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**Caste, Violence and Gender Discrimination in Babytai Kamble's
*The Prisons We Broke***

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Introduction:

Baby Kamble was an Indian activist and writer.

She is commonly known as Babytai Kamble. She was born into the largest untouchable caste in Maharashtra, the Mahar, which is an untouchable caste. She was a well-known Dalit activist and author who drew inspiration from the influential dalit leader B. R. Ambedkar. Kamble and her family underwent a Buddhist conversion and have been lifelong practitioners ever since. She became well-liked in her community as a writer and was referred to as Tai. The Dalit community holds a special place in its hearts and minds for her tremendous literary and activist efforts. She is one of the first untouchable women writers, and her unique reflexive feminist writing style sets her apart from other Dalit and upper caste women writers, whose gaze is constrained and reflexivity is imprisoned in caste and masculinity.

For her Marathi-language autobiographical book Jina Amucha, Kamble has received praise from critics. Maxine Berntsen, a feminist researcher, played a key role in persuading Baby Tai Kamble to publish the works she had kept private from her family. When conducting research in Phaltan, Berntsen came upon Kamble's writings and points of interest. She encouraged Baby Tai and convinced her to publish her works, which quickly rose to the top among autobiographies about the triple oppression Dalit women experienced due to caste, poverty, violence, and other factors.

The autobiography of Baby Tai is not simply a personal narrative of a woman's life; rather, it is a critically political record of how the country was created from the perspective of a very insecure socioeconomic position. One of Jina Amucha's

contributions to society is her chronicling of a nation's history from the perspective of an untouchable woman. As a result, it is also a critical portrayal of the country and its periphery: untouchables' life in a Hindu caste system. The Prisons We Broke was the English translation of the novel written by Maya Pandit and released by Orient Blackswan.

In the Indian literary heritage, Dalit literature represents a potent, young movement whose effects are now felt all over the globe. Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke*, depicts the socioeconomic, cultural, and political situations of the Dalit group in Indian culture, is another addition to the literature of the Dalit community. It draws attention to the predicament of Dalit women, who endure cruel treatment on all fronts. Women are always treated as inferior and downtrodden in Indian society. In India, women are subjected to many sorts of exploitation due to traditional taboos. The situation is significantly worse for Dalit women since they experience triple oppression due to their low caste, gender, and economic status.

Caste:

Babytai in her autobiography, *The Prisons We Broke* describes being ridiculed, bullied, and discriminated against not only by her classmates but also by her instructors. The duty of mahar is to clean and sweep the house, cut firewood and stack it neatly for cooking. It was the privilege of mahars to do all the duty and laborious jobs. Mahar people are further given shabby treatment because they have to perform a duty towards dead people as well as dead animals. The upper caste people expect the dalit girl should know that she has to bow in front of them. They were not allowed to encounter them directly. If they did so, even by mistake, that was a big offence for which they were punished. Kamble and her

classmates from the mahar caste would fight against the Hindu girl peers.

The Mahars were leading their lives in ignorance and abject poverty. They were not aware of the human existence as such. They would not dare to go against the social norms and challenge the caste Hindus. They were greatly superstitious and obeyed their oppressors. Hindu Religion and gods considered Mahars as dirt, Mahar community upheld the Hindu principles and they thought of gods with great sanctity.

Kamble attends a female-only school. She and her companions are not afraid of their classmates in the least. They struggle a lot for their rights. Yet, their teachers favour Hindu kids and consistently reprimand Kamble and her companions. Also, the majority of the teachers are Brahmins who openly despise the mahar kids.

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 (Kamble 62)

The Prisons We Broke relates that the Dalits in Maharashtra had to do only menial works. Caste system is much more gigantic in magnitude, more widely spread in time scale, yet difficult to pin point and comprehend easily. Mahars revolves around tragedy of poverty, hunger, and tales of lesser human beings.

Violence:

The mental and physical violence against women by the public and private spheres describe in Kamble's The Prisons We Broke. Maya says, —If the mahar community is the other for the Brahmins, mahar women become the other for the mahar men. Here Kamble has memory of her community's history and she trying to recasting this history through her writing. This book also provides the Hindu caste system as the doer of terrible crime against humanity. Kamble is not free because she is somebody's wife. Her husband exercises full control over her. She does not enjoy freedom to do anything if she wishes to do. Whenever she happens to go against the patriarchal norms, she is brutally beaten up by her husband. The Prisons We Broke reveals in detail how Kamble is a victim of her husband's male chauvinistic mentality.

Listen carefully, Next time, if anybody passes by me

Without bowing you've had it!

No Mercy would be shown to you any longer
(Kamble 53)

Gender Discrimination:

In a social scenario as depicted by Kamble, women come at the bottom in social hierarchy and the worst was the condition of a daughter in law. They do not have access to medical care, not enough to satiate their appetite and they were wrapped in rags. There is discrimination even in the way the saris are worn. Mahar women are treated as social outcaste who do not fit in the parameters of society made by upper caste people.

Women never had an independent identity of their own. They are considered as a dependent and suppressed being. Women are forced to live restricted life to maintain the prestige of family and society. The politics behind this restricted life is to keep command over women and to keep male default hidden.

Baby Kamble demonstrate how gender discrimination and patriarchy converge to perpetuate exploitative practices against women. Baby Kamble further narrates the differences they had between them and high caste women regarding clothing and accessories. Dalit women were restricted even to copy and use the things in same manner. Only high caste women had the privilege of wearing their saris in such a manner that the border could be seen and a Mahar woman was supposed to hide the borders otherwise it was considered an offence to the high castes women. High caste women though become prey of their male folk. But they don't support women who belong to low position, even having the same experiences. It is perhaps because of the unequal distribution of power. High caste men keep command over each section whether it's low caste people or their own women.

In this chain of command and domination high caste women keep command over low caste people and further low caste men control their women. Thus the social conditions of these women are worst. Women are enslaved by patriarchal society in every aspect whether as a woman, wife, daughter or mother. But as a daughter-in-law, they are exploited not only by their patriarchy but also by

the womenfolk. Kamble portrays the inhuman attitude of men and women of her community towards their young women. Young girls hardly eight to ten years were brought home as daughters-in-law. These young girls were insulted and enslaved both by men and women. The Mahar women led the most miserable existence. Poverty, humiliation, domestic violence and exploitation made their lives like hell.

oh! You, wretched mahar woman,
 take care not a thread of your cloth would
 come in my house (Kamble 61)

Conclusion:

Baby Kamble reclaims memory to place Mahar society before the impact of Babasaheb Ambedkar, and recounts a dramatic story of redemption wrought by a fiery brand of individual and social self-awareness. *The Prisons We Broke* is a detailed depiction of Mahars' inner lives, as well as the restrictive caste and patriarchal foundations of Indian society—but it never descends into self-pity. Kamble eloquently and unabashedly depicts the Maharwada's traditions and superstitions, pleasures and sorrows, hard lives and tougher women. It is a sociological treatise, a historical and political record,

a feminist critique, a protest against brahminical Hinduism.

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