



# Poverty, Violence and Caste Discrimination in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*

**Dr. Prashant Mandre**

Teaching Assistant

P.G.Dept of studies in English

Karnatak Arts College, Dharwad

## Abstract

Caste is descent based and inherited in nature. Caste is a feature determined by one's birth into a particular caste irrespective of the belief practiced by the human beings. Caste indicates a system of inflexible social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation. Under a variety of caste systems throughout the world, caste divisions also control in marriage, housing, and general social interface divisions that are unbreakable through the practice and threat of social leaving out, economic boycotts, and even physical violence.

As the lowest in the caste pecking order, Dalits in Hindu society have previously suffered caste-based social prohibiting from civil, cultural, economic and political rights. Women from this society suffer from not only prejudice based on their gender but also caste identity and resultant economic scarcity. Dalit women's troubles include not only gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination associated with caste, religion and untouchability which in turn results in the rejection of their cultural, social, economic, and political rights. They become powerless to sexual violence and utilization due to their gender and caste. Dalit women also become victims of objectionable social and spiritual practices such as devadasi/jogini (temple prostitution), resulting in sexual exploitation in the name of religion. For more information inequity faced by Dalit women on description of their gender and caste is obviously reflected in the discrepancy achievements in person development indicators for this group. The indicators of human growth, for example, literacy and durability, Dalit women achieve worse than Dalit men and non-Dalit women. The troubles of Dalit women are diverse and outstanding in many ways and they suffer from the 'triple burden' of caste discrimination, gender prejudice, and economic scarcity.

## Key words:

Dalit women, Poverty, Violence, discrimination, consciousness, Society etc

## Full Length Paper

Baby Kamble is born on 1929 usually known as Babytai Kamble was an Indian activist and writer. She was born into an untouchable caste Mahar the main untouchable group of people in Maharashtra. She was a prominent Dalit activist and writer. Baby Kamble was inspired by B. R. Ambedkar important dalit leader. Kamble and her family rehabilitated to Buddhism and remained lifelong practicing Buddhists. In her community she came to be accepted as a writer and was tenderly called as Tai (meaning sister). She is widely remembered and respected by the Dalit people for her contributions of influential literary and activist works. She is one of the earliest women writers from the untouchable communities whose idiosyncratic reflexive style of feminist writing setting her apart from other Dalit writers and higher caste women writers who gaze was limited and reflexivity enslaved in caste and masculinity.

Baby Kamble is importantly acclaimed and known for her autobiographical work *Jina Amucha* written in Marathi. Social Activist Maxine Bernstein was significant in encouraging Baby Tai Kamble to publish her writings which Kamble had kept as a secret from her family. Bernstein exposed Kamble concern and her writings in Phaltan where Bernstein was conducting her research. She convinced and persuaded Baby Tai to print her writings which soon became one of the best autobiographical books on caste, poverty, violence, and triple discrimination faced by Dalit women. This is auto narrative history Baby Kamble's life story in pre-colonial to postcolonial India. It is intensely embedded with two significant serious moments in the Indian history independence from the British rule and anti-caste movement led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Thus Baby Tai's memoirs are just not individual account of a woman's life history but it is a deeply political and a critical record of the making of the country from the vantage point of a very insecure social location. *Jina Amucha* public input is it is a nation's life history record from the impervious woman's point of view. It is also therefore a critical account the nation and its margins lives of untouchables in a caste Hindu society.

Important major portions of the book expressive caste and gender discrimination and multilayered aggression suffered by Dalit women at the hands of the savarna (upper caste Hindus) and Dalit men. This honesty and reflexivity has been mainly missing in upper caste women's writings. Baby Kamble also highlights how the caste Hindu women and men treated untouchables with contempt, disgust, and hate. This work became one of the most powerful and

emotional auto-biographical writing in Marathi. This book was translated by Maya Pandit into English titled *The Prisons We Broke* and published by Orient Blackswan.

Babytai Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* was originally written in Marathi as *Jina Amucha* and later translated into English by Maya Pandit. It can be distant into two sections on the basis of the arguments she presents in the work. Importantly she follows a broad thematic demonstration of the weirdness of Dalit women inside their own community. Secondly Babytai Kamble praises the role played by fellow women in following in the footpath of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar to dream of impartiality with upper-caste Hindus in the social order.

In *The Prisons We Broke*, Kamble uses her life as a basis to identify Dalit oppression painting raw images of the crude realities of their world. rising up in a Maharwada in Maharashtra puts her in major position to witness Dalit oppression at one of its worst, because Maharwadadas are the spirit of the prejudices of the Hindu caste system which are most widespread in and around Maharashtra. Maharwadadas usually consist of secure to 15 families belonging to the Mahar caste located in the outer edge of villages of Maharashtra, which sarcastically owes its etymological origins to the Mahars who are the original people of these regions. Maharashtra is one of the states where the caste organization is most prevalent, *The Prisons We Broke* is justified in being a statement upon Dalit oppression. Maharashtra has witnessed Dalit revolt in literature, religious practices inter alia over centuries. *The Prisons We Broke* is one such effort although one of the firsts by a Dalit woman explanatory its description on women's issues.

That is not to say that this superiority has not been met with consequence. *The Prisons We Broke* is one such effort though one of the firsts by a Dalit woman descriptive its narrative on women's issues. Scholars have classify feminism in three broad waves in India where the first two waves (consist of characterization of feminism solely by elite upper-class men with a redeemer compound since political awareness ran low in Hindu women then as they were kept on a leash using ancestral and religious institutions. Still within the third wave feminism, there are three documented sub-categories, namely

- (1) The Period of Accommodation,
- (2) The Period of Crisis
- (3) The Period of Empowerment.

In this period 'Period of Accommodation' which can be said to have gave way to the 'Period of Crisis' where around the 1960s socio-economic matters were the major concern of the feminist movement in India. Babytai Kamble, born 1929 wrote *The Prisons We Broke* in 2009 and a greater part of the book represents of her lived experiences that can be traced back to the that years representing the Period of Accommodation and onwards. Pinning *The Prisons We Broke* as writing from that period means the work should have focused on issues of gender equality and women empowerment. However the theory of intersectional feminism clarifies how Dalit feminism cannot be said to be at par in its growth and demands with the rest of the feminist movement in India and justify Babytai's dependence on socio-economic inequality as the source of her writing in *The Prisons We Broke*.

The central theme noticeable in *The Prisons We Broke* is the inter sectionalist of the troubles of Dalit women. Babytai highlights in subtle ways all the way through the book that if Dalits were seen as an others group of people by upper caste Hindus, Dalit women were subject to the same manners by men within their own community. She qualifies to the established patriarchal social follows within the organization of family which make themselves most apparent only in the lowest social strata.

In fact she goes on to point that power dynamics growing on account of familial and sociological relations mean women are pitted against each other as well leading to worsening conditions for women in general. She quotes exact examples of the relations between a woman with her mother-in-law and those between a Dalit woman and an upper-caste Brahmin woman to support her quarrel in *The Prisons We Broke*. Babytai Kamble states it was usually observed in Maharwadass that a woman would mistakenly guilt her daughter-in-law of doing deeds she would not even understand, driving the young girl to death and persuades her son into re-marrying a widow. She provides emotional reasons for this behavior being one where the woman being incompetent of projecting her pent-up emotions towards the society finds solace in her victory over a minor being even if it is at the cost of her life. It is this strangeness of women which presents itself in intersectional forms that Kamble chooses as the subject matter of *The Prisons We Broke*.

In *The Prisons We Broke* Babytai query the illogical practices of Hinduism followed and supported by Mahars despite being outcasts to the Hindu community confirmations by the fact that Mahars were compulsory to live outside villages to not fraudulent areas inhabited by caste

Hindus. Women had to face the force of irrational Hindu rituals more than most on account of their lowly position in the Hindu society.

She supports this claim by examples firstly, of her own mother being reduced to such inability due to years of oppression that she could not maintain amiable relations with any of her relatives and secondly, of women wed in the Maharwada who were necessary to keep a passive outlook donning their pallava and applying kumkum in the presence of men of their community. In a specific example, she provides context to this preserve writing that for the wrongs of the women before Brahmins it was the Mahars in common who had to face the Brahmin's dishonors straight away but it was the woman who would be reproved and flogged later by the male of her family. She even suggests how mythological goddesses were considered lesser to the male gods of an irrational Hindu religion.

In addition to the usual practices upheld in upper caste privileged households such as women eating only after the men of the household have finished their meals, the Mahar women were subjected to biased practices followed in the lower caste communities. For example, Dalit women have to bend over down and step out of a road in the village when an upper caste man would move toward. Later in *The Prisons We Broke*, she makes states of how Brahmin women would not touch them while accepting money, Dalit girls in schools were made to sit on the ground so as not to contaminate the classroom for caste Hindus.

Baby Kamble depicts the nail on its head in retelling a story of an odd customs where Mahar women had to carry the feces of newly-wed Brahmin women on their heads Hindu custom obligatory the Brahmin women not to leave the house even for the reasons of defecation during this period to ward off evils and because of the Hindu tradition being reluctant to the idea of construction of toilets inside homes for the purposes of sanctity and purity of the household.

Babytai given the evidence directly at the start of *The Prisons We Broke* when she says she is addressing the millennial of her own group of people completely. In the second part of the book Kamble distinguishes that the living situation of Dalits have taken a turn for the better and that Dalits all over the place owe their betterment to Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar. However Kamble believes that the vastness of his involvement to the Dalit cause is not understood in its whole by younger generations because of their spanking socio-economic rise. She also believes that the role of Dalit women in the strengthen of Dalits should not be ignored as well because they form



as essential a part as any in spreading the gospel of Dr B. R. Ambedkar and paving the way towards a better opportunity than lifelong shit-shoveling for their children.

In *The Prisons We Broke* Babytai affirm that the Mahars were a absurd people. Diseases of the body were typified as being possessions of the soul by gods and goddess's further illustrative a person's passing away due to such sickness as their doorway into the metaphysical monarchy. This was because Mahars had neither money nor access to medicines but mostly for the reason that of a culture against education commit by the upper castes to keep the Mahars from bearing the fruits of civilization. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar changed such primary thinking of Mahars when he arrived in villages attired in a three-piece suit exhorting them to aim better material well-being and give up on the existence intended for them by the Hindu caste system. Kamble remembers that Mahar women who were anything but rebellious up until that point in time would now go in opposition to the head male patriarch of the Maharwada in cultivating their children adopting the practice of not eating dead animals and giving up irrational customs after the instruction of Dr B. R. Ambedkar.

The irrational practices forced by the Hindu religious order upon the Mahars for eons have been referred to as prisons in the title of the book metaphorically, and Babytai maintains that Mahar women were involved in rising up against these social problems designed to keep the Mahars in professions such as manual hunted skinning of dead animals and boot polishing amid other practices which communicated to lowly payment to ensure their animal-like survival for generations.

These details authenticate her original argument of the cruciality of women in defying age-old customs and ultimately leading their people to prosperity, which was kept from them by the higher ups in the varna system. Also mainly this part of the book makes the title *The Prisons We Broke* clear in its whole. The superstitious practices forced by the Hindu religious order upon the Mahars for eon have been referred to as prisons in the title of the book symbolically Babytai claims that Mahar women were instrumental in rising up against these social problems designed to keep the Mahars in professions such as manual scavenging, skinning of dead animals and boot polishing amid other practices which corresponded to lowly payment to ensure their animal-like existence for generations.

Babytai praises Ambedkar for initiating an intellectual discourse in which the Mahar women participated vocally. The reason of making these claims is to call upon the younger people to be

grateful for their roots and to propagate the idea of Ambedkar. Nevertheless as true and personal the accounts are the writing lacks the inspiration and material to arouse any serious rational conversation as would have befit a work of this nature. To demonstrate there is no mention of critical writings of Ambedkar such as ‘The Annihilation of Caste’ to direct the young readers to appreciate the vision of Ambedkar. Babytai calls upon younger members of the Dalit community to identify and appreciate Ambedkar’s role in their rise in the ranks through this novel it would have been more apt to pursue this purpose in depth where the book only brushes upon it cursorily.

### Works Cited

1. Baby Kamble (trans. Maya Pandit), *The Prisons We Broke* New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009.
2. Deepak Lal, *Hindu Equilibrium: Cultural Stability and Economic Stagnation*, Vol. I, Carendor, Oxford, 1984.
3. Urmila Pawar (trans. Maya Pandit), *The Weave of My Life* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
4. B. R. Ambedkar, ‘*The Hindu Social Order—Its Unique Features*’ in Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.3, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987, pp. 116–129.
5. B. R. Ambedkar, ‘*Annihilation of Caste,*’ in Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol 1. Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987,
6. B. R. Ambedkar, ‘*The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Women,*’ The Mahabodhi (Calcutta), 59.5–6. 137–151. 1950 (first published in form of a pamphlet).