



Dalit Women's Struggle and Influence of Bababasaheb Dr B. R. Ambedkar: A Study of Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke (Jina Amucha)*

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Abstract

In her autobiographical story *The Prison We Broke (Jina Amucha)*, Baby Kamble challenges the inconsistencies and paradoxes present in the way the Mahar community of Dalits embraced the Ambedkarite ideal of a casteless society founded on equality, liberty, and fraternity. A vivid glimpse into the inner workings of the Mahar community in Maharashtra may be found in *The Prisons We Broke*. Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* consistently challenges the norms and beliefs that govern the dalit community as a whole, which is crucial. She berates the so-called dalit leaders for preventing dalit women from obtaining an education and achieving economic independence. In her autobiographical narrative, Baby Kamble illustrates and examines the status of dalit communities. The article aims to emphasize this resistance and show how collectively they are working to reconstruct a new, "alternate" social order. The current study emphasizes how autobiographical stories help dalits make a political statement by giving them a platform in society and calling for the establishment of a new social structure based on equality and liberty for all. *The Prisons We Broke*, an autobiography by Baby Kamble, describes the political, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances of the Dalit people in Indian culture. It draws attention to the predicament of Dalit women, who endure cruel treatment and endure hardships on all fronts. This paper aims to discuss the brutal reality of Dalit women's oppression, struggle, and suffering as it is shown in *The Prisons We Broke*. Since Dalit women are known to be at the bottom of the social order, they are denied chances, freedoms, and choices in every aspect of their lives. They also endure violent and cruel living conditions.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Gender Equality, Caste, Education, Social Resistance, Hierarchy

Babasaheb Ambedkar had a big impact on Baby Kamble. Over India's history, the Dalit opposition to the caste system has always existed in one form or another, albeit it was hitherto mainly dispersed. Numerous small-scale uprisings against the persecution and abuses in previous years, but because there was no leadership, they lost contact with one another. The Dalits of India discovered a leader they could look up to and emulate in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a low caste Mahar from the Western Indian state of Maharashtra, who emerged on the national political scene. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a renowned intellectual from across the world, not just another politician thrust by circumstance into the political spotlight. Babasaheb was a highly accomplished intellectual who had experienced oppression and humiliation during his early years. His anger of the caste system grew as a result of this. He broke through all social, linguistic, and regional barriers

among Dalits to win the support of the Dalit masses throughout India with his blatant disrespect for the Hindu religion and his fierce intellect. She says:

Dressed in rags, they would be lying in some dark corner of a hut, crying with hunger. They would have served the high castes day and night, been flogged for small mistakes; they would have to survive on flogging than on food. The monopoly over leftovers from high caste houses would be yours. It was our Bhim who rescued you from such a terrible fate. He showed us this golden day. You must fold your hands to this great man, this self-sacrificing soul, and introduce him to your children. He has made this new life for us. It is to him that we owe our present prosperity. (123)

Kamble draws a lot of inspiration from Ambedkar's remarks. The questioning of Ambedkar serves as the cornerstone for the evolution of ideas regarding the pursuit of one's true identity. Kamble restates the need for dalit parents to educate their kids. The only way their family and lives will get better is via education. According to Ambedkar, the only hope for their survival is for their children to receive an education. He reveals:

From now onwards you have to follow different path. You must educate your children. Divorce your children from god. Teach them good things. Send them to schools. The result will be there for you to see. When your children begin to be educated, your condition will start improving. Your family, your life will improve. Your children will bring you out of this hell. We are humans. We, too, have the right to live as human beings. (64)

Through her writing *The Prison We Broke*, Kamble describes how she experiences discrimination, harassment, and humiliation from both her instructors and peers. Interestingly, though, Kamble and her friends from the mahar caste would fight with their fellow Hindu girls in school. The educational institution where Kamble is enrolled is exclusively for girls. She doesn't feel the slightest bit afraid of her classmates. However, Kamble and her classmates were consistently reprimanded by their teachers, who consistently favored Hindu students. Additionally, the majority of teachers are Brahmins who publicly despise the Mahar kids. She writes:

We, the daughters of the activists in the movement, were enrolled in school no. 5 for girls. It was basically a school for Brahmin girls, with a few girls from other high castes. There were some ten or twelve Mahar girls spread over in various classes. So each class had only a sprinkling of the polluting Mahars. 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... We were like fiery godflies burning for vengeance. (62)

Strong, independent women are capable of leading the dalit community's advancement. They can decide to educate their kids and give up on all superstitions. Ambedkar holds women accountable for ushering in a new era following societal transformation. A new societal perspective only becomes visible in history when a mass revolution alters the course of civilization. The author describes the perseverance of Dalits. How the core of the Dalits survived when millions of them perished. Kamble goes on to say that the arrival of Ambedkar gave the dalit community hope for transformation. The writer's thinking was revolutionized by Ambedkar's statements. Ambedkar counsels them to stand up for their children, give up eating dead animals, change for the better, and give up faith in God and organized religion. It's time to get rid of this maharness, he argues. He disagrees with all of Ambedkar's teachings. He asserts that we must abide by the laws of the land and that we are unable to reverse the direction of the river. It is not necessary for them to enrol their kids in school and teach them foreign languages. He declares:

But we are real Mahars. We will last forever. God has drawn a line for us and you want us to cross it? Listen, we are born for this work. That's our sacred duty. Why should we give up our religion, our duty? We are that real original and pure Maharas! We aren't any of those half-baked converts!

Listen, that Ambedkar has turned your head with his strange foreign knowledge! He has lived among foreigners. Then isn't he polluted? (69)

Even the way saris are worn reflects inequality. Mahar women are viewed as social misfits who do not conform to the norms established by individuals from higher castes. The Prisons We Broke examines how Ambedkar's teachings gave mahar girls a sense of unity and bravery. The author describes how girls from higher castes tease dalit girls mercilessly and how mahar women deal with a harsh culture. She writes: 'You know, I have to bathe again after I go home from school. My mother has come to know that Mahar girls sit in our class and she doesn't allow me to enter the house unless I have a bath. We have to go to the Ram temple. What to do now? Where do we drink water from?' (108-109)

Kamble highlights the negative consequences of illiteracy within the Mahar community. The unsophisticated midwives would stick their hands inside a pregnant woman's vagina to check the baby's progress. They would wipe the infant's face with saliva after spitting on their palms. According to her, educated women have a responsibility to teach their children about the lives of the Buddha and the Bhims through poetry and education. Women's perspectives on life and their place in society changed as a result of their involvement in Baba's movement. Women are moving, with an image of Ambedkar attached to their white *sarees*. As a result, the "Revolutionary group of Women" was created. She gives her community members encouragement by stating that their innate traits motivate them to escape the confines of their current environment. She was born with a spirit of revolt. Here, Kamble is displeased with members of her own community for disobeying Ambedkar and Buddha's teachings. Says she:

Your children have not even the foggiest idea of who Dr. Ambedkar was, and who Buddha was! You are teaching your children to believe in god! There is an explosion of ritual fasts in your families on days of Sankashti Chaturthi, Saturdays, Thursdays-you observe fasts on so many days! Bhima made you and you rub your noses before the very gods that he taught us to discard. Ganesh, Lakshmi- how many gods and goddesses do you introduce your children to? (118)

Deriving inspiration from Dr. Ambedkar, Kamble tells that she started adopting reformist techniques for the welfare of society. She started orphanage for homeless people of the backward classes. The primary motive of Ambedkar's teachings is to provide education. Kamble warns her fellow Mahar people not to defame Baba's name because all of the educated among them have forgotten Ambedkar because of basking in the false glory of their greatness. Further, she writes in this connection:

Baba's words showed me the way. I decided to begin my struggle through my writing. I followed Baba's advice verbatim, to the best of my ability. When Shashikant Daithankar was secretary in the Maharashtra government, he granted me permission to start an ashram shala for orphans from the backward castes. Today, I am the president of Mahatma Phule Dhyani Vikas Prasarak Sanstha and I serve the community in this capacity. Two hundred children study in this school....Sheel, Pradnya and Karuna have been the founding principles of my life. (135)

Kamble paints an uncompromising picture of Dalit women who are threefold oppressed by patriarchy, caste, and gender. Younger ladies who are freshly married especially have the worst fate. Girls are typically married off at the young age of eight or nine, and marriage ends up being nothing more than a terrible tragedy for them. To demonstrate her culinary prowess, the married daughter-in-law's first task was to make *bhakris*. She was not allowed to voice any objections; she was forced to handle all home tasks. Their in-laws can never be relied upon to repay the favour. However, if a girl was unable to perform household chores, her in-laws would mistreat her, particularly if she neglected to prepare *bhakris*. Her mother-in-law would say something like this: Look at the *bhakris* this slut has prepared. She cannot even make a few *bhakris* properly. Oh, well, what can one expect of this daughter of a dunce? (94)

The people who belong to the upper caste also have contradictory beliefs. They do not interact with the Mahar Community members, but they do accept the money that they offer them. After getting inspiration from Baba Saheb Dr Ambedkar, the girls began attending school, but they soon encountered another challenge. They do not share a seat with their classmates. Higher caste members attended their school. The Mahar girls were accepted to school for the first time. As she narrates the story, “they treated us like lepers, as if our bodies dripped with dirty blood or as if pus oozed out of our rotten flesh. If they had to pass by us they would cover their nose, mutter ‘chee chee’ and run as if their life is in mortal danger. The teacher had allotted a place in the corner near the door from where we will not move till the school is over for the day” (Kamble 108).

In response to a follow-up inquiry from Maya Pandit regarding women's political involvement in the Dalit Movement during the post-Ambedkar era, Kamble states that women were integral to Ambedkar's movement up until 1956. However, a tug of war turned into another Ambedkar after his passing. People were bewildered since they were left out of the power conflicts that were certain and they had no idea who Baba's heir was. The higher caste members were concerned because they understood that if the dalit community gained strength and a new leadership emerged, they would lose their position of authority. It is crucial to note that Kamble discusses the politics of caste prejudice that Dalits face in this context. The lives of rural poor dalits and urban prosperous dalits differ greatly from one another.

In those days, it happened because the Dalits were uneducated. Today this happens because the dalits are educated. In those days, the whole village kept us down with tactics like refusing to give us water, keeping us at a distance, and through oppression and injustice. Now the educated dalits are behaving exactly as the upper caste villagers used to behave then. Educated dalits occupy top positions in the government. Their children enjoy the good life. They are not bothered about what's happening to poor people. Whatever they do, they do only for themselves. The poor dalits are left where they were.” (150)

The narrative of Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* takes the reader on a trip from the gloomy past to Mahar's community's recent awakening. How Baba Saheb's teachings enabled people to escape gloomy jails and discover the fresh dawn in post-independence India. Baby Kamble expresses her gratitude how Babasaheb illumined their lives, in her own words, “I made a firm resolve...to lead my life according to the path sketched by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the light of my life” (Kamble 115).

This evaluation makes it clear that Kamble depicts the atrocities a Dalit woman had to endure in realistic and agonizing detail. She was subjected to physical abuse, thrashing, nose-chopping, job overload, and other forms of domestic violence. She was forced to suffer in silence in various forms and at various stages since she had no one to turn to. In addition to her poverty, she had suffered from her caste, gender, and place of origin. Her anguish is layered, wrapped around her in many ways. She had been burdened by life. She definitely paid a high price for her birth. She herself participated in the movement led by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and inspired the women to follow the Baba's call. Her untiring effort became fruitful as many women get educated and got appointments in various reputed professions.

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