
**Caste Discrimination and Struggles for Freedom in Baby Kamble's
*The Prisons We Broke***

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Abstract

The paper, "Caste Discrimination and Struggles for Freedom in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*" aims to study Caste Discrimination and Struggles for Freedom of Baby Kamble. *Jina Amucha* (Marathi autobiography) is written by Baby Kamble and translated into English as *The Prisons We Broke* by Maya Pandit which is a milestone in the history of dalit writing in Marathi. It is an expression of protest against the inhuman conditions which the Hindu caste system subjected the dalits for thousands of years. Dalit women who experienced three oppressions: caste, class and gender. Radical social reformers like Mahatma Phule and Shahu Maharaja raised their voice against the atrocities of the Brahmin-dominated caste system. Dr. Ambedkar provided the intellectual and ideological foundations for a sustained critique of the caste system.

Autobiography, the most important and favourite genre for dalit writers constitutes a significant segment of dalit literature. Dalit writers termed as 'self-stories' (atma katha) most of the autobiographies are the tales of personal sufferings fused with interpersonal responses and community feelings which they experience in Indian society. Dalit autobiographies present the reality without any exaggeration, not circumscribed by a writer's life alone but the expansion, extension of social description and an outcry of the soul. Dalit literature is the document of their struggle for human identity.

Baby Kamble describes the physical and psychological violence dalit women have to undergo in both in the public and private spheres. Dalit women in India suffer from

three oppressions: gender, as a result of patriarchy; class, from being from the poorest and most marginalized communities; and caste, from coming from the lowest caste, the 'untouchables' Dalit women not only grapple with the discrimination due to caste hierarchy and untouchability but they live in poverty coupled with political, legal and religio-cultural discrimination. Dalit Women, are often offended, discriminated, deprived of human dignity and have been subject to inhuman treatment and ugly form of untouchability, illiteracy, poor health, lack of or denial of education and alienation. Dalit Women's day-to-day struggle is the existence, survival and justice. The everyday discrimination is dotted by mental and physical violence. Eternally, the principles of 'high and low', 'purity and pollution' has not left any scope for changing Dalit women's status.

Discrimination against women, which is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity, discrimination against women belonging to particular Caste also manifest in extreme forms of physical and sexual violence and harassment. The socio-political and economic conditions of dalit women continue to remain voiceless even today. Dalit women are yet to be united to raise their voices collectively in various political and socio-cultural fields, so that their voices can be heard.

Keywords:Discrimination, caste, untouchability, violence, oppression and harassment.

The paper, "Caste Discrimination and Struggles for Freedom in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*" aims to study Caste Discrimination and Struggles for Freedom of Baby Kamble. *Jina Amucha* is Marathi autobiography by Baby Kamble and it is translated in to English by Maya Pandit. *The Prisons We Broke* is a milestone in the history of dalit writing in Marathi. It is the first dalit autobiography not only in Marathi but in any Indian languages. It is an expression of protest against the inhuman conditions which the Hindu caste system subjected the dalits for thousands of years. Dalit women who experienced three oppressions: caste, class and gender.

Dalits and caste discrimination go hand in hand. Dalits and the downtrodden are denied even the most basic and fundamental rights is a historical and contemporary reality. In the recent past efforts are made to eliminate discrimination. The nineteenth

century radical social reformers like Mahatma Phule and Shahu Maharaja had raised their voice against the atrocities of the Brahmin-dominated caste system. Dr. Ambethkar provided the intellectual and ideological foundations for a sustained critique of the caste system. Under his leadership, dalit protest acquired the form and force of a militant, political movement and challenged the very foundation of Varnashradharma, the Brahminical creed that has sanctioned and perpetuated the oppression of dalits. Dalit writings bloomed. Poetry, fictional narratives and autobiographies emerged as the dominant forms of articulation. Kumud Pawade, Shantaaai Krishnji Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Shantabai Dani, Mukta, Sarvagod and Baby Kamble are some of the important dalit women writers who wrote their autobiographies. Dalit women's personal narratives are a kind of protest against the exploitations. The self narrative is both the individual and also the collective, historically located and sociologically constituted empowers dalit women.

In Greek, *autos* signifies 'self', *'bios'* life', and *'graphe'* 'writing'. The words denote self-life writing. The British poet-critic Stephen Spender cites the dictionary definition of autobiography as "the story of one's life written by himself". French theorist Philippe Lejeune says, "We call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality.

Autobiography, the most important and favourite genre for dalit writers constitutes a significant segment of dalit literature. Dalit writers termed as 'self-stories' (*atma katha*) most of the autobiographies are the tales of personal sufferings fused with interpersonal responses and community feelings which they experience in Indian society. So, autobiography is a form of resistance against various forms of oppression, mostly personal, yet they narrate their stories with a realization of other members of their community who suffer in the same way. Dalit autobiographies present the reality without any exaggeration, not circumscribed by a writer's life alone but the expansion, extension of social description and an outcry of the soul. Dalit literature is the document of their struggle for human identity. The hopes and aspirations of the exploited masses, the problems of untouchability, the exploitation of dalit women by higher caste are the themes of dalit literature. The aim of dalit writers is to expose the evils of caste system and prejudice done by higher caste. They write what they see, feel and think in the social environment. Dalit literature is the document of their struggle for human identity. They write what they see, feel and think in the social

environment. Linda Anderson highlights "...ranges across canonical and non-canonical texts and looks closely at twentieth-century women's writing, black and postcolonial writing. She explores the ideological assumptions about the nature of the self that underlie autobiographical writing, particularly in the light of recent feminist, psychoanalytic and poststructuralist criticism" (Linda Anderson 2)

The Prisons We Broke brings to light from self-assertion, confrontation with Brahminical hegemony on the one hand and with patriarchal domination on the other. It is published almost twenty years after the completion of writing. It deals with a deep rooted urge to engage with the history of the Mahar community. Baby Kamble writes, "I wrote about what my community experienced. The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences became mine. So, I really find it very difficult to think of myself outside of my community" (Baby Kamble 136).

Baby Kamble describes the physical and psychological violence dalit women have to undergo in both in the public and private spheres. Dalit women in India suffer from three oppressions: gender, as a result of patriarchy; class, from being from the poorest and most marginalized communities; and caste, from coming from the lowest caste, the 'untouchables' Dalit women not only grapple with the discrimination due to caste hierarchy and untouchability but they live in poverty coupled with political, legal and religio-cultural discrimination. Baby Kamble states how she feels herself and the community she belongs. "The suffering of my community has always been more important than my own individual suffering. I have identified myself completely with my people. And therefore Jina Amucha was the autobiography of my entire community." (Baby Kamble 157)

She demonstrates that how caste and patriarchy converge to perpetuate exploitative practices against women. She shows the remarkable dignity and resistance of the Mahar women in their struggle through which they emerged as the agents of transformation in their community. Baby Kamble acknowledges proudly, "I am a product of the Ambethar movement. I came in contact with the movement when I was a child of hardly seven years of age" (Baby Kamble 125).

She made a firm resolve at a young age to lead her life the path sketched by Dr. Ambethkar, the light of her life. Dalit women suffer due to their dual disadvantages, being dalit and being woman. They are alienated at three levels due to their caste, class and gender. While the upper caste men sexually exploit them in their workplace,

at home they are beaten up by their own men. Kamble does not glorify the life of the dalit community but she states explicitly how her community people became slaves and forced to live worse than animals. Discrimination in the name of caste which affects dalit children in general and Baby Kamble in particular. She documents the plight as, "All the girls in the class had benches to sit except us, Mahar girls. We had to sit on the floor in one corner of the classroom like diseased puppies"(Baby Kamble 129).

Dalits rights are violated over 200 million known as Untouchables or outcastes . Despite the existence of Constitutional rights and other affirmative action that is meant to address the issues, today their predicament can be described in terms of a lost humanity and a dispossessed community who live in segregated conditions. Dalits and particularly Dalit Women, are often offended, discriminated, deprived of human dignity and have been subject to inhuman treatment and ugly form of untouchability, illiteracy, poor health, lack of or denial of education and alienation in labour market. Women went with baskets and brooms to Maratha households to collect the leftover food. The life of dalits is worse than animals. People in the village lived in poverty. They had no power but their hearts were full of kindness and love for each other. The Mahars should clean the shit, all the dirty and laborious works were the privilege of the Mahars. The extreme perennial economic deprivation has also resulted in illiteracy, malnourishment, poor health conditions, besides this they are also overworked, oppressed and victimized by a number of factors, including patriarchal attitude within the family and community.

Dalit Women's day-to-day struggle is the existence, survival and justice. The everyday discrimination is dotted by mental and physical violence. Eternally, the principles of 'high and low', 'purity and pollution' has not left any scope for changing Dalit women's status. Beating, rape, naked parading, labeled as witches and harassed for murder by burning of houses, destruction of properties, valuables, crops etc. The National Commission for Scheduled Bastes and Scheduled Tribes, the number of cases of atrocities against Dalits registered. Violence forms the core result of gender-based inequalities, and intensified by caste discrimination. Women are gang raped, forced into prostitution, stripped, paraded around naked, and made to eat excrement, even murdered for no crime of theirs. Thousands of women manual scavengers are forced to earn their living scavenging, cleaning dry latrines, by using metal pans and a short broom to scoop up the night soil. The excreta is carried in baskets on their

heads. The dehumanized practice has killed dignity of women at the same time these women believe that without this job they will be nowhere to their livelihoods.

Lack of educational development is another important problem for Dalit Women, placing them at a disadvantages position as compared to both Dalit men as well as non-dalits. Dalit girls are denied educational opportunities because of Caste and gender discrimination. Dalit women have to depend on wage labour employment to earn their livelihood, they have a poor economic base and higher unemployment rate. This is seen in terms of their lower standard of living and higher level of poverty. In rural areas they have to walk long distance to collect fodder, fuel materials and water women have to shoulder more responsibilities and their families have to survive on their meager wage labour. Women take nutrient deficient food since most of them are below poverty line. Dalit Women suffer from some form of anemia .Dalit Women are under-nourished

The majority of Dalit women continue to rely, and commercialization and privatization of public healthcare services, poor Dalit women are being forced to fend for themselves either to live with ill-health or to enter into health-related debt. This has the chain effect of affecting the health status of Dalit children and their families, besides lowering the income generating capacity of Dalit women. Central and State Governments ensure no discrimination on the grounds of caste and sex with regards to Government or public employment. Men and women have equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood, equal pay for equal work for men and women, women equal rights with men in the areas of education, economic and social life. Discrimination against women, which is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity, discrimination against women belonging to particular Caste also manifest in extreme forms of physical and sexual violence and harassment . They are also prohibited from using the main roads in the villages, from entering temples; their children are prevented from attending schools. In fact they are pushed out of the mainstream community life. This kind of exclusion is much more evident in villages as compared to cities.

One of the more significant developments in the post independence period is the rising Dalit consciousness and activism. Dalits, achievements in creative writing, cultural expression on the Dalit experience, a search for ideology and identity, a growing organized socio-political strength, are in evidence. Among the Dalit masses a new wave of assertiveness is noticeable on all fronts. Dalits are becoming

less willing to accept social, cultural an economic subjugation and claiming for dignified Human Rights. Many observe and believe that this assertiveness is the result of the middle and upper caste backlash. Women's participation in the anti-untouchability movement is an interesting phenomenon, activism of untouchable women in the beginning of the 20th century. Women's activities developed from participation as beneficiaries or as an audience, and shouldering of significant responsibilities in various fields of activity in the Ambedkar movement. Comprehensive development policy should spell out concrete and time-bound strategies and programmes for the socio-economic and political upliftment of Dalit women to gain a minimum of five acres of cultivable land, registered in their name. Implement reservations in employment in both the public and private sectors for Dalit women, and specifically target Dalit women for capacitating. All programmes and project planning free education at the formal schooling, technical and professional education levels for Dalit girls to prevent globalization unemployment and poverty. Rajkumar a dalit critic points out that ambedkar's lifelong struggles was to fight against caste to build an egalitarian Indian society , but the annihilation of caste reminds a distant dream. He says "caste atrocities continue to be perpetuated against, and the uppercastes are still intolerant of dalit subjectivity. (Rajkumar 5)

Baby kamble says as, "The shopkeeper's children would be trickling out into the courtyard for their morning ablutions. He would give the innocent children lessons in social behaviour, 'Chabu, hey you, can't you see the dirty Mahar woman standing there? Now don't you touch her. Keep your distance'" (Baby 14) Dalit women should have equal access without caste or gender discrimination to healthcare and social security services, fundamental rights protected in all situations, to bring justice to by the law. Gender division reinforces and sustains caste distinctions; and the gender ideology legitimizes not only the structure of patriarchy but also the element of Caste hierarchy. that lower caste women are considered inferior and sexually loose. vidhya devi social activist who works for dalit upliftment says as "Caste discrimination is extended to all aspects of life whether in employment education health and holding security and all aspects of women's rights the psychological effects on inferior has constitute grass human rights abuse and continuing cruelty". (Vidhya 136) she further records that "Millions of dalits are systematically and institutionally deprived of their civil right political economic social and cultural rights in every aspect of life."(Vidhya i) The role of Dalit women is crucial and it is in the centre of Dalit liberation and identity; in the larger framework

of Dalit movement and struggle. Henceforth, Dalit vision is more than an equal partner with men and main path of alternative consciousness, primarily feminist, non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical and positively ecological. Dalit women all over the country need to stand up for freedom, inalienable right to human dignity and equal status with men and others in the society.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, there are two enemies of Dalits, Caste ideology and capitalism. Powerful assertion, alternatives and a socialist perspective are based on justice and equality and new perspective towards emancipation of Dalits and Dalit women. According to Dr. Ambedkar "battle is in the fullest sense of spiritual". It is a battle for freedom; it is the battle for the reclamation of human personality". "Tell me, do your children know anything about Baba Ambedkar? Do they know the teachings of the Buddha? Do you have the guts to sing in praise of your religion, your Baba?" (Baby 122) Baby Kamble raises certain important issues like caste discrimination, women subjugation and the influence of Dr Ambedkar on Dalit women to get themselves educated both socially and culturally. Kamble writes about caste discrimination that the poor Mahars went under. Mahars were treated as untouchable servants yeskars. By doing yeskar jobs, the Mahars would get bhakris (leftover food) which they eat after drying them in the sun. Mahars are not allowed to use the regular road that is used by the upper castes. Kamble writes, "When somebody from these castes walked from the opposite direction, the Mahars had to leave the road, climb down into the shrubbery and walk through the thorny bushes on the road side." (Baby 52)

. Every new bride had to adopt and follow this custom. If they failed, they would be severely warned by the upper castes as well as Mahars. If anyone failed to beg for mercy of the upper castes, the master would simply explode in rage and come straight to the Mahar chawdi and call the new bride a shameless bitch. Kamble writes, "Who, just tell me, who the hell is that new girl? Doesn't she know that she has to bow down to the master? Shameless bitch! How dare she pass me without showing due respect?" (Baby 53) The elderly women from the Mahar community would fall on the feet of the master and beg for his mercy. The poor Mahars would request the master, "No, no kind master! The girl is a new animal in the herd! Quite 101 foolish and ignorant. If she has erred, I, her sara, fall at your feet, but please forgive us for this crime." (Baby 53)

Bama a dalit feminist writer records in the forward of the book Singh, Bijender. *Different Dimensions of Dalit Discourse*, "The liberation of dalit is the only

condition of deliberation of Indian people Delhi literature helps to build up a society with equality fraternity and liberty.” (Bama iii) Dalit women’s vision emerges from their emotions, struggles, aspirations and experiences, which has its roots in untouchability and violence, which are very specific in nature to Dalit womanhood. Their suffering encourages them to have common cause with other oppressed and marginalized of the marginal for transforming the society as a whole. Political representation and participation of women, particularly from Dalit communities, in all decision-making bodies to be enhanced, eventually plan to establish a political academy for women in India. “Remember, what you are today is solely because of Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar. This life of luxury has been possible for you because of him”(Baby 123) Dalits do not expect anything from caste Hindus, but the reality is entirely different. It is apt to quote the words of Dr.Ambedkar “Caste does not result in economic efficiency. Caste cannot improve, and has not improved, the race. Caste has however done one thing. It has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus”. (Ambedkar 43) Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become caste bound. There is no sympathy for the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity, but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste.(Ambedkar 45)

To conclude, Dalits demand liberation. The model of development pursued in independent India and especially in the current period of unfettered liberalization and globalization, is essentially hostile to their dignified existence. The system should recognize the right of Dalits to live. Dalit women should get priority over all other issues. The socio-political and economic conditions of dalit women continue to remain voiceless even today. Dalit women are yet to be united to raise their voices collectively in various political and socio-cultural fields, so that their voices can be heard. The evil of untouchability is still prevalent in different parts of India, overtly and covertly. This is evident at village wells, ponds, temples, eating places, and social functions. So, untouchability remains a social reality even today.

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