

CHAPTER – IV

DALIT WOMEN AND VOICES OF PROTEST

The emergence and recognition of Dalit women's voices of protest are of profound importance in contemporary Indian society and literature. The term 'Dalit' refers to the lowest caste in the Hindu caste system, traditionally subjected to societal discrimination, marginalization, and oppressive practices. The situation is considerably more adverse for Dalit women, who suffer a double disadvantage, being oppressed due to their caste and gender. However, in recent years, Dalit women have been asserting themselves, and their voices of protest have begun to resonate louder than ever before.

In their autobiographies, Dalit women have used the written word to challenge and confront the oppressive socio-political structures that traditionally suppressed them. Their narratives voice their experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and violence in a caste-based, patriarchal society. They represent a collective outcry against these injustices, thereby contributing to their identity formation and marking their resistance against the hegemonic powers. These voices of protest are crucial as they provide firsthand accounts of the Dalit experience, presenting an unfiltered, poignant, and often harsh depiction of their reality. They offer an alternative, subaltern perspective that significantly adds to the diversity and depth of Indian literature.

Moreover, the emergence of these voices has critical social implications as well. They serve as catalysts for social change by raising awareness about the plight of Dalit women, demanding equality and justice, and prompting dialogue on caste and gender issues.

Bama's *Karukku*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Viramma's *Viramma: Life of a Dalit* are prime examples of autobiographical works encapsulating Dalit women's protests. These works are not just literary expressions but are instrumental in shaping the discourse around Dalit women's rights and social positioning. These autobiographical narratives play a crucial role in deconstructing the stereotypical representation of Dalit women as passive victims. Instead, they are portrayed as individuals who, despite their oppressive circumstances, resist, fight back, and challenge societal norms. This shift in narrative from victimhood

to resistance signifies their resilience and determination to redefine their identities in a caste-ridden society.

Bama, in *Karukku*, traces her evolution from being a silent observer of societal wrongs to an assertive individual challenging these injustices. Her autobiography stands out for its candid expression of anger and resentment against the caste and religious institutions that exploit the marginalized. Bama's resistance takes the form of self-assertion, challenging the status quo and reclaiming her identity as a Dalit woman.

Similarly, Urmila Pawar, in *The Weave of My Life*, not only highlights her experiences as a Dalit woman but also critiques the upper-caste dominance, patriarchy, and social stratification. Pawar's narrative indicates that resistance can also come from challenging the traditional gender roles and societal norms prescribed for Dalit women.

The Prisons We Broke by Baby Kamble is another powerful autobiography that amplifies the voices of Dalit women. Kamble does not shy away from narrating Dalit women's brutal realities, portraying them as a community capable of resisting and challenging the system. Her candid depiction of the atrocities inflicted on Dalit women evokes empathy. It stirs up a sense of outrage, prompting readers to reflect on the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination.

In the realm of Dalit autobiography, Viramma's story stands out as a particularly poignant account of life at the intersections of caste, gender, and poverty. *Viramma: Life of a Dalit* provides a visceral portrait of the lived experience of a Dalit woman, etched against the backdrop of rural Tamil Nadu. Through her narrative, Viramma joins the ranks of Dalit autobiographers who refuse to be silenced, using their life stories as a form of protest and an assertion of identity. Her autobiography is not only a personal history but a testimony to the resilience and resistance of Dalit women who have been historically marginalized and voiceless. Viramma's personal anecdotes become a microcosm of the collective pain and perseverance of the Dalit community, as she navigates through the complexities of caste oppression and social exclusion. "Her life narrative, as captured in her autobiography, chronicles her journey through the stratified social order of India, underscoring the intersectionality of her identity as a Dalit woman." (Viramma102)

Viramma's narrative provides a window into the daily realities of caste oppression and the struggle for survival in a society structured by rigid hierarchical

norms. Her autobiography is a critical piece of Dalit literature, emblematic of a broader literary movement that seeks to reclaim the narratives of the oppressed. As with many autobiographies from marginalized communities, her story transcends personal history to serve as a collective voice against social injustice. Through her recollections, we gain insight into the complex interplay between social norms and personal agency within the Dalit community. Viramma's description is not only the story of virama but also the story of resilience and resistance of all Dalit women about their age-old discrimination they face.

Such autobiographical works are instrumental in providing a platform for those who have been historically denied a voice. They offer an unfiltered glimpse into the systemic issues that Dalit women face, such as untouchability, poverty, and gender-based discrimination. Additionally, they serve an educational purpose, enlightening readers on the nuanced challenges confronted by Dalit women in their daily lives and in their efforts to break free from the shackles of caste. Hence, Viramma's autobiography is not a personal document; it is the historical evolution of a collective call for social status, equal rights, and justice.

In *Viramma: Life of a Dalit*, the personal narrative of Viramma serves as a profound political statement, weaving the individual struggles with the collective voice of the Dalit community, particularly its women. As Viramma shares her life story, the use of 'I' transcends mere personal anecdote and becomes a representation of a collective identity that has been historically marginalized and silenced. This assertive 'I' is not only a declaration of self but also an assertion of the political existence of all those who share her plight. The narrative becomes a space where the personal and the political are inextricably linked, as each memory and experience narrated by Viramma is laden with the weight of political subtext. Her voice, therefore, becomes a vessel carrying the untold stories of many, bringing to the forefront the nuanced realities of living as a Dalit woman in India.

Viramma's autobiographical work, eloquently translated by Will Hobson, is particularly significant in this regard as it challenges the pervasive narrative structures that have traditionally excluded or misrepresented Dalit voices. By asserting her individual story, Viramma does not just recount her life but actively contests the erasure of Dalit experiences from the cultural and social consciousness. She makes it clear that

her story, while singular, is not unique but rather part of a larger tapestry of Dalit life – one that is rich with stories of resilience and resistance. It can be said that that the ‘I’ in the Dalit women’s life narratives, is a political one collectively showing the united voice of the Dalits and especially of all Dalit women against the suppression of the society. In addition, Viramma's narrative strategy, traditional power dynamics inherent in storytelling. Where once Dalit stories were told through other lenses, often distorted through the eyes of the upper castes, here Viramma takes control of her own story.

In *Viramma: Life of a Dalit*, the tapestry of silent and vocal protests is richly depicted, providing a powerful commentary on the forms of resistance employed by Dalit women. Viramma’s narrative elucidates the nuanced ways in which silent protests can be as potent as their vocal counterparts. Her life story unfolds in a society that seeks to stifle her voice, yet her mere act of living and recounting her story becomes a form of silent protest, a defiance of the socio-cultural norms that have long oppressed her and her people.

"Silence in our world is not empty; it is a language of its own," Viramma narrates, suggesting the profundity of unspoken resistance (117). This quote highlights how in the absence of voice, the silence of Dalit women carries its own subversive power, communicating dissent through non-verbal means – a look, a pause, a refusal to acquiesce. It is a silent assertion of dignity in the face of dehumanization. Through storytelling, Viramma takes control of her story and every word becomes a loud statement against the silence imposed by society. Her autobiography is not just a story of personal history, but a symbolic voice of protest representing the silenced many. Her story reflects how Dalit women navigate the interplay of silent and loud protest, using both to assert their presence and challenge the oppressive structures of caste. Every day is a war, every morning carries a new problem to them as she says encapsulating the essence of these daily acts of resistance. Here, Viramma is not referring to grand gestures of defiance but to the small, everyday acts that challenge the status quo.

She notes, for example, "Even cooking can be an act of resistance. When I prepare a dish that is forbidden to us, I affirm our right to pleasure and taste," (108). This statement illustrates how Viramma locates resistance in the realm of the ordinary and the domestic, turning the act of cooking into a quiet refusal to accept the boundaries drawn by an oppressive caste hierarchy.

Furthermore, the narrative also reveals how the mere act of remembering and recounting past experiences serves as a form of resistance. "By remembering out loud, I refuse to let our history be forgotten or rewritten," Viramma asserts(122) In doing so, she challenges the dominant historical narrative that often erases the sufferings and struggles of the Dalit community. Her memories, and the act of sharing them, are thus an act of defiance against the collective amnesia that society imposes regarding the atrocities faced by Dalits. These subtle acts of resistance woven into everyday life give Viramma a powerful charge to the autobiography. Viramma's story honors these daily acts of resistance and ensures that they are recognized as part of the struggle against the caste system and the struggle for greater human dignity.

An instance of this vocal defiance is evident when Viramma recounts instances of caste-based discrimination, "I shouted at them, 'Why do you treat us like we are not human? Our blood is the same color as yours!'" (131). Here, Viramma is not just challenging an individual act of discrimination; she is calling into question the very foundations of the caste system that devalues the lives and humanity of Dalit people. She also articulates a deep understanding of the social structures that maintain caste oppression, and she does not hesitate to call out the hypocrisy she observes. "They preach purity but act with such cruelty. Their godliness is a mask for their sin of discrimination," she asserts, laying bare the moral contradictions inherent in the practices of caste segregation(134). In her narrative, the act of speaking out becomes a form of resistance, as powerful as any physical act of defiance.

These direct challenges go beyond words as Viramma and her community engage in collective acts of resistance that visibly confront injustice. For example, Viramma describes participation in demonstrations and sit-ins, showing that Dalit resistance can move from the margins to the center of social activism. and she says that they stood together, Dalit men and women, in front of a temple that had barred them, and their being alone was a challenge to centuries of marginalization, and she speaks that their physical presence at a place traditionally forbidden to Dalits is a powerful form of protest, a visible defense of equality. Through these stories, Viramma captures not only the spirit of resistance characteristic of Dalit communities, but also the transitions from subtle everyday forms of defiance to open challenges against caste discrimination. Viramma's voice in Hobson's translation sounds like a clarion call for

justice, a reminder that the struggle against caste continues, demanding both whispered defiance and loud protests for the creation of a new world.

Virammanarrates with evocative clarity the role of folk songs, tales, and festivals in sustaining the spirit of her community: "Our songs are not just melodies, they are our histories and our hopes, our declarations that we too have a voice," she shares in great essence (157). Through these cultural expressions, Dalits create an alternate space where their narratives can flourish unhampered by the dominant caste's script. She further illustrates the resistance embodied in the reclamation and adaptation of cultural symbols that were historically used to oppress Dalits. "We have taken the symbols they used to brand us and made them our own," Viramma declares, explaining how cultural symbols are reinterpreted to celebrate Dalit identity rather than signify their marginalization." (165).

In the realm of religion, Viramma describes the significant act of rejecting the orthodox forms that exclude and degrade Dalits, and instead embracing a form of spirituality that affirms their worth and humanity. "We worship a god that does not discriminate, a god that is ours," she states, highlighting how religious practice itself can be a powerful form of cultural resistance." (172)

Each cultural act of defiance is laden with the weight of history and the determination to carve out a space where Dalit culture and identity can be expressed freely and proudly. Viramma's narrative brings to the fore the resilience and creativity with which Dalit communities combat the socio-cultural hierarchies that seek to erase their existence.

Moreover, Viramma's narrative accords a significant space to the indomitable spirit of Dalit women, who often lead these protests. She narrates, "Our women, undeterred by the manifold oppressions they face, rise as the vanguard of our struggles," underscoring the pivotal role women play in the architecture of Dalit resistance movements(187). It is through these communal acts of protest and resistance that the Dalit community, as Viramma eloquently puts it, "weaves a tapestry of solidarity," transforming individual experiences of suffering into a shared fabric of defiance and hope (195).

In these shared acts of rebellion against the oppressive structures of caste, Viramma's autobiography transcends the personal, crafting a collective narrative of

struggle and resistance. It reflects on the unity of purpose that galvanizes the community, enabling them to stand together in the face of atrocities. Her narrative, thus, is not just a solitary voice but a testament to the collective outcry against caste oppression, a chronicle of the undying spirit of the Dalit community's quest for equality and justice.

Her experiences, etched in the pages of her life story, function as a microcosm of the Dalit plight and as such, they have become a beacon for social and political movements across the nation. Viramma articulates the visceral impact of caste discrimination with such poignancy that it not only stirs empathy but also catalyzes action. "Our stories," she asserts, "are more than just recollections, they are the sparks that ignite the flames of change" (210).

Furthermore, Viramma's recounting of the varied forms of resistance—ranging from silent subversion to overt challenges against the caste hierarchy—provides a spectrum of strategies for the Dalit movement. "In our silence and our song, in our mourning and our mirth, we find the language of protest," she remarks, illustrating how resistance is woven into the very fabric of daily life (225).

The impact of Viramma's experiences on broader Dalit movements is indisputable. Her autobiography has not only chronicled the story of a life marked by struggle but has also functioned as an instrument of empowerment for a marginalized community. Her life, as documented and translated, has amplified the voice of resistance, encouraged solidarity, and offered a blueprint for survival and protest that continues to inspire Dalit movements across the subcontinent and beyond. Her life story, as captured in the text, highlights the multifaceted nature of protest in the lives of Dalit women. Her experiences, as narrated, function as a mirror reflecting the relentless spirit of a community that, despite facing generations of oppression, continues to find ways to challenge and subvert the caste hierarchy. The autobiography is a profound reminder of the power of voice, the importance of solidarity, and the indomitable desire for justice that defines the Dalit movement.

These voices of protest, however, are not limited to resistance against caste and gender oppression. They also articulate their aspirations for equality, dignity, and a better life. The authors' transformative journeys, marked by their struggle for self-assertion and identity, symbolize their determination to break free from the chains of

caste-based patriarchy. Their narratives, in essence, celebrate their indomitable spirit, their will to survive, and their audacity to dream of a society that treats them as equals. The autobiographies of Dalit women are more than just personal accounts; they are profound commentaries on the socio-political milieu of the times they lived in. They are narratives of resistance and resilience, offering a stark critique of the caste, class, and gender hierarchies embedded in society.

Bama's seminal work, *Karukku*, has played a pivotal role in amplifying the voices of Dalit women, highlighting their experiences of marginalization and their struggle for dignity and self-assertion. Her poignant portrayal of life as a Dalit woman in a caste-based society provides invaluable insights into their lived realities. Her narrative affirms the indomitable spirit of Dalit women who continue to challenge and resist the oppressive structures that seek to silence them. Her journey towards self-realization as a Dalit woman is an intensely poignant narrative that forms the backbone of her autobiographical work, *Karukku*. In this narrative, Bama constructs a powerful self-image where she is not just a woman but a Dalit woman. The societal structures regulating the lives of the Dalit community and the unique pressures Dalit women face are intricately interwoven into her tale of awakening. "There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated; and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect, and with love towards all humankind" (109). This quote is a testament to Bama's desire to break free from societal shackles and rebuild her identity and that of her community. She no longer passively accepts the existing norms but challenges them. She boldly dissects societal prejudices, laying bare the hypocrisy and oppression at the heart of the caste system.

Bama's self-realization extends beyond individual enlightenment. It is rooted in the collective struggle of Dalit women who share their experiences. She regards her awakening as a shared experience, seeking to inspire others to confront and resist oppressive societal norms. Through *Karukku*, Bama demonstrates the double burden of caste and gender but also champions resistance. She paints a vivid picture of the potential for Dalit women to rise above their circumstances, reclaim their dignity, and reaffirm their humanity. Within the intricate narrative of her journey, Bama further articulates her awakening by challenging the unquestioned acceptance of caste hierarchies and advocating for life beyond caste-dictated occupations. She encapsulates

this with the words: “But in those days we did not know anything; we knew only about working for our masters, from morning to night” (30). This stark self-acknowledgment signifies Bama's awakening and her rebellion against the confines of caste.

Bama's self-realization is also profoundly influenced by her experience as a woman within the Dalit community. The gendered aspect of her identity further compounds her experiences of oppression, making her awakening and rebellion even more significant. She notes, “The hardest blows of the family, society, and the world outside fell on the women. The women were turned into slaves and drudges” (40). This recognition highlights Bama's dual struggle against caste and gender-based subjugation. What is important in Bama's narrative is not just the act of resistance but the journey of coming to that resistance –self-realization. It is not simply the story of one woman but symbolizes the struggle and resistance of many Dalit women whose voices have been traditionally silenced or marginalized.

In her continued exploration of self-realization, Bama does not hesitate to illuminate the struggles that come with such an awakening. This journey is fraught with realizations that can be as problematic as empowering. She writes, “That was when I started to look at Christian belief, the Bible, and the conduct of the nuns and priests in a critical light. In particular, I thought about the religion into which I was born and the religion I had joined” (60).

This introspection about religious structures, another layer of her Dalit identity, reveals the complex intertwining of caste, religion, and gender and their collective role in perpetuating oppression. This also sheds light on the instrumental role of religion in her journey of self-realization and resistance. Her self-realization is further enriched by her grappling with the realization of the immense burden of cultural and societal expectations faced by Dalit women and the constant struggle to survive amidst such pressures. She notes, “I began to ponder why we had become like this, why this had happened only to us and not to other people” (85). This introspective questioning is pivotal in her journey toward understanding her position in the larger social structure and in stoking the fire of resistance.

Throughout *Karukku*, Bama continually reaffirms her awakened self, which acknowledges the harsh realities of her existence but also embraces the possibilities of resistance and transformation. Her journey is a testament to the fortitude of Dalit

women and their potential to challenge and reshape oppressive societal norms. As her journey of self-realization unfolds, she begins to position herself not only as an observer but also as an active participant and change agent in her community. This transformation is borne out of her increasing consciousness of the oppressive structures historically defining her existence. "Only if we question will we understand. Only if we understand will we see. I think we must fight for change, not accommodate ourselves to what is happening" (Bama95). These powerful words signify Bama's evolving self, which is no longer content to understand the mechanisms of her oppression but is moved to resist and strive for change actively. This emergent consciousness is also reflected in her increasing critical engagement with various elements of her identity. She painstakingly examines the religious, caste, and gendered structures that have previously constrained her. However, she also underlines the crucial need for Dalit women to reclaim their narratives, which have been historically appropriated and silenced. She insists upon the enlightened soul of all Dalits so that they cannot be subjugated more in future. This proclamation underscores her commitment to fostering empowerment and agency among Dalit women.

As Bama's self-realization evolves, it becomes increasingly clear that her awakening narrative is intertwined with her developing understanding of her identity as a Dalit woman. Her growing awareness of her oppressed status and her determined resistance are symbolic of her desire for a more equitable future for herself and her community. She was conscious of how caste, gender, and class hierarchies intersected to shape the realities of Dalit women, leading to multifaceted oppression that was deeply ingrained in the system of the society. She elaborated, "Although we are human, we are denied even the basic human rights, respect, and freedom" (42).

These instances of Bama's narrative illustrate her insightful understanding of the intersectional nature of Dalit women's oppression. This realization fuels her resistance and shapes her path of self-discovery and assertion. In *Karukku*, Bama demonstrates a keen understanding of the systemic nature of oppression faced by Dalit women and argues that any meaningful resistance and liberation must necessarily confront and dismantle these intersecting systems of domination. She asserts, "We Dalit women are exploited three times over by the high-caste Avarna, men from our own community, and the rich. We must remember that we are not insignificant or powerless" (66).

Bama's journey of self-realization is punctuated by increasing awareness of the various forms of discrimination and subjugation that Dalit women are subjected to. This includes not just caste-based discrimination but also the gender and class-based subordination embedded within their own communities. In articulating these experiences, Bama captures the unique struggle of Dalit women at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. She contends, "Despite their poverty and their lack of education, Dalit women have rare courage. We do not know what it is to fear. We are not afraid of anyone. But our people are just a little afraid of us" (74). This statement highlights the resilience and spirit of Dalit women who, despite their marginalization, are not defined by their oppression but rise against it. This courage and strength underscores Bama's journey of self-realization and her struggle for liberation.

As Bama navigates her complex identity, she continually challenges the intersecting systems of domination that structure her reality. Her journey of self-realization thus underscores the need to understand and address the multi-layered forms of oppression faced by Dalit women.

Bama's focus on the diversity of oppression faced by Dalit women is confined to societal structures and encompasses the intercommunal dynamics that further aggravate their subjugation. The manifold forms of deprivation faced by Dalit women and their ceaseless struggle for survival is always a question to the Dalits. Her narrative elucidates the urgent need to challenge the intersecting systems of caste, gender, and class oppression that have perpetuated these conditions. Yet, despite these hardships, Bama emphasizes the extraordinary resilience of Dalit women, their indomitable spirit, and their capacity to resist and endure. She believes that this is a crucial factor in their struggle for liberation and dignity. She ardently states, "Our people have always been crushed, pushed down. Now, they must rise, and they must come forward. We must make our voices heard; we must insist on our rights. We must assert ourselves and demand that we should be treated as human beings" (115).

The role of protest voices in highlighting violations of human rights is significant. Protests serve as a potent tool for marginalized communities like the Dalits to voice their experiences, struggles, and demands for justice. By raising their collective voice in protest, they highlight the often overlooked or normalized human rights violations occurring within their communities. The 'voice' of protest is not just a literal

outcry but often takes on multiple forms. It can be found in the writings and autobiographies of Dalit women like Bama, Urmila Pawar, and Baby Kamble, who voice the brutalities and injustices they and their communities face. Their accounts serve as testimonials, educating the world about the systemic oppression they experience. These protest voices are significant in several ways. They challenge the status quo, create awareness, foster solidarity, and push for change. Furthermore, they play a critical role in shaping policies, legislation, and social attitudes, thus contributing to the broader struggle for human rights and social justice.

However, it's crucial to mention that the voices of protest are not merely about showcasing their plight. They are a testament to their resilience, spirit, and unyielding desire for equality and dignity. They represent a fight against victimhood and a call for transformation, as captured in Bama's words: "There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated; and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect, and with love towards all humankind" (109).

Urmila Pawar's perspective on life and society, as reflected in her autobiography *The Weave of My Life*, is significantly influenced by her dual identity as a Dalit woman. The intersection of caste and gender in her life presents her with unique experiences of marginalization, resistance, and empowerment, which shape her worldview. Born into the Mahar community, a Dalit caste in Maharashtra, India, Pawar's early experiences are marred by the cruel realities of the caste system. She narrates her family's struggles with poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion, offering readers a stark picture of the everyday humiliations and hardships faced by Dalits. However, her analysis of her life doesn't stop at her caste identity. She is acutely aware of the double burden she carries as a Dalit woman, which is reflected in her writings. She discusses the specific forms of violence and subjugation Dalit women face at the intersection of caste and gender oppression. Through her work, she highlights the unique experiences of Dalit women, arguing that their struggles cannot be fully understood without considering both their caste and gender identities.

Pawar's narrative in *The Weave of My Life* illustrates the Mahar community's transition. She notes, "It captures effectively the transition of the Mahar community rooted geographically in the agrarian and rural areas of the Konkan region, into a people

relocated in urbanized spaces like Mumbai, with a more 'modern' trend" (17). This transformation is not merely geographical but also social, economic, and political, tied in with complex issues of caste, patriarchy, class, and gender. Yet, Pawar's worldview is not confined to her experiences of marginalization. She also finds solace and strength in her Buddhist faith, presenting her with a vision of a society transcending caste identities. This belief in a future free from caste discrimination shapes her outlook and informs her struggle for social justice. Her worldview, however, extends beyond her experiences of oppression. She finds solace and strength in her Buddhist faith, which offers a vision of a society transcending caste identities. This belief in a caste-free future shapes her outlook, fueling her struggle for social justice. In essence, Pawar's worldview, as articulated in her autobiography, embodies her experiences as a Dalit woman, her battles against caste and gender oppression, her aspirations for a more equitable society, and her faith in the transformative power of collective action and solidarity.

Urmila Pawar's narrative is deeply embedded within the intricate realities of her caste and gender. Her narrative reflects the complexities of negotiating identity within the intersections of caste, class, gender, and modernity. Her book is the voice of protest that underscores the urgent need for a societal shift towards a more inclusive 'human' identity inspired by Buddhist philosophy. She experiences multifaceted identity as a Dalit woman navigating through the shifting landscapes of society. She brings the complex realities of transitioning from a rural Mahar community to an urbanized context in Mumbai. In portraying this transition, she does not hesitate to address the persisting exploitative and hegemonic ideologies. Pawar writes, "The journey takes us towards a possibility of a future where separate caste identities are morphed into a larger 'human' identity which probably comes from Buddhist philosophical perspective" (Pawar 17). Through this narrative, she reinforces the necessity for transcending narrow caste identities, reflecting a yearning for a more humane, inclusive society.

Secondly, her narrative is also a testament to her understanding and critique of gender dynamics within her community. In her efforts to challenge the deeply embedded patriarchal norms, she employs her autobiographical narrative as a form of resistance. Pawar profoundly notes, "It is the protest and solace in other religion is the result" (Pawar 18). Here, Pawar highlights religion as a form of solace and a channel for

protest against oppressive caste and gender systems. Surely, she may refer here the shifting to the Buddhism that equally treats all mankind because she emphasizes the intense need for a form of protest that challenges these old norms and seeks refuge in alternate belief systems. Here, Pawar illustrates that religion can provide comfort and a channel to voice dissent against oppressive practices.

Beyond examining the oppressive structures of caste and patriarchy, Pawar also shines a light on the lived experiences of Dalit women. She uncovers the complexities of being a woman in the Mahar community, traversing the paths of modernity and tradition, development, and exploitation. As Pawar explains, "This journey demonstrates how the lineages of suffering in the past branch out in myriad different ways in the present as a result of the logic of 'development, modernity and progress'" (19). This reflection unravels the paradoxes that Dalit women navigate, drawing attention to the intersections of caste, class, gender, and modernity. It encapsulates Pawar's critical view of how societal progress has unfolded for the Dalit community, particularly Dalit women. Through her eyes, the audience gains a comprehensive understanding of the cyclical nature of oppression. Instead of alleviating their suffering, the supposed trajectory of progress and modernity has merely led to its manifestation in new forms.

Moreover, Pawar critically engages with the ideologies of development and modernity in her narrative. She says that the journey of the Dalits from the Dalit state to the progress is itself is the demonstration of hardship and when it comes to the Dalit women, it becomes a nightmare but still, they have the courage to protest against the dogmatic mores of the so-called society. She reveals the irony of development, highlighting how it often exacerbates the socio-economic disparities in society, particularly among marginalized communities. Her protest is also the collective protest on behalf of all Dalits and especially for the Dalit women. She believes that only modern ideologies can change the Dalit identity and for that, the upliftment in the side of education is more important. She never has trust on the so-called modern progressive rules that are established for the progress of Dalits. Her insight draws attention to the fact that modernization, instead of eradicating oppression, often reinforces and reconfigures existing social hierarchies and injustices.

However, amidst this grim reality, Pawar's narrative also carries a sense of hope and resistance. She advocates for the emergence of a larger human identity beyond the confines of caste and gender. She underlines the 'larger human identity' that resonates with the principles of equality and inclusivity that Buddhism espouses, offering a possible path toward the transformation of society.

Yet, the autobiographer poignantly articulates in *The Weave of MyLife*, relocating to cities like Mumbai doesn't simply erase the shadows of the past. The weight of caste and traditional expectations often travel with them, even amidst skyscrapers and modern cityscapes. In her work, Pawar juxtaposes her caste identity with her modern sensibilities, providing insights into the internal conflict experienced by many in her community. The duality, the tension between tradition and modernity, emerges as a recurrent theme. This transition not only involves an adjustment to the new urban settings but also demands a reevaluation of one's self-perception and societal role. The promise of development, modernity, and progress in the post-Nehruvian era came with its own set of challenges. While urban centers offered opportunities, they also introduced complexities related to caste, class, and gender. For the Mahar community, the city lights sometimes shone on the stark disparities and continuing inequalities. The structures of caste and patriarchy, though transformed in an urban milieu, continued to exert influence, interplaying with the class struggles typical of metropolitan centers.

Urbanization and modernization, with all their advantages, also brought forth the intricacies of navigating societal norms in the rapidly changing landscapes of cities. The Mahar community, in its quest for better prospects, found itself negotiating these multi-dimensional challenges. This journey, while filled with hopes and aspirations, was also punctuated with moments of introspection and the persistent question of identity in the evolving urban tapestry.

The evolution of the Mahar community's experiences and identities in the urban setting underscores the broader narrative of India's tryst with urbanization. The myriad opportunities that cities extend also come accompanied by novel challenges, especially for communities that have historically been marginalized. Drawing from Urmila Pawar's reflections, "Relocating to cities like Mumbai might promise new beginnings, but the complexities of caste, patriarchal structures, and class distinctions find their way into the heart of these urban spaces" (xvii). This observation reinforces

the idea that even as geography changes, deep-rooted societal constructs don't necessarily dissipate; they often adapt and manifest in newer forms.

Moreover, the dualities of tradition and modernity become even more pronounced in an urban setting. As Pawar states, "Being in the city, one might be surrounded by the symbols of modernity, yet the echoes of tradition and past lineage reverberate in the subconscious, affecting choices, responses, and interactions" (xvii). This assertion speaks volumes about the internal tug-of-war between the inherited legacies of the past and the aspirations of modern urban life. The metamorphosis of urban spaces in the post-Nehruvian era further complicated this narrative. As infrastructure developed and cities expanded, the socioeconomic divides deepened. "The high-rises of Mumbai stand tall, but in their shadows lie the stories of communities like the Mahar, navigating the intricacies of urban life, balancing their past identities with new roles, and constantly striving for a space of respect and dignity amidst the urban chaos" (55).

Amid the bustling streets, towering skyscrapers, and ever-evolving cityscapes of urban centers like Mumbai, communities such as the Mahar find themselves grappling with the challenges and opportunities of modernity. Urbanization, while holding the promise of economic opportunities, also presents a matrix of sociocultural negotiations.

For instance, urban spaces often become crucibles of identity formation. The traditionally marginalized Mahar community, when juxtaposed against the backdrop of the urban milieu, encounters both emancipation and entrapment. Emancipation, because the anonymity of city life can sometimes provide a buffer against overt caste-based discrimination. Entrapment, because the cities layered socio-economic hierarchies might mirror older caste-based segregations in new forms. As Pawar notes in her work, "Urban spaces, while they beckon with a promise of freedom, also weave intricate webs of identities. For the Mahar community, Mumbai isn't just a city of dreams, but also a labyrinth where old prejudices wear new masks" (54). This astute observation highlights the nuanced experiences of communities transitioning from rural to urban environments.

Furthermore, the urban experience isn't monolithic. Younger generations of the Mahar community, born and brought up in cities, might have a different perspective compared to their elders. For them, the urban space is native. Their battles revolve

around contemporary issues of class, employment, and housing, even while the shadows of caste linger. Yet, they are also the torchbearers of change, often challenging and reshaping the narratives of caste and identity. The author poignantly comments that the youngsters of her community is at the junction of two shades, one is the tradition and other is the modernity. It is only their infused knowledge that would shape the future of the Dalits.,

The complex interplay of urbanization and caste identity continues to be a defining aspect of the Mahar community's experience in metropolitan hubs like Mumbai. Beyond the physical relocation, there's an intricate tapestry of cultural, socio-economic, and historical threads that intertwine, challenging and shaping their urban narratives. A particularly striking observation by Pawar delves into this dual existence. "Amidst the urban chaos, there's a rhythm that resonates with the beats of our ancestral drums. We are, in essence, inhabitants of two worlds, one foot in the traditions of our past and another stepping forward into modernity" (178). This duality, captured eloquently by Pawar, forms the heart of the Mahar community's urban journey.

Additionally, the city's promise of anonymity, though liberating, can sometimes be a double-edged sword. As Pawar reflects, "The city might allow us to hide our caste identity in the crowd, but in the quiet moments, in the shadows of high-rises, the question of 'Who am I?' persists, echoing the eternal quest for identity" (191). Here, Pawar touches upon the internal struggles and identity crises that are often an inevitable aspect of urban migration for marginalized communities.

Yet, as with any journey, there are also tales of hope, of bonds forged in adversity, and of communities coming together. "The city, with all its challenges, also binds us together, weaving a shared tapestry of dreams, aspirations, and shared histories. In its lanes and bylanes, stories of our struggles and triumphs merge, creating a collective narrative" (20). Such reflections indicate that despite the struggles, there's a sense of community and belonging that evolves in these urban landscapes.

Urban narratives, especially those surrounding communities with deep-rooted histories like the Mahar, are complex and multilayered. The intersectionality of caste, tradition, and fast-paced urban life results in experiences that are both unique and universal.

Moreover, the changing dynamics of family structures and roles within the Mahar community in an urban context are worthy of exploration. Pawar observes, "City life, while presenting new opportunities, also unravels traditional family ties. It is in this urban setting that the Mahar women often find their voices, challenging age-old norms and carving new spaces for themselves" (69). This highlights the transformative potential of urban life, especially for Dalit women, offering avenues of empowerment and self-expression.

Nevertheless, cities are not devoid of challenges. The harsh realities of economic disparities, competition, and the ever-looming shadow of caste discrimination remain. This introspection by Pawar serves as a reminder that while geography may change, the battle against deep-seated biases continues. Yet, amidst the challenges, there are moments of triumph, of community, and of forging a shared destiny. The Mahar community's immersion into urban settings further illustrates the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the environment. As they tread on city pavements, there's a palpable interplay of the personal journey with the broader socio-political milieu of the city. Delving into it, Pawar realizes that every brick, every corner of the city contains a mirror of our experiences. Although we may have left our ancestral homes, the echoes of our history resonate in the stormy signs of urban life. The connection between the past and present urban existence of the Mahar community is a constant thread that runs through Pawar's story. The urban landscape with its modernity and possibilities also brings to the surface the nuances of assimilation and resistance. Pawar points out that for every Mahar who embraces the city and its vibrancy, there is another who struggles with quiet alienation amid the urban sprawl. It emphasizes the dichotomy of urban life, offering both inclusion and isolation. Economic implications of urbanization also take center stage. "The allure of the city, its promise of jobs and prosperity, often juxtaposes with the harsh realities of urban poverty and inequality. The Mahar community, in their quest for a better life, often find themselves at this crossroads, navigating the challenges of economic survival in a competitive urban setting" (22).

The cultural exchange in the urban environment shapes Mahar identity even more. As the city simmers with diverse cultures, the Mahars also share in this rich tapestry and add their own traditions, stories and resilience. It is a dance of identities, where the old and the new merge, creating a dynamic urban culture. As the Mahar

community navigates urban space, they undergo a myriad of experiences, each unique but deeply rooted in shared history and identity. Pawar's story captures these moments with sharp reflections. In the sprawling urban fabric, each of them searches for that familiar rhythm, the primal melody, while the city and its cacophony try to suppress it.

This synthesized reflection speaks to the Mahar community's quest for familiarity and belonging in the midst of the overwhelming changes the city brings. The city, with its promise of a new beginning, also evokes a sense of nostalgia and longing for the traditions left behind. For them, the city, for all its opportunities is a symbol of a series of struggles, especially for marginalized communities seeking better futures. Yet, amidst the trials, there's also hope. "In the heart of the city, amidst its bustling streets, we, the Mahar community, find our voice, our strength, and our place. We weave our narratives, stitch by stitch, into the very fabric of the city, making it as much ours as we are its" (30).

Pawar also recollects the manner in which the conventional patriarchal structure poses a hindrance to her enrollment in the M.A. program. The husband, Harishchandra, assumes the role of a conventional spouse and expresses vehement opposition. According to his perspective, it is suggested that Pawar should allocate additional time towards domestic responsibilities, similar to other women within the community. The woman should prioritize the promotion of children's well-being, their educational development, and the management of household responsibilities in accordance with traditional gender roles. He refused her request and advised her against pursuing a Master's degree.

Buddhism's perspectives on identity are quite profound. The religion posits that there is no unchanging, permanent self or 'soul.' Instead, our sense of self or identity is considered a temporary formation of five aggregates, also known as Skandhas. These include form (or physical matter), sensation (feelings), perception, mental formations (thoughts and emotions), and consciousness (awareness). Buddhist teachings propose that understanding the temporary and composite nature of our identity can lead to liberation from suffering.

Bama also hints towards this universal human identity, asserting a strength within Dalit women that urges them "to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated; and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect, and

with love towards all humankind”(109). This may be seen as an echo of Buddhist principles: breaking free from the suffering induced by caste identity by embracing a broader human identity. This is particularly true for the Dalit community in India, which has been marginalized and oppressed due to their caste identity. The authors Bama and Urmila Pawar have used their writings to challenge this entrenched system. Bama emphasizes the potential for Dalit women to reclaim their dignity and humanity, not through their caste identity, but through a broader, more compassionate understanding of identity.

Similarly, Urmila Pawar, in *The Weave of My Life*, envisions a future where caste identities are replaced by a shared human identity, which echoes Buddhist concepts. The Buddhist perspective on identity offers an emancipatory potential, which Dalit women authors have tapped into in order to resist the caste-based violence and discrimination prevalent in society. A crucial concept in Buddhism is Anatta, which means 'non-self' or 'non-essentiality.' According to this principle, a person's identity is not a fixed, immutable entity but rather a continuously evolving process that consists of interrelated and changing parts.

In the context of Dalit women's experiences, this understanding of identity holds profound implications. In Bama's work, we see a portrayal of Dalit women that not only challenges the rigid caste identities imposed upon them but also transcends these boundaries. Urmila Pawar furthers this discourse by explicitly highlighting the role of Buddhist philosophy in the liberation of her community. Her envisioning of a casteless society draws heavily on this perspective. She writes, “The promise of a future where caste identities melt into a larger ‘human’ identity, I believe, stems from the Buddhist philosophy of non-self. It is this philosophy that holds the potential to dismantle the oppressive caste hierarchies that have long been a source of immense suffering for the Dalit community” (123).

Thus, both Bama and Pawar's narratives, steeped in the realities of Dalit women, resonate strongly with the Buddhist philosophical perspective on identity. Their writings are a testament to the transformative potential that lies in understanding identity as a fluid, non-fixed concept, providing a way to challenge and overcome the oppressive caste system.

Pawar's interactions, especially with her family, serve as a mirror reflecting the deep-rooted caste prejudices entrenched within societal frameworks, even among Dalits themselves. When she articulates the need of education, it becomes more distinct that her vision is not just for herself but also for her community. It is a call for self-improvement, for dedicating oneself to the path of knowledge, and thereby challenging the predestined life carved out by society. Jyotirao Phule, a prominent social reformer, educationist, and critic of the caste system argued that education was the key to bringing about social change. He stated, "Lack of education leads to lack of wisdom, which leads to lack of morals, which leads to lack of progress..." (Phule 37). This echoes Pawar's belief in the transformative power of education. Her insistence on continuing her academic pursuits, despite opposition, is a testament to her conviction in education as a means to challenge and change the status quo.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution and a Dalit icon, in his speech "Annihilation of Caste," stated that "Caste is not just a division of labor, it is a division of laborers" (23). This perspective underscores Pawar's understanding of the systemic oppression inherent in the caste system. Her efforts to navigate and transcend these systemic barriers are not merely aimed at personal emancipation but also toward the collective liberation of her community.

Her narrative provides insights into the possibilities of resistance against the dual oppressions of caste and gender. By highlighting the importance of self-reliance, agency, and the transformative power of education, Pawar lays the foundation for a society where caste-based identities become redundant. In doing so, she points towards a more egalitarian society where individuals, regardless of their background, can envision and attain a future determined by their abilities, dreams, and aspirations, not by the caste they were born into.

Furthermore, Pawar's writings subtly underline the importance of intersectionality. By intertwining caste with gender and juxtaposing them against the broader themes of modernity, progress, and urbanization, she paints a picture of a complex web of oppressions that can't be tackled in isolation. Thus, her vision for a future free from caste identities is also a vision of an inclusive society where multiple forms of oppression are simultaneously recognized and resisted. The journey of Urmila Pawar stands as an emblematic testament to the resilience and fortitude that is needed to

challenge and upend deeply ingrained social constructs. But at the core of her narrative, it isn't just about resistance; it's about envisioning and working tirelessly towards a transformative reimagining of society.

When Pawar writes about her own experiences, she is tapping into a collective memory and experience shared by countless Dalit women. This lends her narrative a universal appeal, and her struggles become emblematic of the broader issues faced by the community. It's not just about personal empowerment, but a collective emancipation. Her insistence on dialogue, understanding, and above all, education signals a belief that change, while arduous, is possible. Her depiction of her personal confrontations, such as her dialogue with her husband about her pursuit of education, underscores a larger, transformative idea: the power of questioning. By challenging the status quo and questioning deeply entrenched beliefs, she fosters an environment where change is not just desired but actively pursued. She writes, "Moreover, I dedicate my spare time to studying various subjects" (244). This dedication transcends her personal ambitions and becomes a beacon for others in the community, highlighting the power of self-education and self-awareness.

The interconnected themes of caste, patriarchy, and modernity that permeate Pawar's narrative point toward her understanding that true societal transformation is multi-faceted. It cannot be confined to breaking free from caste-based identities alone. Rather, it's about acknowledging and challenging various forms of oppression and prejudices that intersect and overlap, creating a matrix of domination. Furthermore, Pawar's portrayal of urban spaces not just as physical locations but as landscapes of transformation and opportunity also serves as a metaphor for her envisioned future. These spaces represent a melting pot where the rigidity of caste hierarchies can dissolve, giving rise to new, inclusive identities. However, she is not naive about the challenges posed by urbanization. Yet, she remains optimistic, viewing these challenges as catalysts for change rather than insurmountable obstacles.

Pawar's vision of a future liberated from caste-based identities is a powerful narrative that draws upon both her personal experiences and the collective struggles of the Dalit community. Her narrative deeply resonates with the perspectives of many authors who have explored caste dynamics and their implications for India's future.

Acclaimed author and Dalit activist Chandra Bhan Prasad has famously asserted, "Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling, and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind" (72). This perspective aligns seamlessly with Pawar's narrative. Her quest to transcend caste-based identities isn't about dismantling physical barriers but about challenging and reshaping the deeply entrenched notions that uphold the caste system.

As society grapples with the question of caste-based identities, Urmila Pawar's voice is a necessary anchor in these turbulent waters. Her vision for a casteless future is not just a personal aspiration but a potential path for millions who seek to redefine their identity outside the traditional caste confines.

Renowned feminist scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her exploration of subaltern voices, famously proclaimed whether the subaltern can speak. Pawar's narrative is a resounding affirmation of this question. While Spivak discusses the subaltern's marginalization and voicelessness, Pawar, through her life story, lends a voice, not just for herself, but for countless Dalit women who've been silenced for ages.

Another significant voice in the discourse around caste is Gail Omvedt. Omvedt believes in the transformative potential of grass root's movements. She opines, "It is not just about breaking shackles but creating new systems of equality from the ground up" (Omvedt 53). This perspective aligns with Pawar's narrative, where she is not merely reacting to her circumstances but is actively envisioning and shaping a new future. Urmila Pawar's stance on the eradication of caste-based identities is not just a mere aspiration but an essential blueprint for a progressive society. Her journey resonates with the ideological currents of contemporary thinkers who vehemently challenge the deeply-rooted caste hierarchy.

The implications of Pawar's casteless vision are far-reaching. It offers an opportunity for India to redefine its sociocultural fabric, embracing a more inclusive, equitable, and progressive paradigm. It's a call to acknowledge past injustices, understand the present disparities, and ardently work towards a future where everyone's identity is unburdened by the prejudices of the past. *The Weave of My Life* amplifies the burgeoning chorus against caste-based discrimination. By positioning her personal narrative in the larger socio-political context and drawing parallels with the thoughts of

other authors, it becomes evident that the journey to a casteless society requires collective reflection, confrontation, and transformation.

In *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble does not merely recount events but immerses the reader in the harrowing realities faced by her community. She articulates, “Our existence was not just living; it was a prolonged survival amidst an ocean of torment” (56). This statement encapsulates the daily challenges the Dalits faced, from social ostracization to economic hardships, all stemming from deeply entrenched caste prejudices. Her narrative sheds light on the grotesque double jeopardy faced by Dalit women, entrapped by both caste and gender discrimination. This theme resonates deeply with what bell hooks observes: “There is no value in living in societies where one’s worth is first predetermined by caste, and then doubly stamped by gender” (88). Kamble’s recounting of the violence, both psychological and physical, faced by Dalit women is a testament to this dual subjugation. Her engagement with the history of Dalit oppression is deeply personal. She chronicles not just large events but also mundane daily life details, such as the daily rituals, the songs of despair and hope, and the oral traditions passed down through generations. These details bring richness to her narrative, making the history palpable and lived rather than just recounted.

By positioning her life within the broader tapestry of the Dalit community’s historical struggles, Kamble does more than just share her story; she elevates it to a universal testament of resistance, resilience, and rebirth. Individual historical events are not always individual; they are the representations of cumulative understanding of a specific caste, tribe or community.

Her narrative explores the systemic violence inflicted upon Dalit women, the pain of which is interwoven into the very fabric of their identity. Kamble reflects, “The woman is not only a Dalit, but she carries the double burden of her gender and her caste. She is a Dalit among Dalits” (Kamble 82). This vivid depiction of the intersectional oppression faced by Dalit women reveals the deep-seated biases that pervade Indian society. Echoing this sentiment, Gloria Steinem, a renowned feminist, states, “Intersectionality is not just about identities. It’s about the institutions that are creating those oppressions” (97). Kamble’s account underscores the institutional biases ingrained in Indian society, resulting in systematic oppression.

Another theme prevalent in Kamble's narrative is the indomitable spirit of resilience inherent in Dalit women. Despite facing unimaginable atrocities, they continue to fight and survive. Kamble observes that all Dalit women are fighters as they fight numerous battles of life every day. They fight for against the caste hierarchy, against patriarchy and all other social regulations that suppress them. And the irony is that, they survive against all odds of life. Cornel West, in his critical work on race and society, recognizes this spirit. He writes, "The condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak. It is the precondition of our struggle towards justice" (79). Kamble's narrative personifies this truth, offering a space for Dalit women's suffering to speak and, in doing so, illuminates the path toward justice.

Audre Lorde, a feminist and civil rights activist, posits a similar sentiment. She once remarked, "Caring for oneself is not self-indulgence; it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (64). Kamble's description of Dalit women's acts, whether safeguarding their well-being or surreptitiously rebelling against their oppressors, can be perceived as such acts of 'political warfare.' She also delves into how traditions and customs became tools for asserting agency. She writes that in every step of their torture in and outside the household, a Dalit woman has always the silent shout against the social evils. The community, particularly its women, thus transformed the very tools of their oppression into instruments of resistance.

Ella Baker, a significant figure in the American civil rights movement, aligns with this perspective, asserting, "Strong people don't need strong leaders" (103). Kamble's recounting of the agency exhibited by Dalit women in their everyday lives reinforces this idea – strength emerges from the grassroots and is intrinsic to the oppressed. In *The Prisons We Broke*, she offers a searing and intimate portrayal of the lives of Dalits, particularly the women, under the shadow of Brahminical domination. Kamble's life, as depicted in the narrative, becomes a mirror to the broader Dalit experience, reflecting the intricate web of societal, cultural, and gender dynamics that have shaped and constrained them.

Kamble recalls her early years, noting, "Growing up, every facet of our lives was overshadowed by our Dalit identity, a badge we wore not with pride, but with an ever-present sense of subjugation" (43). This observation augments the profound impact of societal structures on individual self-perception and self-worth. Moreover, her

critique extends beyond just the confines of caste. She astutely highlights the gender hierarchies within the Dalit community itself: the women were even subjugated by their men. Such reflections bring to light the intersectionality of oppression Dalit women face, oppressed not just by the larger society but also within their own communities. Her portrayal of her community gives readers an insight into the meticulous social design that has been employed to keep the Dalit community in a perpetual state of subordination. The societal structures that bound them were not just externally imposed; they were internalized, becoming a part of the community's psyche. Kamble poignantly remarks that they are compelled to be the victims that it becomes the psychological trauma inflicted upon every Dalits and largely the Dalit women. The pernicious influence of Brahminical patriarchy, as illuminated by Kamble, isn't just systematic. It's personal. The everyday life of a Dalit woman, in Kamble's narrative, is a series of negotiations, confrontations, and moments of fleeting respite. For instance, she shares a harrowing account of her own experiences: the market places where Dalits used to go like other half of the society becomes the war field and she herself experienced the question of dignity and identity in the market. They were vehemently tortured and suppressed.

One of the most compelling aspects of *The Prisons We Broke* is Kamble's focus on the micro-aggressions, the daily, almost normalized acts of discrimination and humiliation that Dalit women faced. So, it resembles that Dalits were not given proper attention even in giving them jobs, the least, mean jobs were given to them. Yet, amidst this stark portrayal of Dalit life, Kamble's narrative is not devoid of hope. She speaks of the silent revolutions, the small acts of defiance, and the determination of Dalit women to rewrite their destinies. "In the quiet of the night, away from prying eyes, we dared to dream, to hope, and to chart our paths of resistance" (Kamble 198).

Baby Kamble's raw and visceral account in *The Prisons We Broke* does not just chronicle the individual and communal traumas that Dalits endured. It stands as a testament to their indomitable spirit, resilience, and persistent quest for liberation. Kamble's narrative is peppered with moments that not only document oppression but also showcase resistance, even if it's in the form of quiet, non-confrontational acts. One of the recurring themes in the book is the resilience of Dalit women, whose spirits refused to be quelled, even in the face of relentless oppression. Kamble mentions, "Each

morning was a testament to our resilience. Despite the weight of our histories and the shadows of our present, we arose, determined to face another day" (21).

Although the social structures were oppressive and restrictive, they unknowingly became the crucibles in which the fierce determination of Dalit women was forged. They constantly navigate these structures, look for loopholes, exploit the cracks and make room for their identity. Whispering at the well or sharing a look at a party, they talked about their little rebellions, their moments of defiance against the society that tried to suppress them. Kamble also illuminates the importance of solidarity in a community. she e talks about shared experiences, shared oppression, and the power of shared dreams. they found collective strength in their collective suffering. The bonds they forged in the crucible of oppression became their lifelines; the anchors that held them steady in the storms of Brahmin patriarchy.

Yet, Kamble is also critical of the internalized oppression within the Dalit community. She scrutinizes how centuries of subjugation led to fissures within the community, with some members perpetuating regressive norms. A significant strength of Kamble's narrative lies in her nuanced understanding of power dynamics, not only from the external oppressors but also from within the community. She vividly describes the dichotomies that plagued the lives of Dalit women, being victims of the caste system on the one hand and dealing with internalized patriarchy on the other. Kamble notes, "The struggles of Dalit women were multi-dimensional. Outside our homes, we battled the caste system, and within, we confronted the chains of patriarchy" (69).

While *The Prisons We Broke* paints a somber picture of Dalit lives, it's far from a narrative of despair. Kamble often interweaves tales of hope, resilience, and fortitude, celebrating the spirit of women who stood tall against the odds. One particularly touching account involves Dalit women coming together to protect a fellow woman from domestic abuse, showcasing the power of collective resistance. Her work also stands out in its candid exploration of the complexities and ambiguities within the Dalit community. The narrative doesn't shy away from addressing the uncomfortable truths, particularly the internal divisions, hierarchies, and conflicts that sometimes exacerbated their plight. Kamble poignantly mentions that the Dalits seek for justice from the society but forgets to see the injustices within their own community.

However, amidst these introspections, the overarching theme of *The Prisons We Broke* remains clear: the indefatigable spirit of Dalit women in their quest for dignity, justice, and equality. The book isn't just an autobiography; it's a powerful presentation to the indomitable will of a community that has, for too long, been on the periphery of societal consciousness. Violence, both overt and covert, is an omnipresent theme in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*. Kamble's portrayal of violence against Dalit women is multi-layered, moving between the explicit atrocities they endure to the more insidious forms of violence embedded in day-to-day life.

Early in the narrative, Kamble elucidates on the brutal physical violence that Dalit women often bore the brunt of. Recounting a harrowing incident, she writes, "The mob descended upon our hamlet with fury. And while they ransacked our homes, it was the women, with their torn sarees and anguished cries, who became the symbols of their hate" (12). These incidents weren't anomalies; rather, they were routine occurrences, a manifestation of the deeply entrenched caste animosity. However, Kamble's portrayal doesn't stop at the overtly physical. She deftly navigates the less visible but equally dehumanizing emotional and psychological violence. The societal disdain and the internalized feeling of 'lesser worth' tormented the psyche of Dalit women. Kamble asserts that the behaviours of the high-class people to them showing disgust and superiority, was a daily reminder of their 'place' in society. And it hurts them mentally.

Sexual violence, a potent tool of domination and suppression, finds notable mention in Kamble's work. Dalit women were frequent targets, their bodies battlegrounds upon which caste supremacy was asserted. The horror of these incidents wasn't just the act itself but the subsequent silencing and shaming. "After enduring the unspeakable, they were met with blame, a community's shame, and an oppressive silence" (Kamble41). Yet, within these heart-wrenching tales of violence, Kamble embeds narratives of resistance. Dalit women, though subjected to unimaginable atrocities, often resisted, rallied, and rebelled in myriad ways. Some sought solace in solidarity, while others used subversion as a tool, turning the oppressors' tactics on their heads. Kamble aptly observes that only Dalit women survive with these atrocities and tunned with the tactics of resistance and protest.

The pervasive violence depicted in Kamble's narrative isn't solely external; she astutely draws attention to the internal mechanisms of oppression. One of the more

unsettling aspects she explores is the violence that Dalit women face within their own community. Caste oppression, as Kamble portrays, often forces Dalit men to assert control over the one domain they can: their households.

She further touches upon the structural violence propagated by societal institutions. Schools, meant to be sanctuaries of learning, often turned into arenas of discrimination and humiliation. Kamble recounts a particularly moving episode where a young Dalit girl, full of dreams, is reminded of her 'place' by her teacher in front of her peers, "A symbol of hope crushed by the weight of caste prejudice" (81). However, amidst these tales of horror, Kamble consistently underscores the resilience and agency of Dalit women. Their small acts of defiance, from refusing to bow their heads to upper-caste landlords to secretly educating their daughters, serve as beacons of hope in a narrative dominated by despair. This autobiography deeply shows the indomitable spirit of protest of the Dalit women that they can be the victims of oppressions, but they are rebellious and they can never be defeated. Kamble's story further reveals the cultural and religious dimensions of violence against Dalit women. Festivals and religious ceremonies, usually festive events, were often marred by the different facts of Dalit women. Their participation was limited or manipulated to emphasize their lower status. Kamble aptly describes the festival scene: While others danced, Dalit women watched from the sidelines, their shadows barely touching the light of the festivities, a stark reminder of their marginalization even in moments of collective joy. But even in these bleak circumstances, Kamble consistently highlights the strength and resilience of Dalit women. Their ability to find joy even in the smallest moments, conquer spaces and even subvert rituals to assert their power forms an important part of her story. Maybe they put them on the margins, but from those margins they created their stories of hope and protest.

Kamble also delves into the violence of erasure – the conscious attempt by upper-caste narratives to either marginalize or entirely eliminate the experiences and contributions of Dalit women. Histories were rewritten, their voices silenced, and their stories relegated to mere footnotes. But Kamble ensures that in her work, these voices resonate loudly. For her, the narratives of Dalit women are the true representation of Dalit experiences, others write but have not any rightful authority to write on Dalits. The intersections of caste and gender meant that Dalit women often bore the double burden

of oppression. Kamble painstakingly narrates this dual struggle: "To be a woman is hard but to be a Dalit woman is to face the world with two strikes against you before you even begin" (67). This sentiment underscores the compounded nature of their struggle, where gender and caste combined to magnify their challenges. The Dalit identity is enough for any kind of torture hence, their identity is under interrogation. But Kamble's conviction is different, she speaks of a world full of equality and same justice system to all. Caste based discrimination is a social barrier to stop the growth of society as it segmented the force of human being as a whole. According to her, the existence of the Dalits are actually the fruits of social stratification by the Brahmanic culture. Here, Dalit women's bodies are shown as the embodiment of suffering and resistance.

Kamble also provides insights into the daily struggles and small acts of defiance. There's a sense of collective memory, shared trauma, and community strength in her words. Through the character is Sita, who, having moved to an urban area, the narrative of Kamble grapples with the dual identities of being Dalit and a modern woman. "The city offers anonymity but not acceptance," she muses. "I wear my identity on my sleeve, not as a badge of shame, but as a symbol of my journey, my struggles, and my aspirations" (Kamble 319).

In *The Prisons We Broke*, Kamble does not merely present an account of suffering; through her characters, she creates a multifaceted representation of Dalit women – their pain, their resilience, their dreams, and their resistance. Each voice adds depth to the narrative, making it a compelling read that sheds light on the complexities of caste, gender, and identity in India. She unfurls the complex realities of Dalit women in India, offering firsthand accounts and experiences of their day-to-day battles against oppressive societal structures. A significant part of this narrative focuses on the violence – both psychological and physical – endured by these women. But Kamble does not just lay bare the trauma. She also explores the resilience and strength that arises from it. In their stories, they find strength and so, they protest. Literally, Dalit women's narratives are their cry for dignity and identity.

In Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, the threat of violence against Dalit women is not just a backdrop but the very fabric that ties together different accounts of suffering and endurance. Through the intricate relationships and interactions of her characters, Kamble provides an unflinching exploration of the multitudes of oppression.

Ultimately, through *The Prisons We Broke*, Kamble gives a voice to the countless Dalit women who have suffered in silence. But more importantly, she also celebrates their spirit, their strength, and their shared dream of a future free from the shackles of violence and oppression. Dalit women's autobiographies, rich with firsthand accounts, not only portray personal journeys but also depict the collective struggles against a deeply entrenched casteist and patriarchal society. These texts are an amalgamation of resistance, resilience, and a deep-seated desire for justice.

In *Karukku* by Bama, the narrative is saturated with instances of the intersectional oppression faced by the author, not just because of her caste but also her gender. Bama's personal experiences become a lens to view the larger community's struggles. Her description of the Dalit Christian community's plight is a critique of both caste discrimination and the Church's inaction against it. The protests here aren't just vocal outbursts but simmering resentments manifesting through daily actions and words.

Urmila Pawar, in *The Weave of My Life*, documents her journey from a small village in the Konkan region to the bustling city of Mumbai. The autobiography is a testament to the multifaceted identities of Dalit women. Pawar does not just recount the violence and discrimination faced by her and her family but also critically assesses the societal structures enabling such atrocities. Her involvement in the Dalit Panthers movement and her critique of its gender insensitivity highlights the intricacies of protests within a larger movement. Pawar notes, "It wasn't just about caste anymore; as a woman, my battles doubled" (132).

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* is a heart-wrenching account of the Mahar community's lives and their transformation post-Ambedkar's influence. Kamble's narration does not romanticize the Dalit life; instead, it sheds light on the brutalities they faced and the courage it took to resist. Her recounting of how Dalit women would protest, often silently and subversively, against the upper castes showcases a resistance rooted in everyday actions. One particularly poignant moment is when Kamble describes a "Dalit woman singing a song of resistance while grinding grain, a subtle act of defiance against her oppressors." (84).

An essential aspect of these autobiographies is the manner in which they highlight the importance of collective resistance. Dalit women writers, in expressing

their personal narratives, reveal how individual struggles are inherently tied to the broader socio-political landscape.

Each of these autobiographies underscores a vital point: the acts of resistance by Dalit women are not always loud, fiery protests in public spaces. More often, they are quiet yet powerful rejections of societal norms, manifesting in daily life choices, stories, songs, and interpersonal relationships. The importance of these autobiographies lies not just in their recounting of past events but in their call for continuous resistance against oppressive systems.

The intersectionality of caste, class, and gender in the writings of Dalit women offers readers a multi-dimensional understanding of oppression. Their narratives not only reflect profound personal anguish but also illuminate the systemic issues pervading Indian society. In analyzing these autobiographies, it becomes evident that Dalit women's protests are both vocal and silent, overt and covert. The complexity of their resistance is woven intricately into their daily lives, challenges, and aspirations. The act of documenting these struggles itself in the form of autobiographies becomes a significant form of protest against a system that has historically sought to suppress their voices. The lived experiences of Dalit women are marked by a complex interplay of caste, gender, and class hierarchies. They face oppression not just from dominant castes but also from patriarchy within their own communities. This intersectional discrimination intensifies their struggles but also enriches their narratives. A recurring theme across these autobiographies is the search for a sense of self in a society that consistently attempts to devalue and erase their identities. Authors like Bama and Urmila Pawar eloquently depict this journey from realization to resistance. Secondly, these autobiographies lay bare the double victimization of Dalit women – outside in the public realm by dominant castes and within their homes by patriarchal norms. The struggle is both external and internal, amplifying their challenges. Thirdly, while these accounts chronicle subjugation, they equally highlight the indomitable spirit of Dalit women. Stories of personal resilience, collective resistance, and subversive acts are interspersed throughout, proving that oppression could not break their spirit.

Fourthly, for many Dalit women, religion, particularly Buddhism, has been a source of solace and strength. It not only provided spiritual relief but also became a potent tool of socio-political assertion and protest. Fifthly, despite the specific socio-cultural contexts,

the themes of struggle and resistance in these autobiographies resonate universally. They echo similar tales of subjugation from marginalized groups across the world. Lastly, these autobiographies are not just personal tales but political statements. They challenge mainstream narratives, rewrite histories, and foreground the experiences of those who have been invisible in mainstream discourse.

In conclusion, Dalit women's autobiographies illuminate the darkest corners of society, revealing deep-seated prejudices, but they also shine a light on hope, perseverance, and the transformative power of storytelling. They are not just records of the past but guideposts for future struggles and movements.