

CONFRONTING HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF SELECTED WORKS BY AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND INDIAN DALIT FEMINIST WRITERS

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ABSTRACT: The present paper aims at comparing the black autobiography of Maya Angelou, *I Know Why The caged Bird Sings* and the Dalit autobiography of Baby Kamble, *The Prisons We Broke*. The study discusses how caste system and racism has deeply affected the lives of the Blacks in America and the Dalits in India and also critically analysis how autobiography writing has been used by these oppressed people to resist the main stream oppressive discourses. This article acts as a looking glass to the pain experienced at the individual level and personal painful experiences narrated in a way that it testifies and depicts the sorrows as well as pain of their community as a whole. The two writings are assertive in nature and fight for the liberation from the clutches of casteism and racism. The life of the Blacks under racism and the life of the (so called lower castes) Dalits were suppressed to such an extent that their desire for self identity and freedom from the dominant powers gave them the reason to rebel against ill treatment and have a reason to fight for their rights.

KEYWORDS: Black men, Black women, Dalit men, Dalit women, Poverty, Discrimination, Exploitation, Violence and Self-identity.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The African men and women were captured and brought to America as slaves from the continent of Africa all through the 17th and 18th century. They were beaten mercilessly and were exploited. Both the men and women were tortured to such an extent that they were even denied of their basic rights. The race was put in an isolated place and were restricted to interact and socialize. The situation of the Black African female was more pathetic. She being a Black and a Negro was doubly marginalized and faced both racism and sexism. The women were considered to have no identity, dignity and respect. She was considered as a thing or named as a 'problem'. African American women faced racism and discrimination both by White men and White women. Further she also faced discrimination at the hands of Black men as well. She had to suffer inside and outside the house and was considered a curse upon this earth and treated as a creature who had no feelings and emotions. Racism and sexism had remained associated with the life of African- American women since ages. Just as the Black race was demeaned as underclass in America, in the same manner the Afro-American women were even more dehumanized as an inferior race and lower gender. Women were put in the category of weaker section in comparison to men but when it came to work, she always walked hand in hand and did everything. Sojourner Truth, the Black Feminist argues at the women's rights convention held in Ohio in 1851 that still she (woman) was not supposed to have "as much rights as men." (Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a Woman?)

The historical background of Dalits has been equally distressing. In the Hindu society there are said to be four Varnas and each of the four Varnas is said to be originated from different parts of Purusha. It is believed that the Brahmans emerged from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet. It is held that Jyotiba Phule minted the word 'Dalit' for this Shudras who were regarded to be the lowest amongst these four Varnas. Dalit was the community, which was downtrodden, suppressed, crushed and under privileged. Dalits had a very painful life which was full of struggle, disrespect and oppression. They were the rejected class who had no existence of theirs. They were the untouchables or outcastes. Dalits, the depressed classes were given the lowest position in the caste hierarchy based on the values and beliefs. Dalits had no status in the society except that they were a marginalized group who were born to serve the upper classes and obey the orders of their masters. As a critic of Dalit literature Sharankumar Limbale asserts that: "Dalits exist literally on the periphery" (Limbale, 2004, P. 2). They never got recognition for their hard work and contributions to the

Indian Society. Condition of the Dalit women was even more severe. They were doubly deprived of basic human rights, both by the upper classes and Dalit men alike. In fact, she was just a thing or a commodity. In both the American and Indian social system African-American and Dalit women were disregarded, humiliated, exploited and rebuked. None understood the pain she underwent while delivering children. Muktabai Salve, a Dalit woman asked, “Aren’t Dalit women, women who suffered the pains of womanhood?” (Shailaja, 2014 P.80)

The African- American writers and the Dalit writers wrote with a purpose. The main theme of their writings was to fight for equality of rights and freedom from injustice. They rejected the mainstream literature and wrote their own literature which was full of sufferings and anguish. Their writings aimed at to get back their culture, language and most important their lost identity and self. In their writings one thing which is prominent throughout is the quest for self-identity against the dominant classes. A few of the well-known African – American writers like Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Frederick Douglass, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Harriet Jacobs, and Octavia E. Butler writings demanded dignity, respect and identity. Alike, the Dalit writers also wrote with a similar point of view. They wanted not to be treated as sub-humans and raised their voice against caste system and untouchability. Some prominent Dalit writers like Dr. BhimRao Ambedkar, SharanKumar Limbale, Baby Kamble, Mahasweta Devi, Bama (Faustina Soosairaj), Urmila Panwar and many others who wrote with just one aim in their life i.e to become the voice of the voiceless. These African-American and Dalit literary personalities had a strong vision to set their communities free from the clutches of racism and caste system and keeping this as their main motive they expressed their feelings in the form of writings to get the world know about their struggle and the atrocities they had to face. There are many more renowned literary writers in the African-American race and among the Dalit community but mentioning everyone here is not possible but certainly the contribution of each of them is remarkable.

The writings of the African-American writers and the Dalit writers serve as a weapon to the two communities which arouses in them the feeling of revolt against hegemonic power. The African –Americans and the Dalits had their own sorrows and tribulations which they wanted to put an end to and this was made possible through the literature written by the renowned writers of their race and caste depicting the exploitation which they as an individual had to face socially, economically and politically. This paper shall explore the two autobiographies, one by Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* which is an autobiography of an African- American female writer and the other one by Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* which is an autobiography of a Dalit female writer. It is a known fact that autobiography is always narrated in the first person and in both the autobiographies it is seen that Maya Angelou and Baby Kamble give us evidences of their personal lives, their problems, humiliation that they underwent and how they stood as confident persons and brought together their communities as a whole and taught them the importance of fighting for themselves and their rights. In both the autobiographies we see that the writers depict their painful journey and through their personal sufferings how they give the reflection of agony, traumas, humiliation which the community as a whole undergoes. Both these authors not only have all these unpleasant experiences but also witness very closely the hardships and the humiliation that their communities face. This is why autobiography should be taken as testimonio because here the author as an individual is a “witness”, as in the words of Pramod K. Nayar an autobiography is a testimonio because it is a “programme of witnessing” (Nayar. K Pramod, P. 84) and also it should be taken as a “collective document” (Nayar. K Pramod, P. 84). Collective document here means the writer through his or her life portrays the life of his or her group or section. In this context it is worth mentioning these words by Henry Louis Gates Jr. that “the slave narrative was an attempt to become a communal voice, a collective tale rather than merely an individual’s autobiography” (Correa, P. 71).

The two autobiographies *I know why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou and *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble deals with the voice of the voiceless. Their destitute, disabled life talks about the hardships they faced and the social problems related to their race, caste and gender. In *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* we see there is prolonged cruel and unjust treatment of the Whites towards the Blacks. Maya Angelou published seven autobiographies and also was a civil rights activist. She wrote several books of poetry and her name is attached with a list of plays, movies and television shows. She was born on 4 April 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, United States and died on 28 May 2014 in North Carolina, United States. She was awarded with many awards. *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble is a protest against the atrocities subjected on the Dalits by the Hindu caste system for thousands of years. The life of the Dalit community was pathetic and they were treated no less than animals but still the author does not feel ashamed of giving the real picture of the Mahars (Dalits) and feels full of oneself in reflecting a true picture of her (Mahar) community which is poverty stricken. As Ankur Yadav points out about “transfer of resources from the poor class to the more privileged, in particular in India” (2019). In this context it is worth mentioning made by Baby Kamble in her preface to the first Edition: “the word Mahar makes us feel proud” (Kamble, 2008, P. xvii. Preface to the first edition). The domination of the Brahminical community was so severe that it made the Mahar to survive with the tag of a slave (untouchables). Baby Kamble was born in 1929, in the untouchable Mahar family. She was a Dalit activist and writer. *The*

Prisons We Broke is an English translation of 'Jina Amacha' a Marathi text by Baby Kamble. She was highly motivated by Dr. B. R Ambedkar. She died on 21 April 2012.

Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* which is an autobiography deals with childhood of Maya and this Maya is none other than but Maya Angelou, the protagonist in the novel. She recounts her past where she (Maya) is neglected and abused because of her sex and color and she being just three- years-old and her brother Bailey being just four- year old were shipped to their grandmother's "place to Stamps, Arkansas with tags on their wrists which instructed To whom it may concern"(Angelou,1984, P. 7). The two children were sent to their grandmother's place because their parents recently got divorced. Maya lived with her grandmother in the segregated Southern America. She was of the belief that her parents had died but she had been mistaken as she received gifts from them on the day of Christmas. An unexpected visit of Maya's father in Stamps one day put everybody in a surprising situation when he announced that he had come to take the children to their mother in St. Louis. Maya's movement from Stamps to St. Louis was a great turnover in Maya's life. Maya, Bailey and their mother Vivian lived with Vivian's boyfriend Mr. Freeman. One unfortunate day Maya was raped by Mr. Freeman. As Anna Julia Cooper a prominent African-American educator and Black Liberation activist asserts "African-American girls, age often offers little protection from assaults. Far too many young Black girls inhabit hazardous and hostile environments" (Collins, Patricia, 2000, P. 30). Maya's family tried to give her physical healing, but nobody understood her emotions. Maya was able to generate confidence in herself during her trip to Mexico where she learnt to handle the car's steering of her father and she managed to drive with no help. This incident made her self-reliant and she could find that she had lot of potential in herself. Her stay in the junkyard with the people who were at par with her taught her the life lessons. She at last found a job of a Black Streetcar conductor in the restricted area of the Whites. This served as the biggest achievement in Maya's life. Apart from the incident of rape, Maya was illtreated by her white classmates also.

In Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* there is an undercurrent of emotional and mental pain. The Mahars voices were unheard, they had deep wounds which were unseen by the Upper castes. *The Prisons We Broke* refers to the oppressed class who longed for freedom. Superstition prevailed amongst the Mahars. Kamble who was highly influenced by Dr. B R Ambedkar preached the Mahars to take the religion as which allows them to stand on their feet and not just as which makes them handicapped. They performed the jobs which were considered unclean in Hinduism. Likewise cleaning toilets, sweeping roads, removal of rubbish, or preparing the bodies for funeral. They were even restricted to enter the temples and draw water from the wells as their touch would taint the water. Condition of the Dalit women was even more severe. Dalit women led the life where they had no freedom inside and outside the house. Men considered themselves to be superior to women. Kamble's autobiography shows a true picture of domination of the Brahmanical class. The text tells how the life of the Mahars used to be like and how it changed because of Dr. B R Ambedkar.

The paper aims at exploring the common concerns and similarities of perspectives between the two autobiographies of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*. Parallelism can be drawn amongst the various concerns which are mirrored in *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* and *The Prisons We Broke*. Blacks were called as Negroes and Dalits were referred as untouchables. Both the groups suffered because they were denied humanity. Afro Americans were badly treated because of their color and Dalits suffered because of their caste and untouchability.

In *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* we get to know that the condition of Maya and her family was miserable. Maya's paternal grandmother Annie Henderson was a strong sensible lady who ran a store in the segregated land in the Black town. She sold the canned food and was the only earning member who looked after her disabled son Uncle Willie, Maya, her granddaughter and Bailey her grandson. The condition of the family was deplorable because of which Maya and her brother Bailey had to go barefoot and they also learnt how to resole their shoes when they "gave out" (Angelou, P. 54). The grandmother "bought two bolts of cloth each year" (Angelou, P. 54) for all the winter and summer clothes to be made for Maya, Bailey and for herself. This shows that their living conditions were not favourable. At the time of Easter, the dress which Maya wore was made from a thrown away cloth of a white woman. It is said that the children who live under miserable conditions happen to possess low self-esteem in themselves. The family was unable to satisfy their basic needs and were unable to get fresh food and survived on canned food. "In Stamps the custom was to can everything that could possibly be preserved" (Angelou, P. 26).

This gives us a clear hint that they (the blacks) never survived on fresh meat. Momma, the grandmother knew that the fresh meat was equally important and must be incorporated in the diet and that is why the children were given money twice in a year to go to the town and buy the "liver" (Angelou, P. 27) which was kept reserved for the whites who had refrigerators. The Blacks did not have refrigerators and had to use the preservatives to preserve the food (meat) and this is why Momma sold the preserved food in her store. This really seemed quite

disgusting that the children longed for fresh meat and they did not even have the possibility to have the same and the Whites always had the pleasure and privilege of having fresh food. Momma's store went well because it was the only store in Stamps where people of her Black community, who resided on the same segregated land came for buying the canned food. Momma's store was the centre of community and during the cotton harvesting season Momma used to get up at four in the morning to sell lunches to the crowd of Black cotton laborers before they started their day with the hectic work. The cotton picker started their day with a ray of hope that they would earn much but it was all useless because no matter how much hard labor they would put in, it did not serve their basic needs and the condition of their (cotton pickers) women was even more pathetic. The women had to wear discarded shoes of their men and Maya observes that the "women's feet had swollen" (Angelou, P. 131). The Blacks had a life which was full of challenges and ups and downs.

Similarly, *In Prisons We Broke* the Mahars (untouchables) did not have the proper means to meet their basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Their life was only meant for serving the upper castes and in return they received nothing but pain and misery. Superstition and ignorance were the two inherent components of the Mahars destitute life. They survived on the decayed and the leftover food and many a times when this was also not available to them they had to manage with the cactus pods and "eating the cactus pods is like killing oneself" (Kamble, P. 83). They even ate dead animals. During epidemics the carcasses of the dead animals would rot and gave a foul smell in various locations and parts and they (Mahars) were asked by the upper castes to carry the carcasses away as it became difficult for them (Upper castes) to survive in such a foul environment. The happiness of Mahars had no boundaries because now they would have something to eat. After removing the rot skin of the dead animals its meat was cooked and consumed. They had neither to eat nor to wear anything. Their tattered, shabby, dirty and ragged clothes showed the pitiful, distressing and heartbreaking state of their lives. They would get the clothes made out of the white sheet which was spread over the corpse as they had the right over it. It was a matter of honour for them that they had something to wear which did not have any patches and was not torn from anywhere without realizing that the cloth they were using on their body had been used to cover the dead body. The young children would go begging for food and their legs would be like sticks and at the end of the day they could manage with the decayed food which nobody can even think of consuming. Such was their life and this was just not the end. The houses in which they lived "were the poorest of the poor" (Kamble, P.7) and walls of the houses were just arranged with stones "vertically with some mud coating" (Kamble, P.7). The clay pots which they had in their houses were no good as they had big holes in it and to avoid the entry of the mice through the holes the women would cover it with "rag balls" (Kamble, P. 13). The tough situation arose when there was no food available in the house and so-called new mothers had to manage without food.

The Blacks were treated as inferior by the Whites. Their unjust and unfair treatment shattered the Blacks. Maya lived with her grandmother, Uncle Willie and her brother in a segregated land in Stamps, Arkansas. The discrimination was so acute that the "Black children didn't, absolutely know what whites looked like" (Angelou, P. 27). Many a times when Maya and her brother Bailey were sent to the town for some work or duty, the children would go with great attentiveness because they always had a fear that something unusual might happen and to avoid that danger the children were extra cautious. There also went a story that Bailey had heard about that a man was killed by the white folks and was thrown into the pond, "all because the white-folks said he did 'it' to a white woman" (Angelou, P. 40). Blacks were treated as "dump animals" (Angelou, P.19). For every and anything wrong that took place, blacks were held responsible and this why ex-sheriff had come to warn momma to make his disabled son hide because "A crazy nigger messed with a white lady" (Angelou, pp. 19-20) and the white men were planning to take revenge from the Black man. It shows the dominance of Whites who did not even leave the disabled person and how much hatred they had towards the Blacks. Distinction and disparity between the black schools and white schools was intolerable. When it was eighth grade graduation ceremony in Maya's school where a white guest speaker Mr. Edward Donleavy delivered a speech and talked about the improvements to be done in white schools on the new lab equipments for science classes, Maya felt insulted that that black schools would receive limited sports funds only and she hated the idea of the speaker saying that the black race has achieved greatness only in athletics and not in academics. Maya really felt sad about the discrimination made between the Whites and the Blacks in terms of the facilities provided in the schools of Whites and discarding the same in the schools of Blacks. Maya realizes that "It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life" (Angelou, P. 194). She felt her color can get no recognition no matter how good she and her colored community perform in the field of education. This distinction between the schools of blacks and whites made Maya heavy- hearted. In Stamps the white community was so biased "that a Negro couldn't buy vanilla ice-cream" (Angelou, P.53). This shows that they (Blacks) were not even allowed to live a normal life. They had to live on the mercy of the Whites. They had the capacity but no means and it is quite observable with the poor white families who resided on Momma's farm land in the South of Arkansas and were so prejudiced against the Blacks that they disrespected Momma and Uncle Willie without even caring about the difference in

age of theirs in comparison to them and calling them with their first names. Those young white girls even mocked at Momma by doing her mimicry. They did not even bother about the disability of Uncle Willie and treated him badly by showing disrespect to him. White community had a lavish life and had luxurious things like cars, good houses in comparison to Blacks who really struggled to earn their livelihood and Whites had a lot of money and were spend-thrift. Another example of racism when Momma takes Maya to see a dentist for Maya had a toothache and the doctor refused to treat her (Maya) as this was against his policy to treat her saying that “my policy is I’d rather stick my hand in a dog’s mouth than in a nigger’s” (Angelou, P.203). In the eyes of Whites, Blacks had no identity and were not treated properly, and this was noticeable when Maya had served in Mrs. Cullinan kitchen, a white woman. The white woman used to ill-treat her by throwing plates at her and calling her “clumsy nigger” (Angelou, P. 120) and during those times it was a common practice for the Whites to address a negro with insulting words as “nigger, figs, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks” (Angelou, P. 118).

Likewise, Dalits in India also had no status in the society. They were segregated in every possible way and lived in the outskirts of the village. Their poor huts were near the garbage pits. The Mahars (Dalits) had no right to acquire knowledge. The Mahars served in the houses of the upper-castes and served them with complete sincerity and commitment yet they “dared not drink even a drop of water there” (Kamble, P.38). Dalit women had to maintain distance from the shopkeeper while buying things and the shopkeeper would throw the things towards her so that he did not get polluted. Mahar women was even not allowed to use the same road which the upper-castes men used and they had to take the different path and if in the mid-way it happened that the woman saw an upper-caste man, she had to cover herself and say, “The humble Mahar women fall at your feet master.”(Kamble, P.52). Incase if she ever forgot to do so, a big issue was made by the upper caste man and she was warned not to repeat the mistake again. She was abused by everybody in the house and they behaved in a violent manner. Although this is generally presumed that a woman understands a woman better but in the case of Dalit women the upper-caste Brahmin ladies would never understand the pain of a Mahar woman and she was even more scolded and abused by these upper-castes women. Mahar women were treated as untouchables and their children as “brats” (Kamble, P.55).Baby Kamble mentions in her book *The Prisons We Broke* several such incidents where upper caste women never bothered to pay heed to the torment that the Mahar women undergoes in earning the livelihood by selling the firewood and what all difficulties the Mahar woman had to face while collecting the bundles of dry sticks and at times thorns would prick and “sometimes they cut their own limbs instead of the wood and blood poured down”(Kamble, P. 56).Baby Kamble tells that she and a few more girls who were the daughters of the Dalits were not given proper treatment in the school as they were not provided with the benches and were made to sit “on the floor in one corner of the classroom as diseased puppies”(Kamble, P.129).The teachers also did not treat them well and “harassed”(Kamble, P.140) them. Kamble mentions they “treated us like lepers, really they wouldn’t even look at us.” (Kamble, P. 140). This can be better understood in the words of Dr. Dhumal as the “the nonprevalence of constitutional values that pave way to social stratification, irrationality and bigotry system” (2019).

One should sympathize and understand others feelings. This is the greatest help one can provide to a person and make him feel important and realize that he/she too has his/her existence in the society. This principle if someone follows can bring a lot of change in the living condition of the people but in *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* the Blacks really had a bad luck and they were not fortunate enough to have good faith. The Blacks who lived on the segregated land in the Stamps were made to feel every now and then that they were the curse on this earth and they should accept this fact and should learn to bear this pain forever. They had to struggle and work hard to earn their livelihood. In the case of cotton pickers who were the black cotton laborers “worked like oxen” (Angelou, P. 131). After working through-out the day they would earn less. “No matter how much they had picked it wasn’t enough”(Angelou, P. 10).The wages that they earned “wouldn’t even get them out of debt”(Angelou, P. 10). Maya gets to know from her stepfather’s friends that “negroes were made to sleep on streets in the North and they had to clean out toilets with their hands and even things worse than that”(Angelou, P. 239).

In a like manner *The Prisons We Broke* also presents the picture of how the Mahars were exploited. It went without saying that all the filthy jobs rested on the shoulders of the Mahars. They would even spread their hands which would serve as “spittoons”(Kamble, P. 38) for the upper castes “to spit”(Kamble, P. 38). During the marriage season it was the duty of the yeskar (Mahar) to manage with all the jobs related to the marriage in an upper-caste family. Starting from cleaning and sweeping the house and cleaning the “shit” (Kamble, P. 76). All low and small work was to be performed by the Mahar and he did it with full dedication and in return he got the leftover stale food. The musty and the smelly food which the (yeskar) got was the waste food which the guests had left in their plates and the owner never wanted to waste this food so the same was collected in the big cane baskets and this food was handed over to the (yeskar) when he has finished the cleaning of the pandal, no matter how exhausted and hungry he may be but for the owner of the house would provide him with the sticky

leftover food “after having worked for hours on end” (Kamble, P. 76). Mahar was not allowed to enter the chawdi (a central place in the village for public and official transactions. The Mahars would have their own Mahar chawdi in their locality) but he was allotted a place somewhere at a distance outside the chawdi. He had to wait there for the whole day and was not supposed to stand erect. “He had to stand with his back bent” (Kamble, P. 78) and had to greet everybody who so ever passed by including children. “He had to bend down, till his head touched his knees, join his palms together and say ‘joharmai bap’ three times, and then touch his head with his palms joined in salutation”(Kamble, P. 78). *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble reveals that the life of a Dalit mahar girl was even more dreadful. She was married at a very young age. “For the girl, marriage meant nothing but calamity” (Kamble, P. 93). She did all the household chores and still was threatened by her mother-in-law. The little girl was always scolded and abused for some or the other reason. Marriage for a girl was a disaster and a great damage brought in her life. She had no say in the production of babies and “Mahar woman would continue to give birth till she reached menopause” (Kamble, P. 82).

The Blacks have struggled throughout their lives and the struggle had been because they were denied of respect and love. Maya, the protagonist in *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* faces many challenges in her life which gives her lot of pain. She is raped by her mother’s live-in –partner Mr. Freeman and bears the physical pain and mental trauma of this sexual assault. Maya is threatened by Mr. Freeman that if she tells anybody her brother Bailey would be killed. She is unable to understand as to what has this incident to do with her brother and why will he be killed and she is always in conflict with herself for she does not get the answers of many questions and she is always stressed out. Maya always felt bad about herself and lacked confidence and wanted to know what made the whites so hateful towards the Blacks. She became dull and lost interest in everything because of the incidents that took place in her life; likewise sexual abuse which she had to face, deviation from her parents and insult brought to her by her white playmates who called her to be of “shit color”(Angelou, P. 24). There was a lot of internal struggle which Maya had to cope with, and she had no one to share her problems with. Apart from the incidents that took place in Maya’s life, the Black Community as a whole also had to suffer a lot as there are many instances narrated in *I know Why The Caged Bird Sings* which clearly indicate towards the sufferings of the entire Black community. In the book there is mentioned an incident in which there was some discussion going on between Uncle Willie and Mr. Reverend, who was the presiding elder in the church of Stamps about the latest developments where in the topic arose of how a man was killed by white folks and “thrown into the pond, all because the white folks said he did ‘it’ to a white woman”(Angelou, P. 40). The man was “shot in the head”(Angelou, P. 40). Thus we see how brutally the acts of damaging, harming and killing the Blacks took place.

Likewise, the physical abuse, torture and grievous bodily harm was quite prominent in the Mahar community shown in Kamble’s autobiography *The Prisons We Broke*. Physical pain and damage done to the body was at extreme and beyond one’s imagination. Husbands would beat their wives ruthlessly with a stick “until the sticks broke” (Kamble, P. 98). The book depicts that a Dalit woman was always treated as a sex symbol. After getting a thorough beating from her husband “at night, he would sit on her chest and taking his own time” (Kamble, P. 101). Kamble in her book *The Prisons We broke* mentions to Maya Pandit (translator of the book *Jina Amucha* in English) in an interview that “all cases of rape are suppressed for fear of family honour, pressures from the dominant communities and political parties (Kamble, P.154).Sasu (mother-in-law) considered her daughter-in-law as her enemy and the “sasus would wake her, dragging her by her hair” (Kamble, P. 94). The poor daughters-in-law had to wait for their turn to eat and if it happened by chance that the mother-in-law saw her staring at the food then the morsel was thrown at her (daughter-in-law). The husbands were no less than their mothers, they would go on hitting their wives until “the heads of these women would break open, their backbones would be crushed, and some would collapse even” (Kamble, P.98). In some cases, Baby Kamble reports that, the husband would even “cutoff her nose” (Kamble, P. 101) and she was thrown out of the house. The daughters-in-law always had to be extra careful in not making any mistakes or else they had to be ready to face the consequences.

Maya Angelou’s *I know Why The caged bird Sings* is an autobiography where Maya relates in detail the story of her struggle for identity as an individual in life. Maya’s life has seen many ups and downs but her attitude of not giving up has been attained because of a few people who played a very important role in framing her personality and taught her the real meaning of life. Self-identity is the recognition that everybody has a desire for. Maya wished to be beautiful and “her real hair, which was long and blond” (Angelou, P. 4), she craved for. Maya felt that if her color becomes white and if she doesn’t have a “nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number two pencil” (Angelou, P.5), she would get love and acceptance from everybody. She suffered from inferiority complex and this was the main reason why she was not able to make up in her life. Her brother Bailey always supported her and never let her confidence go down and her grandmother (Annie Henderson) taught her to be strong and independent. Maya’s life actually began at the age of thirteen when she moved to San Francisco with her mother (Vivian Baxter and Daddy Clidell). Maya

mentions here that “Daddy Clidell, who turned out to be the first father I would know” (Angelou, P. 223). She had high views about him. He was a simple man who did not have any inferiority complex in himself. In spite of being less educated was still a “successful businessman” (Angelou, P. 223). He was Maya’s stepfather. She also talked about the life in San Francisco. She felt quite homely there because of the constant changes that took place because the world war II which had broken and San Francisco “experienced a major revolution” (Angelou, P. 224) and gave an upper hand to the Blacks. The Japanese diminished gradually and the Japanese shops were taken over by “enterprising Negro businessmen, and in less than a year became permanent homes away from home for the newly arrived Southern Blacks.” (Angelou, P.224). This displacement of Japan during the wartime and the advancement of the Blacks made Maya “dauntless and free from fears”(Angelou,P.227). Maya always found happiness in reading as she was friends with books and for this, the credit went to Mrs. Bertha Flowers who made Maya feel “proud to be Negro, just by being herself.” (Angelou, P. 103) and her move to San Francisco where she studied in a school and there she happened to meet her teacher named Miss Kirwin who never discriminated amongst Black students and White students. Maya was “one of the three Black students in the school” (Angelou, P. 230). She also took dance and drama in her evening classes and did not feel shy thinking about her “cucumber-shaped body” (Angelou, P. 233) and danced confidently. In this context it is worth mentioning Audre Lorde, a great African –American poet and essayist here who states that “It is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves, we will be defined by others- for their use and to our detriment”(Collins, P. 40). In San Francisco Maya lives with her mother Vivian Baxter and Daddy Clidell. Both her parents took good care of her. Mother taught her social conduct while Daddy Clidell guided her and gave her the life lessons by introducing Maya to a group of con men who shared their stories on taking revenge from the white by using their cleverness. Maya feels proud listening to the con men success stories and regard them as winners and not as criminals. Maya has now understood that making your own way to lead a happy life is very important. Con men serve a great motivation for Maya. She has now become quite positive and firm in herself which was prominent in the coming days of her visit to her real father’s place in southern California and from here Daddy Bailey(Maya’s real father) plans to take Maya to Mexico and on the way back home daddy is drunk and unable to drive. Maya did not know how to drive but she accepted the challenge and ended up driving home although the car was wrecked but they were safe. Maya leaves her father’s place because she felt herself to be responsible for the fight between his father and his girlfriend Dolores. Imam Subchi points out that “In the context of relationships, some literature shows that infidelity carried out by women is usually closely related to relationship dissatisfaction”(2019). Maya could not tolerate this and the bold Maya leaves her father’s house and feels to be free now thinking about her future. After wandering aimlessly for a day she ended up in a junkyard, slept in a car and the next day she found surrounded by several boys and girls of her age around 14 to 15. She introduces herself as Maya to them and was accepted by them to stay there. Maya learns many things here. She learnt driving and dancing. Maya also mentions that her “thinking process had so changed that I was hardly recognizable to myself” (Angelou, P. 272). Maya by now has become an independent girl who manages on her own going back to her mother in San Francisco where she telephoned her mother and asked her to send the “fare to the airline then I’d pick it up”(Angelou, P. 272). Maya was with her mother again. She has now made up her mind to work and find a job as a Black streetcar conductor. She was just 15 then. She tries hard to get a job and finally succeeds. Maya states about her mother that “she stayed awake to drive me out to the car barn at four thirty in the morning, or pick me up when I was relieved just before dawn”(Angelou, pp. 289-290). Maya becomes the first African American female Black streetcar conductor. In this context it is worth mentioning made by Maria Stewart a women’s right activist that “possess the spirit of independence....Possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted” (Collins, pp. 3-4). Maya has now come a long way from a submissive girl to a proud African American who fights against racial discrimination by taking up the challenge that a black girl can do everything if she wishes to and should not be underestimated. An insecure Maya has now become an intellectual Black African American.

Comparably in *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble, the Mahar community was made to realize that they too have their existence and should revolt against to have their identity. They were made to understand by the teachings of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar that they are the makers of their destiny. Self-respect and social justice were the desirable needs of the Mahars. To achieve this goal, Dalits (the Mahars) in *The Prisons We Broke* were made to attend the meetings and discussions organized at the chawdi. Babasaheb had come once to address his Mahar community where he said “from now onwards you have to follow a different path. You must educate your children. Divorce your children from god. Teach them good things”(Kamble, P. 64). He asked the Mahar women not to be superstitious. Mahar women were asked to take a step forward to educate their children and to be ignorant anymore in life. The Mahar community was motivated by the addressal of Ambedkar that they will have to bring revolution and put an end to the slavery of which they have become accustomed to. Babasaheb said to his people not to eat the dead animals. To bring reformation in the Mahar community, Babasaheb had high hopes from Mahar women so he requested saying “my mothers and sisters, be the first ones to step forward for reform” (Kamble, P. 65). A great change was seen in the Mahars. They after attending the meeting of

Babasaheb, started organizing their own meetings for their people and the topic of discussion was always on the preaching's of Babasaheb. The community started following him. "They began to be aware" (Kamble, P. 69). Parents started sending their children to school. "Parents now discarded the loincloth for their children and began dressing them up in pajamas. They began cutting the hair of their young daughters"(Kamble, P. 69). It was Babasaheb's influence only that BabyKamble and her brother were enrolled in school. "The chawdi started getting a newspaper and reports of Baba's public meetings and speeches began to be read out to the public" (Kamble, P. 106). A great sign of bravery was seen in school when the upper castes girls threw stones and dust at the Maha girls and in return "they would get angry and attack them"(Kamble, P. 109). Babasaheb's teachings were being followed by the whole Mahar community. "They all worked with one voice and in one mind. That is why the community grew in strength" (Kamble, P. 113).

Kamble also mentions that "once Baba sent a telegram asking us to exert our rights as the sons of the soil, by forcibly seeking entry into temples and hotels"(Kamble, P. 126). This plan of entering the temple was executed by the hostel boys and even the Mahar girls also made their strategy to enter the Ram temple and see the god's idol. Such daring acts were accomplished. Mahar women had grown strong. They fought for their rights because Kamble specifies that "our Ambedkar has told us to demand our rights"(Kamble, P. 133). The result of this was that when Kamble for the first time attended the "women's club, Mahila Mandal"(Kamble, P. 132). The club was established by Rani Laxmibai and "she was very young then. It was only Brahmin women who occupied all the positions in this mandal"(Kamble, P. 132). Rani Laxmibai allowed Mahar women also into the mandal. Kamble when saw that the Mahar women were not offered chairs and were made to stand at one side and the chairs were used by Brahmin and Maratha women, she brought this to the notice of Rani sahiba (Rani Laxmibai) that "your women are not allowing our women to sit on the chairs and I am going to forcefully remove your women from the chairs and seat my women there" (Kamble, p. 133). Rani sahiba was shocked to hear this and she got the chairs arranged for all the Mahar women. Attending meetings had become a part of their routine life and the women were more aware of the things going around. They actively participated and "their knowledge began to increase"(Kamble, P. 133). BabyKamble got married at the age of 13 and she showed her involvement in Ambedkar movement. She played an active role in the public meetings which were organized. Babasaheb's encouragement to learn and have your own business inspired Kamble and her husband to open a grocery store of theirs. Later, Kamble took up writing and also started "ashram shala for orphans from the backward castes"(Kamble, P.135). She also became the "President of Mahatma Phule DnyanVikas Prasarak sanstha" (Kamble, P.135) and around two hundred children studied there. This is how Baby Kamble served the community. The two autobiographies thus not only depict the trauma of discrimination faced by oppressed Blacks and Dalits but also give a detail account of how these oppressed people started resisting oppression.

II. CONCLUSION:

In both the autobiographies the persistent battle is seen to create an image of pridefulness. The two societies being different with regard to geographical locations, culture, language and race have numerous commonalities when it comes to discriminatory socio-political fabric. They were deprived of opportunities and basic human rights and forced to live impoverished and poverty-stricken lives. Because their problems are same, sufferings are similar and pains are just like each other's, therefore both American Blacks and Indian Dalits have the same stories to tell and the same challenges to overcome. This is what this paper makes an attempt to prove.

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