

## AMBEDKARITE MOVEMENT: ITS INFLUENCE ON THE SELF- NARRATIVE OF BABY KAMBLE AND URMILAPAWAR

Atul Kumar Tak  
Research Scholar  
Govt. College, Pushkar,  
Ajmer (Rajasthan)

### Abstract

*The self-narratives of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar are the representation of thousands of suppressed voices of dalit community. Jina Amucha is the original title of Baby Kamble's autobiography, which has been translated by Maya Pandit as the title name The Prisons We Broke. It is probably the first autobiography by a Dalit women, not only in Marathi but in any Indian language. Urmila Pawar's The Weave of My Life is the reflection of women in dalit community. Her autobiography, Aaydan, called The Weave of My Life in its English translation, has been yet another landmark in the history of dalit writing in Marathi. Pawar's Aaydan is the voice of shattered lives of Mahar caste in Konkan region. "The other meanings of Aaydan are utensil and weapon. My mother used to weave aaydan. I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing are originally linked. The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering and agony that links us." (Kamble x). The works of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar have been greatly influenced by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is called the father of dalit literature as he inspired many marginalized to fight against the injustice. He is the whole and sole inspiration of Dalit Literature. He had enlightened the dalit through his writings and speeches and movements. His primary aim was to uplift the dalit by enhancing their living standard and bringing revolutionary changes in their behaviour. To enhance the life of the people he looked at literature as the best instrument. Ambedkarite movement was a major political against the unjust condition of dalit. This research paper is an attempt to highlight the Ambedkarite movement in special reference to the self-narratives of dalit women writers.*

**Key-words:** Dalit women literature, Ambedkarite movement, Dalit feminism, Caste, Gender.

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### **Introduction**

The Ambedkarite movement is a transformative socio-political movement in India that follows the ideals of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, often called Babasaheb. This movement centers on advocating for the rights, dignity, and upliftment of the Dalit community, who have long endured social exclusion and discrimination. The term Ambedkarite Movement merges two core ideas: Ambedkarite, meaning anything related to Dr. Ambedkar or his principles, which emphasize humanistic values for the welfare of all, and movement, signifying a collective effort toward social change. Together, these terms form a movement grounded in Ambedkar's teachings, striving to challenge caste-based discrimination and promote equality and justice.

Rooted in Ambedkar's lifelong struggle against the injustices imposed by caste hierarchy, the Ambedkarite movement seeks to empower Dalits by fostering self-respect, preparing them for continued resistance, and embedding values of human rights and dignity. Dr. Ambedkar advocated for the abolition of the caste system, social and economic empowerment, and political representation for marginalized groups. Education, in his view, was a vital tool for liberation, and he emphasized the need for Dalits to attain self-reliance and respect in society. He also worked tirelessly to eradicate untouchability by founding organizations, organizing conferences, and promoting political and social reforms. His work extended to championing the rights of women, most notably through the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to bring unprecedented legal rights to Indian women. Key aims of the Ambedkarite movement include eradicating caste oppression, promoting social justice, combating patriarchy, and achieving economic and cultural transformation, all toward building a democratic and egalitarian India.

### **Influence of Ambedkarite movement on Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*:**

Ambedkar's teachings served as a powerful source of inspiration for the community, as illustrated by an incident shared by Baby Kamble. She recalls Ambedkar's visit to her village, where the local people were in awe of his presence. His speech passionately highlighted the critical importance of education in transforming the lives of the Mahars, urging them to pursue learning as a path to empowerment and dignity. He said "you must educate your children. Divorce your children from god. Teach them good things. Send them to schools" (Kamble 64). The Ambedkarite movement was initiated to uplift the untouchables, instill a strong sense of self-respect, and equip them for a lifelong struggle to secure their human rights. It aimed to embed values of equality and justice within the community, fostering a foundation for a socialist and democratic India where dignity and inclusivity would prevail. Baby Kamble quotes the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar "We, too, have the right to live as human beings" (Kamble 65). Ambedkarite movement played the role of panacea for the dalit women. Baby Kamble was inspired by the words of Ambedkar as he said "our women have had a major role in being superstitious, but I'm sure they will now give up these superstitions and take a lead in educating their children"(Kamble65). Superstitious practices were widespread within the Dalit community, where worshipping specific deities, experiencing supposed possession by a community god, and subjecting women to abuse under the guise of superstition were everyday occurrences. These activities reflected deeply ingrained beliefs that often perpetuated harm and injustice, especially toward women. Baby Kamble unveils such incidents as she mentioned in the book "the man possessed by LamanPathan can do everything about anybody who comes to him. He'll not have any inhibitions even with his parents" (Pandit 10). Woman possessed by a soul was another level of drama as Kamble witnessed "we kids used to rush from place to place to see women getting possessed. It wasn't an ordinary thing, getting possessed. The screams could be heard from a long distance. You know how it is with women! One would give an earplitting scream, another would hear

her and she too would begin to scream” (Kamble 22). Women were neither respect nor honoured in the society but when a soul possessed a woman the men of her family would bow down. Kamble noted in the book “at other times, these men commanded great respect as the father-in-law or brother-in-law of the woman who was now possessed. But now, she was the mother goddess, and they her children! They fell at her feet; it was the goddess who was speaking to her” (Kamble 24). There is uncountable number of incidents where Kamble depicted the tight grip of superstition in the dalit society and atrocities on women. The views of Ambedkar worked as the torch bearer for the people of dalit community and especially for women to live a life of being human. For Dalits, the notion of "being human" was almost absent, as they endured inhumane conditions and relentless humiliation in society. One of the core aims of the Ambedkarite perspective is to cultivate humanity by fostering humanistic values, particularly at an individual level. This vision seeks to nurture all aspects of personal development, especially intellectual and moral growth. Naturally, people attempt to grow by emulating what they observe around them, drawing inspiration from their surroundings. For the Mahar community, exposure to the lives of other villagers stirred aspirations for a better life, fueling hopes that one day they too might attain dignity and respect.

However, as Baby Kamble poignantly notes, while Mahar men harboured these hopes, the bodies of Mahar women were often viewed as worthless, and their minds neglected. Despite this devaluation, the community continued to cling to hope, treating it as a vital source of sustenance amidst adversity. The narrator wrote.

“We desperately tried to preserve whatever bits of Hindu culture we managed to lay our hands on. And yet no one tried to understand us. Our minds somehow kept on hoping against hope- that we too would be able to live like the upper castes, that we also would be able to enjoy wealth like the Patil’s wife and practice the same rituals as them. But when our very bodies were considered worthless, who was going to spare a thought about our minds?”(Kamble18)

This reflects a grim reality where the Dalit community's hopes for a dignified life remained unrealized, as they lacked the wealth or rights to pursue it. Their basic human rights were denied, and upper castes refused to recognize them as equals, viewing them as less than human. With an absence of humanistic values in society, the rights of Dalits were effectively stripped away. It was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who restored these rights, empowering the community to assert their humanity and dignity. In *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble vividly exposes the hardships faced by Dalit women. Living in conditions of extreme inferiority, these women endured oppression not only from the upper castes but also from the patriarchal structures within their own communities, rendering them doubly marginalized. Kamble's work highlights this dual subjugation, shedding light on the unique struggles of Dalit women and their fight for both social and gender justice.

Baby Kamble states that "there is a saying that a black cow can survive even on thorns. Our women were like that proverbial black cow" (Kamble 57). Due to severe food scarcity, daughters-in-law in the community often bore the brunt of hardship. They had to wait until all the men had eaten, and would quietly accept whatever was left—if anything remained at all. It was customary for men to eat first, leaving the women, who often went to bed hungry, to endure in silence. Poverty exacerbated the situation, with elder women frequently treating daughters-in-law with contempt over the limited food available. Many young women suffered in silence, but those who dared to speak out faced harsh beatings from both husbands and in-laws.

Some women attempted to escape from these oppressive households, fleeing at night; however, if caught, they faced severe punishment and constant ridicule, with in-laws blaming their upbringing. These young women were treated more like objects than individuals, expected to function without complaint. This relentless dehumanization, reducing them to mere tools within their own homes, inflicted lasting physical and emotional suffering.

Baby Kamble said "she was not a human being for her in-laws, but just another piece of wood. Her hair would be all tangled and spread around her

head in complete disarray. She would be made to wear her younger brother-in-law's copper anklets as bangles. Those copper bangles were a sign that she was a Mahar" (Kamble 99). Morality serves as a powerful force for societal reform, and Dr. Ambedkar's engagement with the untouchables was a profound moral discourse that transformed the lives of the Mahar community. His every thought acted as a remedy, sparking sweeping changes in the lives of the oppressed. Baby Kamble reflects on this, noting that society desperately needed a guiding flame to bring light to the lives of millions of untouchables. She emphasizes the suffering endured by Dalit women, who faced trials akin to a relentless ordeal by fire. Yet, this hardship, she believes, gave rise to a divine flame—a source of truth and love that illuminated the world. She said, "After having undergone the ordeal of fire for ages, she finally gave birth to a divine flame. This flame showed the world what true love and affection is."(102). That divine flame is none other than Ambedkar. He shattered the chains binding women, paving the way for their emancipation. By awakening them to their true worth and responsibilities, Ambedkar removed the restrictions that had long confined them. Inspired by his message, many women began actively participating in the Ambedkarite movement for women's liberation. Some even chose to remain unmarried, leaving their homes to fully dedicate themselves to the cause. Baby Kamble, too, sought to enlighten women with Ambedkar's empowering words, hoping his vision would inspire them to reclaim their rights and dignity. She referred the speech of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar addressed to the women and wrote "Our women have had a major role in being superstitious, but I'm sure they will now give up these superstitions and take a lead in educating their children. They will have the honour of being the first to take this step forward." (Kamble 65).

### **Influence of Ambedkarite movement on Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*:**

*The Weave of My Life* (2008) is the English translation of *Aaydan* (2003), originally written in Marathi by Urmila Pawar and published by Granthali Publication in Mumbai. Translated by Maya Pandit and published by

Mandira Sen for Stree in Kolkata, the book chronicles Pawar's life and the struggles of Dalit women as they navigate social, economic, religious, and gender-based challenges. It captures Pawar's resilient journey toward becoming a successful writer and the vital role education played, despite the adverse conditions she faced. Through her work, Pawar vividly portrays the harsh realities endured by Dalit women in the Konkan region, shedding light on the deeply rooted issues within the Mahar community, which grappled with poverty and lack of traditional means of livelihood.

Pawar's narrative also spans various spheres—pursuing education, managing household responsibilities, participating in social programs, writing stories and books, and engaging in literary gatherings. This makes her work not only a personal memoir but also an inspiring guide for marginalized women, encouraging them toward feminism and activism. As a Dalit woman writer, Pawar infuses her narrative with Ambedkarite Dalit feminism, bringing this perspective to the forefront more strongly than other aspects of Ambedkar's philosophy. *The Weave of My Life* stands as a significant work within Ambedkarite feminism, highlighting the compounded oppression of women in the Mahar community at the intersections of caste and patriarchy.

The emphasis on education instilled by her parents drove Urmila Pawar to pursue higher studies, making her the first woman from the Konkan region to earn a postgraduate degree. This family dedication to education reflects the Ambedkarite principle that sees education as a path to empowerment. *The Weave of My Life* provides a rich portrayal of Konkan culture, particularly the experiences of the Mahar community post-conversion. Through detailed events and personal experiences, Pawar's narrative conveys Ambedkarite perspectives, making it a powerful vehicle of the Ambedkarite movement.

In this work, Pawar embodies Ambedkar's social philosophy of revolution, envisioning a society rooted in equality where no one faces ridicule for their cultural identity or behaviour. She argues that such mockery fosters discrimination, which in turn breeds hatred and contempt, ultimately fragmenting society. This undermines the collective values of equality,

fraternity, freedom, and justice, essential to a cohesive and inclusive society. Through her narrative, Pawar upholds Ambedkar's vision of a just society, urging the dismantling of practices that perpetuate social divisions. Pawar not only highlights these challenges but actively advocates for women's rights, both in her writing and through her involvement in women's movements. The book traces her remarkable journey from a girl born in a remote village in Maharashtra's Konkan region to a highly educated woman who confronts caste and gender discrimination at every step. As a female writer, her commitment to Ambedkarite feminism forms the core of her narrative, shaping it into a powerful testament to resilience and social change.

In the Ambedkar movement, activists recognized Urmila Pawar's potential as a public speaker, noticing her ability to articulate ideas effectively in public settings. This led to her being invited to speak at the Ambedkar birth centenary celebrations. Pawar and her husband, Harishchandra, had already immersed themselves in Dr. Ambedkar's teachings, having read *Buddha and His Dhamma* and Dhananjay Keer's biography of Ambedkar while they lived in Ratnagiri. Pawar was familiar with public speaking, having gained confidence through school events and theater, as well as listening to local leaders like Nathuram Kamble, Bandy Chavekar, and Haribhau Aayre.

However, when she attended the centenary event, she was taken aback by the commanding presence and sophistication of the speakers, realizing a significant difference between her local leaders and the voices she was now hearing. At that moment, Dr. Ambedkar's words, "Leave the villages and go to the cities" (Pawar 224) took on a deeper meaning for her. This experience opened her eyes to the broader perspective and potential within the Ambedkar movement, revealing the importance of connecting with larger urban networks to gain new insights and strength for the Dalit cause.

The narrator recognized the importance of spreading Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideology to raise awareness among the oppressed about their rights and responsibilities. She understood that the issues women face could be addressed effectively only if men and women worked together, engaging in



affirmative discourse. Dividing the struggle by focusing on separate platforms for men and women would only delay the resolution of real issues. Additionally, it was crucial to familiarize oneself with the thoughts of social reformers in order to tackle these issues effectively. Pawar understood the necessity of embracing an Ambedkarite perspective, so she brought Ambedkarite literature into her home to explore the evolving trends of humanism and the root causes of women's struggles. It only by comprehended these humanistic and rational ideas that one could stand before society with a clear and affirmative ideology.

Urmila Pawar describes her gradual involvement in the Ambedkarite movement, Dalit literature, the women's movement, and women's literature. Yet, despite her active participation, she felt she hadn't yet developed a clear, personal stance on many issues. Her daily responsibilities—her job, household tasks, caring for her children, and her education—left her with little time to reflect deeply on her own beliefs. Through her involvement in public events like Ambedkar Jayanti and Mahaparinirvan Din, held in slum areas, the narrator got a firsthand glimpse into the intense poverty and hardships endured by her community. Although she had some idea of slum life from visiting relatives, the conditions she witnessed in these particular areas were far worse. The slums consisted of tiny, cramped huts—just six by eight feet—lined up closely together with only makeshift cane partitions between them. The roofs were low and made of tin, with only a few old cloths, rags, and a handful of pots and pans as the residents' possessions.

The surrounding environment was even more alarming: open drains and gutters emitted foul odours, with clouds of flies and mosquitoes thickly clustered over them, as if defending their territory against human intrusion. Mice and bandicoots darted around, children relieved themselves in open spaces, pigs roamed among the waste, and people spat and disposed of dirty water freely. Amidst this chaos and squalor, bitter arguments were common, yet the people, despite their pale and exhausted faces, encouraged each other to hold onto hope for a better future. This experience revealed to the narrator the severe daily struggles faced by her community and the resilience needed

to endure such conditions. In her speeches, the narrator often used powerful quotes from social reformer Krantiba Phule, along with references to Dr. Ambedkar's work, like the Hindu Code Bill. These quotes were particularly effective in drawing attention to gender inequalities and challenging traditional norms. In this speech, she began by highlighting one of Phule's provocative questions "Krantiba Phule used to say when a woman's husband dies, she is made to commit sati, therefore if a woman dies why doesn't a man commit sata? He also says that a man can marry a second wife and acquire a savat (Marathi for "cowife") in the house. Then why can't a woman marry a second man and have a co-husband (savata in Marathi) in the house?" (Pawar 258)

Pawar has effectively utilized various tools such as books, education, presentations, movements, and ideologies to inspire societal change. She served as a consultant for the Dalit costumes in the film on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, directed by Dr. Jabbar Patel. One of her most notable works, co-authored with Meenakshi Moon, is *Aamhi hi Itihas Ghadwila* (We Also Made History), which chronicles the involvement of Dalit women in the Ambedkarite movement. *The Sixth Finger* is a collection of short stories, and she also edited the journal *Stree Uwacha*. In Ambedkar's perspective, education is a vital tool for leading a meaningful life, which is why he placed immense importance on it within his philosophy. Through his speeches, he emphasized the transformative power of education, inspiring thousands of Dalit families to pursue learning and improve their lives.

This paper tries to highlight *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble and *The Weave of My Life* by Urmila Pawar as powerful expressions of Ambedkarite thought. Both authors discuss their struggles for education, the suffering of Dalits, and their challenges against orthodox beliefs, all while advocating for social progress and the education of society. Their personal and feminist experiences, both within the home and in public, and their active participation in the Dalit movement, position them as true Ambedkarite feminist activists. The narratives reflect the core principles of Ambedkarism, with a strong focus on Ambedkarite feminism as a key dimension.

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