidarities possible. Dalit is not a homogenous category, it is a monolith as there are multiple possibilities of Dalit writing. By now they are sturdy and robust internal criticism, containing voices of alternative solutions to various challenges and it definitely gestures towards a universal canon of world literature of the oppressed in every corner of the world.

The condition of Dalit women is worse than the rest. Dalit women have always been public women of some sort. Privacy like dignity and education is always denied to a Dalit couple. Hope is a place where the Dalits are yet to assert their autonomy. Dalit literature brings forth this central theme of suppression. Bama explains:

“The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating, really. In the fields they have to escape from upper caste men’s molestations. At church they must lick the priest’s shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and Hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husbands torment.” (Bama 122)

### **Dalit Literature**

In his autobiography, Graham Greene mentions —

“Writing is a form of therapy: sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation.” (Greene 9)

There has been a garble both in Indian literature and Indian English literature in the representation of Dalit women. Arjun Dangle has defined Dalit literature as “Dalit literature is not simply a literature; it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It is strongly evident that there is no established critical theory behind (Dalit writings) instead there is a new thinking and a new point of view” (viii). The Dalits are determined to narrate their agony, resistance, strengths and thoughts of liberation. The Dalit autobiographies are a part of social discourse as these narratives can be studied historically as a cultural performance, linguistically as a text, psychologically as an act of completion to include memory, self – analysis and personality construction.

Most of the upper caste male writers have a predisposition towards Dalit women. A woman’s being a woman is neglected. Her only identity is in her being a Dalit. In Dalit literature, the Dalit women remain confined and encapsulated in the roles of the mother and the victimized sexual beings. They are universally portrayed as a sacrificing mother, a supportive partner or a destitute sister. The patriarchal notions are thrust upon women, like deprivation of education and lack

of economic freedom. It compelled women to remain inside the threshold which metaphorically signifies the mental and spatial limiting of Dalit women. Marriage provides a lifetime opportunity to the Dalit men to vent out their frustration on the Dalit women through domestic violence. Dalit women are represented as the victims of the lust of the higher caste men and never as rebels to fight against the injustices perpetuated upon them. Even in the writings of Mulk Raj Anand, Premchand and so on- Dalit women are either molested or raped by the upper caste men. The practices of devdasi and jogini are seen as religiously practiced prostitution. These representations do nothing to bring out the spark that exists within the Dalit women. They do not seek sympathy. What they are looking for is dignity and equality. Thus, in these literatures, a Dalit woman is never a fighter but always a victim. Amar Nath Prasad mentions that in order to counter- struggle the misrepresentations of Dalit women in Indian English literature, the first generation of Dalit writers constructed Dalit women in Dalit literature writes:

“The female characters in Dalit Literature are dynamic and not static. Dalit writers do not look upon widows, prostitutes, depraved women, as Dalit, the exploited, with compassion alone; but they make them towards radiance. In the stories and novels of Annabhau, Shankar RaoKharat, BaburaoBagul and others, though the nature of the struggle of woman in the beginning is individual, later it becomes class conflict... As a consequence of this, Dalit female characters end the journey of deep darkness and behold dreams of sunrise... They fight for truth and for themselves. They revolt to protect their self-respect... The revolt of Dalit women is not person-centered but society-centered... That is why Dalit writers do not portray Dalit women as hollow identities, overflowing with love as embodiments of sacrifice.” (Prasad 46)

Clara Nubile quotes Gayatri Spivak’s arguments that the voice of the subalterns is not heard properly: “It is not so much that subaltern women did not speak, but rather that others did not know how to listen, how to enter into a transaction between speaker and listener. The subaltern cannot because their words cannot be properly interpreted. Hence, the silence of the female as subaltern is the result of failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation” (Nubile 35).

Dr. C.B. Bharti claims:

“The aim of Dalit Literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the

higher castes. There is an urgent need to create a separate aesthetics for Dalit literature, an aesthetics based on the real experiences of life.” (Bharti 6)

Writing about the emergency of Dalit Feminist literature and its need, Challapalli Swaroopa Rani states: “It has a long time for Dalit women to overcome their oppression, as Dalits and put to creative use the gains of social and literary movements. There are of course common issues that bind Dalit men and women, like untouchability and caste oppression. But women also suffer from patriarchal oppression. These concerns are constantly foregrounded in Dalit women’s poetry in Telugu and are evident in the form, content and the emotions that they express. However, Dalit women’s poetry in Telugu still needs to develop beyond the confines of patriarchy.” (Rani 21)

Soni in B.T. Lalita Nayak’s *Gati* symbolise the pitiable plight of many embittered dalit women who are suffering sitting in the dark corner of the society, shunned by the men who fail to realise their duty as father, husband or even son. The only permanent and loyal friend that they have is ‘suffering’, which refuses to leave them. They hold the opinion that they suffer only because of their husband and in-laws. Treatment of Sohini by Pandit Kalinath in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* exposes the ill-treatment of dalit women by high caste men. In Bama’s *Sangati*, Mariamma escapes from village chief who tries to molest her, but is eventually harassed in front of Panchayat by the chief. The stigma of untouchability will be nullified if these women decide to accept the lecherous motives of these men. The worst kind of humiliation for any woman is sexual exploitation but in case of a Dalit woman society seems to have negated this right even.

Baburao Bagul has explained how Dalit literature is not defined by anguish, waiting and sorrow alone but is a historical necessity in promoting human freedom. Sharan Kumar Limbale shows how Bama clarifies her acknowledgement of the work “*Sangati*”:

“My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about lively, rebellious culture their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide....About their hard labor. I wanted to shout out these stories.” (Limbale 119)

Shantabai Dhanaji Dani’s *Ratrandin Amha* (For Us-These Nights and Days) does not only talk about the tumultuous conditions in which Shantabai had to struggle

for gaining education but also carves out the path that she travelled in order to become one of the best known women leaders of the movement. Mukta Sarvagod's *Mitleli Kavaade* (Closed Doors), Shantabai Krishnaji Kamble's *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (The Kaleidoscopic Story of My Life), Baby Kondiba Kamble's *Jinne Amuche* (Our Lives), Kumud Pawade's *Antasphot* (Thoughtful Outburst), Urmila Pawar's *Aaidan* (The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs), Janabai Kachru Girhe's *Marankala* (Deathly Pains), Vimal Dadasaheb More's *Teen Dagdachi Chul* (Hearth of Three Stones) and so on highlight opportunity for more emancipatory feminism. It helps to embolden the masses to learn from their struggle and thus gain recognition by first taking pride in oneself.

Feminist movements throughout the world catered to the general problems faced by women at large. But no special emphasis was given to Dalit women as such. Hence, it had become necessary that the Dalits speak for themselves and fight for their own rights. It has helped various Dalit women to come out of their claustrophobic existence and earn dignity for themselves. Bama says about Dalit feminism in an interview:

“All women in the world are second class citizens. For Dalit women, the problem is grave. Their Dalit identity gives them a different set of problems. They experience a total lack of social status; they are not even considered dignified human beings. My stories are based on these aspects of Dalit culture..... The hard labor they have to do all their lives. Other problems are the same for all women. The Dalits particular caste.....more agony and hard labor can be attributed to them. Dalit women have to put up with a triple oppression, based on class, caste, and gender. They die in order to live.” (Bama 116)

Dalits are not only writing about themselves but about India and Indian society and when they do so it happens in the terrain of healing as against the terrain of cure. Previously there was writing about the cure of the problems faced by the untouchables but when the Dalits started writing, it was healing. This brings forth a totally new perspective to the existing issues. Bama's writing about her personal experience and bringing it out into public knowledge is in itself a revolution and it shifts from a paradigm of cure into a paradigm of healing. Women's writing shows what the world looks like from a woman's point of view and a new set of terms, new concepts, new narratives opens up the other terrain, that is, the world as seen from the women's point of view.



Tapan Basu has explicitly mentioned Professor Gopal Guru's opinion from *"Theoretical Brahmin and Empirical Shudra"* that: "This exclusion of Dalit women from the mainstream women's movement is not such a bad thing after all: it has caused them to start building their own praxis, identity, and agency" (Basu 145).

The Dalit writers have felt that wherever we go our caste follows us, even after death it follows us. So in this society, we tend to look at the reality through the prism of high and low. When we see and segregate people by this attitude then we inflict pain on one section of society and this pain of social exclusion that is experienced leads the scars to become wounds when the mammoth task of writing the pain is undertaken. Bama feels that writing is also a form of healing. The first stage of healing is actually when we express this pain even if it is painful. Healing starts when instead of pushing the pain under the carpet, we try to find the reason why this people are pushed aside or marginalized. The second stage is while writing the author realizes that she can come out of it and become militant to oppose all the oppressors who do not recognize the Dalits as a human being. Life is a struggle but there is a difference in their pain. This pain is one of humiliation for being under the power of someone. With the realization of a protest, the author becomes a militant and the process of healing starts. This protest can be in many forms. It can be explosive and violent or it would be non-violent, a breaking of social norms and taboos, a hilarious display of native wit, rustic humour and promises when faced with tricky situations. The songs of protest are in the culture of Dalits, a life giving and affirming culture. Therefore, in spite of this segregation and pain, they still live this culture as this culture gives them life. Instead of breaking down, the Dalits break through this system.

Shantabai Dhanaji Dani in *Ratrandin Amha* (Translated by Sharmila Rege as 'For Us These Nights and Days') asks:

"Who among dalits was the most dalit? Babasaheb used to say that the dalit woman in your homes is the most dalit of all. A dalit woman's husband could impose his male ego on his wife. I am well educated but still a woman born in the mahar caste after all." (Dani 150)

This is not just a representation of a personal problem faced by one but is basically universalizing the global issue of dominance and thus highlighting the brutal atrocities as constantly prolonged by the patriarchal social structure. In this we can find parallels with Black women's writing where the pain surpasses every other emotion experienced. Jocelyn Moody in her essay 'African American Women and

The United States Slave Narratives' states:

"The slave woman's narrative functioned then, as a space to document the African American women's moral, mental, intellectual and psychological strength, their capacity to endure the horrors of slavery as well as to develop and maintain a strong and abiding sense of self-respect and self-determination." (Moody 119)

Life of the Dalit women is one of double oppression, society and family. The fault that she has committed is by dint of her birth. The biggest mistake lies in being born as a woman in a society where people rejoice at the birth of a son and the birth of a daughter is considered to be a burden and ill omen. Being born as a Dalit woman is like the final nail in the coffin. Shantabai Dhanaji Dani in *Ratrandin Amha* (Translated by Sharmila Rege as *For Us-These Nights and Days*) states the incident of her birth. Her father had expected the birth of a son, but the birth of a daughter had caused so much disappointment that all his hopes had become diminished. He kept on saying that all his hopes had become *shant* (quiet) and finally the child was named Shanta, a constant reminder of the woebegone situation that has commenced from the moment of her birth. Om Prakash Valmiki in his novel *Joothan*, talks about the oppressed life that he led as a Dalit. But the difference in the life of a Dalit man from that of a Dalit woman is clearly projected when his birth is celebrated gloriously. His father nicknames him 'Munshiji' portraying his high hopes from his son. Thus, oppression for a Dalit woman begins right from her birth and is ingrained in her own community only.

### **Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke***

Baby Kamble's novel *Jinne Amuche* was translated as *The Prisons We Broke* by Maya Pandit in 2009 aptly sums up the life led by Dalit women when she mentions that, "We who from childhood learn to digest thorns and embers — we were the children of mother earth" (43). These thorns and embers were strewn in their paths not only by the upper caste members of the society but also by their community. Kamble's autobiography brings out the major theme of insecurity and oppression. The Dalit woman in her own family is an object of both domestic and social violence besides caste based violence. The personal and political seems to have become one in tormenting her both physically and psychologically. Thus, leading to their experience of suffering from double alienation. Her dependency on men is primarily due to the patriarchal system. She mentions their pitiable plight: "Such

was the condition of our people. We were just like animals, but without tails. We could be called human only because we had two legs instead of four. Otherwise, there was no difference between us and the animals” (49). We have seen how the Indian society tormented and tortured the people of the lower caste. In Kamble’s autobiography too we will find a vivid description of that oppression. But my focus will be primarily on the hardship and turmoil that the Dalit women had to face in their family and community. The subjugation of one Dalit by another. The use of ‘we’ and ‘prisons’ in the title shows the ubiquitous innumerable prisons that all Dalit women had to endure.

The patriarchal system has always prioritized the birth of a son over a daughter. The position of the eldest son is of utmost importance. Baby Kamble writes, “The eldest son was the pride of the house. He would be offered to the deity as vaghya or potraja. Fathers had a lion’s share in preparing their sons for this role. To offer the son as vaghya or potraja was considered a great honour and prestige for the family. The father very diligently saw to it that his son was properly trained” (Kamble 18-19).

We misapprehend a concept that power can only be commanded by the powerful individuals and institutions in our society. The thirst for power is ingrained in the psyche of every individual and the same is true in case of the Dalits as well. The oppressed class found a way of venting out their oppression by subjugating the weak and the helpless, in this regard the women of the community. The position of the young brides was the most pitiable. Not only were they subjugated by the strict patriarchal rules laid down by society but also by their mother-in-laws. A woman who could have been the defender of the young bride turns into a dictator, thus making her life worse. The author illustrates, “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). The Dalit women experienced a bitter life of domestic violence under the dominance of their husband and in-laws.

Young girls of eight or nine or even younger were married off and subjected to the evils of patriarchy at the domestic level. Kamble describes: “This girl would embark upon a new life that was harsh and arduous. She was a young girl, a child really, still immature. Yet, the poor child had to break all ties of love and go to her in-laws’ house to lead a married life, without even knowing what a husband meant, or what it was to be given away” (Kamble 93). The division of labour within the Dalit homes was gendered in every aspect. As soon as the bride arrives at her in-

laws' home, she would be asked to make two baskets full bhakris. If the young bride would do any mistake in preparing the bhakris, everyone in the neighbourhood would be called in to see the sight, "Attyabai, come and see what is happening here. Didn't you think that I'd brought the daughter of a good woman into my house? Look at the bhakris this slut has prepared. She cannot even make a few bhakris properly. Oh, well, what can one expect of this daughter of a dunce?" (Kamble 94). If the mother-in-law is not satisfied again with her making of bhakris properly, she started abuses on her and her mother, — "what's your aai really? Tell me! Is she a good married woman at all? Or does she know only how to run after the pot-maker donkeys? Didn't she teach you anything? I pamper you... my own sasu was spitfire. A burning coal! Holding a burning coal in one's palm was easier than living with her!" (Kamble 95).

The new bride is not allowed to sleep until she completes the entire house hold duties. She could not even say that she was hungry. All she could do was simply stare at the food which would also be a cause of reprimand from her mother-in-law. Kamble states: "But the poor daughters-in-law just couldn't do anything but sit and watch hungrily without saying a single word. In case a mother-in-law noticed, she would throw a morsel to them saying, 'Eat that, you beggar! You're so shameless, you watch a kid eating...atleast let the food get down his throat properly! Otherwise it will go the wrong way and the poor kid will cough to no end. Have you no shame hussy? Can't you behave like a decent daughter-in-law?" (Kamble 29-30) Back-breaking tasks like grinding the grain would be given to her and the mother-in-law would just sit in order to find fault with her work and hurl abuses at the daughter-in-law's mother.

Women were given a sub-human status. Baby Kamble mentions, "My father had caged my mother like a maina bird while he wasted in charity the wealth that he had earned" (Kamble 5). A person in their community would gain respect only if the women in their family were forbidden to step beyond the threshold of their house. The opinion of the wife in financial matters was not considered substantial and the men did not pay any heed to it even. Baby Kamble also deals with how Dalit women are confined to live within the four walls of the house, "In those days, it was the custom to keep women at home, behind the threshold. The honour enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house"(Kamble 5).

Life became a nightmare when the young daughter-in-law attained puberty. The mother-in-law left no stones unturned in keeping the husband and wife apart. This was done because the mother-in-law was apprehensive of the fact that her son

might get bewitched by his wife and the superior position of authority and control would pass from her hand to that of the daughter-in-law. Thus, she would again be hurled back to her subservient position. This fear in her mind led her to instigate her son and encourage domestic violence. Baby Kamble writes: "In those days, at least one woman in a hundred would have her nose chopped off. You may well ask why. It's because of the *sasu*, who would poison her son's mind. These *sasus* ruined the lives of innocent women forever...They had no food to eat, no proper clothing to cover their bodies; their hair would remain uncombed and tangled, dry from lack of oil. Women led the most miserable existence"( Kamble 98). It was a common sight to find women with broken backs and heads. Baby Kamble also was not spared from her husband's torment: "Once we went to Mumbai to attend a meeting, we travelled in a general compartment that was very crowded and some young men happened to stare at me. My husband immediately suspected me and hit me so hard that my nose started bleeding profusely ....The same evening we returned and he was so angry that he kept hitting me in the train" (Kamble 155).

Unable to bear this tormenting situation further, some brides would rebel. They would try to escape from their daily life of unending arduous tasks and relentless torture. But little did she realise that she had nowhere to go. Lack of education ensured her financial slavery. The moment she reached the paternal home, the men of the family would gather together against her and send her to her in-laws' house where her character would be publicly assassinated. The mother-in-law would incite her son to physically abuse her: "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"(Kamble 58). Baby Kamble mentions the plight of such women: "Once she was brought back to her in-laws, an even worse fate awaiting her. Her in-laws would take a huge square piece of wood — weighing around five kilos — to the carpenter to have stocks made for her. The carpenter would drill a hole in the wood, big enough for her foot to go through. After this, they would put an iron bar through the sides so as to make it impossible for her to pull an iron tub. She would have to drag this heavy burden each time she tried to move...She was not a human being for her in-laws, but just another piece of wood" (Kamble 98-99).

The Dalits would have to show their reverence whenever they would see any upper caste man. If any newly-wed woman would forget to offer her customary salutation to the upper caste man, he would create a *furor* in the entire community. The daughter-in-law and the entire community will be hurled abuses at by the upper caste man. Her error would be projected as a heinous sin. The moment the upper

caste man finishes his abuses and leaves, the in-laws' take the daughter-in-law to task. She is not only humiliated but also physically abused. These abuses are not only limited to her but her poor parents are also not left out of this, although they had nothing to do with the entire situation. Even the neighbours would actively participate in abusing her.

The women did arduous tasks from the morning till night. They would fetch water from the stream, collect firewood and pile them up, bring in grass to sell, sharpen the blade of the axe to keep it ready for the morning's task. Physical labour teemed with hunger would tire them out. But due to unavailability of food they had to go to bed in empty stomach and the same would happen while they would leave for the next day's work early morning. These women would ask for food from each other to satiate the fire in their stomach. Baby Kamble gives a detailed description of the reproductive labour of women in her community: "Mothers who give birth to those who serve mother earth, have to tie up their stomachs just after childbirth. Because in the pregnant woman's hut, there is no grain even to make a simple gruel. After the woman delivers the baby, her stomach becomes empty, and it needs to be layered with soft food. But, that is not what happens! The woman having just delivered the baby with her stomach tied tightly, asks repeatedly for food, lying on torn rags, crying in pain.... There was a popular saying among the women: 'The black cow eats thorns and shrubs.' Our women were like this cow, even in times when they ought to be indulged they would have to eat thorns and shrubs"( Kamble 6).

The surrounding of the Dalit women gave them nothing but subjugation. The *Prisons We Broke* is literally a person's own scrutinized and calculated recording of her life through thorough and methodical introspection and self-analysis.

## Conclusion

Imtiaz Ahmed has brought forth one poem, where Mrs. Bansode had lodged a complaint in the People's court in search of justice, but at last she attacked the inhuman game of oppressors and hence this aptly concludes the discussion:

"This complaint of mine is against the orthodox culture which has imprisoned us in a sealed room, which has given us the charity of life completely boycotted. Where the wind treats us as strangers, where the Monsoons give us only famines where the water plays with us the most inhumane game of mirage. We are rejecting this unclean and poisonous life. And to escape from these cruel curses will you give me a bright and auspicious moon? My

countrymen, to your court I have brought a complaint. Will you give me justice?" (Ahmed 129)

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