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**BABY KAMBLE'S *THE PRISON WE BROKE*: A VIVID DEPICTION OF HER COMMUNITY**

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**Abstract:**

*Baby Kamble's autobiography Jina Amucha is probably the first autobiography in Marathi translated by Maya Pandit as The Prison We Broke which depicted Dalit lives. It is originally a regional work of art. It is an account of Mahar community of Maharashtra. This community has to lead life in almost hell like conditions. Tattered clothes, diseased carcasses for meals and continuous hunger and starvation accompany right from the birth. This autobiography has the power to make the reader angry and ashamed. She authenticates the life of community when Baby Kamble reveals her experiences of life her childhood, her education and her marriage.*

**Keywords:** *Community, Caste, Dalit, Mahar, Society, Atrocities, Untouchability, etc.*

For thousands of years many castes and tribes have been living in India almost unknown to the so called sophisticated society. According to the ancient Hindu scripture there were four classes (*Varnas*): *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Shudra*. These four classes later became the castes. The *Brahmins* were priests, *Kshatriyas*, warriors; *Vaishyas*, traders and the *Shudras* were skilled, semi skilled or unskilled labourers. As the *Brahmins* had all the rights of education they could get knowledge. They used to teach the other classes. The *Brahmins* wrote many Hindu texts which emphasized that the caste system was heaven made. It was also spread that the *Brahmins* were born from the mouth of *Brahma*, the *Kshatriyas* from shoulders, *Vaishyas* from his thighs and the *Shudras* from his feet. This theory made *Brahmins* the superior ones and the *Shudras* inferior, at the bottom of the ladder of the caste system. Because of such theories *Brahmins* always held the top position and *Shudras* that of the bottom. This made the *Shudras* suffer tremendously.

The social, political, economic and religious restriction laid down by the *Brahmins* in the religious texts were implemented by the kings and the *Kshatriyas*. As they were supposed to be the inferior to the other classes, they were denied all the human rights. This is how the *Shudras* later know as *Dalits*, began their journey into darkness. This led the lowest class to slavery and further to 'untouchability'. Initially, they were not allowed to take education but in the later period even their existence was supposed to be polluted. They have been in a way outcasts, lower than the lowest schedule caste, on the bottom-most rung of the social hierarchical ladder. The politics, education, religion, economics of the mainstream society never touched them and they have been living in their own world of superstition, primitive norms of justice and of ignorance.

The plight of *Dalit* women worsened from generations to generations. Their social, economic, psychological exploitation made their life miserable. They did not believe to get rid of this social bond. They laid their life as if it was a curse which did not have any way out.

The revolutionary thoughts and activities of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule and Shahu Maharaj inspired the *Dalit* to think of breaking the chains of the slavery. This work can be traced back to Lord Gautam Buddha for his humanitarian outlook. The revolutionary thoughts were spread among



the *Dalits* to take a form of literature. *Dalit* literature was born out of such struggle of social and economic change.

Initially *Dalit* literature was restricted to the thoughts of social reforms. In the course of time it and to reflect the society and further it became more personal through autobiographies. Jasbir Jain aptly observes: “Autobiographical narratives work backwards in time, and are selective in the choice of events which have impacted the writer (Jain, 282).

Autobiographies are the means of self- examination, self-creation and self- regeneration. The writer creates a meaningful pattern of his past experience by reflecting them. This form of literature has proved boon for *Dalit* writers as it was handy for them, close to them and it can vent their anger which was buried deep in their minds. They can express whatever they have experienced (their painful past). It was a delineation of social system, injustice and exploitation. As a result of this a number of *Dalit* autobiographies have been published till date. Many male writers like Daya Pawar, P.E. Sonkamble and Laxman Mane introduced and established this form in *Dalit* literature. Enchanted by this some women writers too contributed through the experiences which they had with them to express. Women writers like Shantabai Kamble, Kumud Powde and Mukta Sarvagod are noteworthy in *Dalit* literature.

*Dalit* literature began as a revolution in the life of the most oppressed people and achieved popularly as a rebellious form of literature. The attitude of society towards this literature was indifferent initially. Yet it has reached to its zenith because of its faithful and honest depiction of the contemporary society. The autobiography by Baby Kamble is also the depiction of her personal experience found generally.

Baby Kamble’s autobiography *Jina Amucha* is probably the first autobiography in Marathi translated by Maya Pandit as ‘The Prison We Broke’ which depicted *Dalit* lives. It is originally a regional work of art. It is an account of *Mahar* community of Maharashtra. This community has to lead life in almost hell like conditions. Tattered clothes, diseased carcasses for meals and continuous hunger and starvation accompany right from the birth. This autobiography has the power to make the reader angry and ashamed. She authenticates the life of community when Baby Kamble reveals her experiences of life her childhood, her education and her marriage.

Baby Kamble was born in a small village *Veergaon, Phaltan* tehsil place in Satara district in Maharashtra. Right from her childhood she has witnessed many atrocities against her community. The women were subject to many operations in almost all the communities in India but the women in *Mahar* community had to face a double lock; because of the patriarchal system and because of their community. Superiority of the male has troubled her and being a member of an oppressed community adds to her misery. While walking along the road they used to walk from the thorny side tracks. They were not allowed to use main road, when somebody from upper caste walk from the opposite direction they had to say, “(*Jouhar Mai-Baap*) the humble *Mahar* woman fall at your feet Master” innumerable. In case any newly married daughter- in- law unknown to the tradition fails to do so, it is not tolerated by the upper castes. The master would immediately report to *Mahar-Chawdi* (a public place, where all the community gather for common purposes) and shout at the people. The father- in- law of ‘the woman’ and other members from the community would fall at the master’s feet begging for the mercy. The master would abuse and threaten them with the result that ‘the women’ was severely tortured at home by her in-laws.

The woman had to face domestic violence as well. Being fed up with the tiresome daily routine and the atrocities of her in- laws, if a daughter in law decided to go back to her parents she was treated like treacherous creature. A piece of wood weighing 5 kilograms would be put around her foot; she had to do all the household works dragging the food with wood. It would make her foot bleed. In extreme cases the woman’s tip of nose would be chopped off. These women while spirit possession



enjoyed the superior position than the men of the community (perhaps in the only one incident). That they let their male in-laws to go before them and dance to their tune helplessly.

Superstitions also played a vital role in the community. The superstitions like spirit possession, the custom of *Potraj* and *Waghya* sacrifices are made in the name of God are noteworthy. From the very beginning of the book, superstitions in this community are observed. It is considered that the writer Baby Kamble also came in this world due to the grace of Goddess *Kalubai* of *Harni* village. Her grandmother was a fervent devotee of the Goddess. The discussions at *Chawdi* among *Mahar* community showed nothing but sheer superstitions of these people, how they wear entirely mingled with superstitions. The episode of clashes between God *Yetal Saheb* and Goddess *Margi Mata* and the holy spirits *Laman Pathan* exposed to the same. The writer aptly comments: “Generation after generation was away in the senseless worship of stones, in utter misery. Generations after generations perished. But it is the basic human need to hope change. The tiny sapling of hope was reared in the hearts too. It grew tall, drawing strength from the iron in their souls” (11).

The worthlessness of the lives of *Dalits* is well depicted. The chapter of buffalo fair showed the superstitions of the people of *Veergaon*, if they did not sacrifice the male buffalo in front of the Goddess of the village as an offering on a particular fare day they would incur the wrath of the Goddess. For the upper caste people boon of the goddess is important and on the other hand, for the hungry *Mahars* of the village who enjoyed the fresh feast of the tasty meat of male buffalo once in the year and boon as well, both are important. The sacrifice of the buffalo serves the purpose of both but it nurtured superstitions. Baby Kamble rightly examines: “The entire community has sunk deep into the mire such dreadful superstitions. The upper castes had never allowed this lowly caste to acquire knowledge. Generations after generation, our people rotted and perished by following such superstitious way of life” (Kamble, 37).

As superstitions among the low castes are observed simultaneously orthodoxy of the high caste people is observed as they consider themselves pure while the existence of these low caste people is considered to pollute them. She has also faced discrimination at her school that the upper caste girls are afraid of her. Even the minds of school going children are also polluted. She observes: “They treated us like lepers, really. They wouldn’t even look at us. Our classmates were all upper caste girls and they too used to be afraid of us, constantly worried about our touching and polluting them. They used to scorn us as if we were some kind of despicable creatures. We had no friends among Brahmin girls.

Baby Kamble accepts the influence of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s thoughts and moments on her. She came in close contact with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s thought through the reading of newspapers in *Chawdi* by her father and other activists. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had appealed the students of *Mahar* community to enter the temples. Some students enter the *Vitthal* temple and broke the orthodox traditions. This incident created more impact on her mind about the thoughts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Because of the revolutionary thoughts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar her father could take education because of the inspiration.

Baby Kamble’s autobiography *The Prison We Broke* offers a platform to many burning issues like superstitions, domestic violence, atrocities of orthodox society and moreover the slavery of *Mahar* community so vividly that The reader irrespective of the castes sympathizes with the plight of the community. She had successfully delineated the mindset of both the upper caste and lower caste people. Though she has written this autobiography, the experiences are universal for the community.



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