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## Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Portrayal of Women's Problem

**Sumeet R. Patil**

Ph.D. Scholar,  
Department of English,  
University of Mumbai,  
Mumbai, (M.S.) India.

*"Women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue."* (Wollstonecraft 1988: 19)

*"In establishing caste status, the purity of women was often more important than the right to Vedic rites and rituals."* (Rege 2006: 20)

Baby Kamble's autobiography, *'The Prisons We Broke'*, portrays that women used to live in that unbearable condition which one couldn't think of it in present time and it is due to the upper caste hegemony. They controlled downtrodden people from thousands of years. Kamble says,

*"Our women offer entire lives to the service of mother earth. But when they themselves become mothers, what do they get? After having given birth to their children, they have to tie up their bellies and lie down helplessly."* (Kamble 2008: 57)

Similarly Mary Wollstonecraft portrays about women and their life from birth as:

*"Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives."* (Wollstonecraft 1988: 19)

Baby Kamble in her autobiography portrays endless toiling of women and then too they did not get anything in return, they only get suppressed, degraded, abused, harassed and tortured by their family members or by society. Some decades ago there was no proper treatment and hygiene after the delivery. Women had to take rest for some weeks after the delivery, but here the condition was worse they had to go to work after one week or so, because if they don't work, their children and her family will not survive more than one week. It is because initially they are

weak due to improper amount of food they consume, and there are some days when they (downtrodden people) had to sleep without food during rainy season. During rainy season there is scarcity of work and so no money and no food. Kamble illustrates her life, her society and their condition as, *“He [Dalits] would get food some times and at other times. He would have to go hungry. A life without food, living space and clothes—it was a story of permanent deprivation and suffering.”* (Kamble 2008: 79)

Women were treated as slaves in their own house. Similarly, Gopal Guru articulates that,

*...a slave in the grip of fear of death finds it impossible to stake a claim.* (Guru 2009: 4)

They were also human beings, but treated worst than animals. They also desired freedom and happiness but they never enjoyed it in their whole life. Correspondingly Wollstonecraft pens down about women and their freedom as,

*...A woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by the fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself.* (Wollstonecraft 1988: 25)

Young girls were married at an early age. There are some women who even don't remember their own marriage; it is because they were hardly nine to ten year old during their marriage. Marriage means lots of work and such as collecting firewood and making arrangements so that in-laws would feel comfortable and totally satisfied during and after the marriage and major work was done by women.

*“Thus the 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. Besides, in those days there were no vehicles. When the cock crowed early in the morning, the sasra<sup>1</sup> would start with his daughter-in-law on foot. It took two to three days to reach his home. Even if the place was close by, they invariably would have to walk for the entire day. When the bride arrived at her in-laws' home, she would be asked to make bhakris<sup>2</sup>. Two*

*baskets full! The child would sit down to make them, but she would not be able to pat balls of dough into proper round shapes...Then the sasu<sup>3</sup> would call all her friends and neighbours and hold an open exhibition of the tiny burnt bhakris.*" (Kamble 2008: 93-94)

Mother in laws harassed their daughter in law. Newly bride had to get up early in the morning to grind wheat. Initially she had to clean the grinding stone and had to grind till late morning. Then she had to fetch water from the river or well for household purpose. Later she had to cook for the family and after all they had finished eating, the leftover would be swallowed by her. After all these work been done, her mother-in-law would scold her for a single mistake she commits and pinch her cheeks and abuse her. New bride's mother-in-law gives example of her mother-in-law that, *"My own sasu was a spitfire. A burning coal! Holding a burning coal in one's palm was easier than living with her!"* (Kamble 2008: 95)

The newlywed girl had to endure lots of problems such as her mother-in-law would mix crushed bangles in the flour while grinding. Then she would show the flour to all the society so that her daughter-in-law's image will be degraded.

Some women had to endure to that extent that her nose would chop off. The reason behind chopping off women's nose is that the relation between husband and wife and husband's mother would poison her son. Women's life was destroyed by her in-laws and her relatives. Husbands used to whip their wives a lot and it is described it as, *"Husbands, flogging their wives as if they were beasts, would do so until the sticks broke with the effort. The heads of these women would break open, their backbones would be crushed, and some would collapse unconscious. But there was nobody to care for them."* (Kamble 2008: 99)

All these things would go to that extent when that poor woman is rejected by her husband's family and later she was not accepted by her own family too. This is the time when her own relatives should accept her, give her some space to decide about her own life, but they don't want their image to be spoiled in the society and that woman's life is spoiled totally. Wollstonecraft utters about men and their supremacy as:

*"Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men."* (Wollstonecraft 1988: 25)

Women are brutally tortured by their in-laws and it is portrayed by Baby Kamble as, *'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 her foot out.'* (Kamble 2008: 99)

Further, Kamble uncovers the patriarchal hegemony and their domination over their wives as, the newlywed man is told by his parents that his wife has an affair with someone, while she goes to fetch water or some other work. Thus he is enraged due to his parents (poisoning his mind) and makes his mind to do anything with his wife and it is clearly portrayed by Baby Kamble in her autobiography as, *Never mind if you have to go to prison for six months! You must chop off your wife's nose and present it to her brother and father. They mustn't have any respect to sit with the members of the panch<sup>4</sup>. This speech would go to the son's head. His ego would inflate like a balloon. 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.* (Kamble 2008: 100-101)

Women are not only suppressed in public and private life but also rejected from the society. Their existence is also desolated. Gopal Guru pens down about untouchables, their existence and rejection from society as,

*"For reducing a person to a thing, the physical existence of that person becomes a precondition. It cannot be an imagined reduction. Rejection especially achieved by assigning a repulsive meaning to the human body assumes a much more pernicious dimension. Unlike reduction it does not require the existence of a person as the precondition of its definition. The very idea of untouchables in India creates among the upper caste a deep sense of repulsion. In its extremity it cancels out or erases the human being from memory."* (Guru 2009: 210)

To conclude, Mary Wollstonecraft pens down about women, their condition and problems as:

“In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in the favour of woman.” (Wollstonecraft 1988: 8)

**Notes:**

1) *Sasra*=Father-in-law  
made up of Jowar.

2) *Bhakris*=Round bread

3) *Sasu*=Mother-in-law  
Referee.

4) *Panch*= Jurymen, Panel,

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