

DALIT FEMINISM AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: UNVEILING THE INTERSECTIONAL NARRATIVES OF EMPOWERMENT AND RESISTANCE

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Abstract - At the nexus of caste and gender in India, dalit feminism has grown into a potent movement that challenges and dismantles the repressive institutions of the country's historical patriarchal society. In order to highlight the distinctive voices and experiences of Dalit women who have utilized their personal stories as a vehicle for empowerment, resistance, and societal transformation, this abstract attempts to explore the role of autobiographical narratives in Dalit feminism. The interdependence of caste, class, and gender is emphasized by Dalit feminism, which also draws attention to the particular types of violence and prejudice Dalit women experience. These women encounter many levels of oppression, where gender identification and caste identity interact to influence their encounters with prejudice, exclusion, and violence. Autobiographies have been essential in helping Dalit women to express their lived experiences, challenge prevailing narratives, and rewrite their own self-identity stories. This abstract looks at Dalit autobiographies in order to investigate the many themes and narratives that appear in these literary works. These memoirs offer insightful perspectives into the complexities of Dalit women's life by capturing their experiences in a variety of geographical locations, religious traditions, and sociopolitical circumstances. In addition to highlighting Dalit women's tenacity, courage, and agency in the face of adversity, the narratives frequently reveal how they battle caste-based prejudice, gender-based abuse, and systematic injustice. This abstract makes the case that Dalit autobiographies are effective vehicles for social change and the empowerment of Dalit women. They give Dalit women a platform to reclaim their histories, contest prevailing myths, and promote solidarity.

Keywords - *Dalit feminism, Caste, Dalits, Autobiographies, Dalit women, Intersectionality, Caste-based discrimination, Patriarchy, Gender inequality, Empowerment, Dalit literature, Marginalization, Caste atrocities, Solidarity*

INTRODUCTION

Autobiographies and Dalit feminism are effective instruments for revealing the intersecting stories of empowerment and resistance within the Dalit community. The experiences, tribulations, and aspirations of Dalit women in India and other South Asian nations are the focus of Dalit feminism, a subset of feminism that has recently arisen. It acknowledges the numerous forms of discrimination Dalit women experience as a result of their caste, gender, and class identities and works to alleviate these interconnected forms of prejudice. Dalits, historically referred to as "untouchables," are members of the lowest caste in South Asia. They have historically experienced significant systemic violence and discrimination, as well as social, economic, and political marginalization. Dalit feminism draws attention to the particular struggles and experiences of Dalit women, who are subjected to both caste- and gender-based oppression. By putting Dalit women's perspectives and concerns front and center in talks of gender equality and social justice, it hopes to counter the traditional feminist

movement's exclusive concentration on middle-class, upper-caste women. Autobiographies are essential to Dalit feminism because they give Dalit women a forum to discuss their unique experiences, challenges, and victories. These autobiographies provide a firsthand look at the challenges Dalit women confront, including as caste-based violence, poverty, sexual exploitation, and restricted access to opportunities and education. Dalit women recover their agency, question prevailing narratives, and shatter the silence around their experiences by telling their tales. Autobiographies written by Dalits frequently emphasize themes of empowerment and resistance. They demonstrate the tenacity, power, and will of Dalit women who work to oppose repressive systems and promote social change. These stories serve as a potent instrument for social change and awareness because they reveal the deeply ingrained prejudices and biases in society. Furthermore, the connectivity of various types of oppression and discrimination is emphasized in Dalit feminist memoirs. They emphasize that caste, gender, and class are all interconnected and that Dalit women's experiences cannot be understood in isolation from their caste identities. These stories show the intricate relationships between privilege and power and put the social hierarchy under scrutiny.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review on Dalit feminism and autobiographies stresses how crucial it is to record Dalit women's experiences, difficulties, and goals. A significant instrument for advocacy, empowerment, and resistance is the autobiographical tale. Dalit feminist memoirs fight against oppressive systems and add to the larger conversation about social justice, feminism, and equality by highlighting the interconnectedness of caste and gender.

Writings regarding Dalits are essentially what constitute Dalit Literature. The anti-caste movement to create an equity-based democratic and secular Indian identity is opposed by the Dalit movement. The First Dalit literature, published in 1958 in the Indian state of Maharashtra, is where the word "Dalit literature" first appeared. After Independence, the phrase "Dalit," which denotes someone who is oppressed, broken, or downtrodden, came under exploitation. In the 1930s, it was in use. Who am I? is a major topic for the Dalit consciousness. What exactly am I? These inquiries help to define the Dalit authors' strong moral character. A strong, new trend in the Indian literary landscape now is dalit literature. Few researchers have attempted to focus on Dalit feminism within the larger context of Dalit literature in light of the theories of the rhetoric of resistance, according to a very restricted review of Dalit feminist publications.

"Protest Movement and Social Change: A Study of Dalit Movements in Maharashtra" was the title of P. G. Jogdand's Ph.D. thesis, which served as the basis for Pralhad Jogdand's Dalit Movement in Maharashtra (1991). It deals with the conceptualization of this social movement as well as its theories and categorization. Conceptually, words like "social change" and "Dalit" have been made clearer. Additionally, the community of Mahar and its movements are discussed.

Anitha (2015) discusses Dalit literature in her work "Aesthetics in Dalit Literature" as it advances past the conventional discourses of literary modernity. She claims that this body of writing serves as a potent form of expression for the Dalit cause and gives those battling for their ability to live in dignity an unwavering passion. She has correctly noted how various literary genres, including short stories, novels, critical essays, memoirs, plays, etc., offer crucial insight into the debate over Dalit identity.

Aboriginal and Dalit writings are "narratives of pain," according to Dr. Rajesh Kumar in his study paper Exploring Converging Dimensions: Dalit and Australian Aboriginal Autobiographies (2012). Both pieces of writing served as the springboard for their literary careers by first telling their life stories, i.e., by making autobiography a formal venue through which they could first engage the literary public. The Black feminist movement, especially Dalit women in India and African Americans both endure horrible, dehumanizing things

in their respective societies. Afro-American women had previously been mistreated by White people. They fell prey to enslavement created by humans. Black men and women were both the targets of racial bigotry, as evidenced by American history. Black Internationalist Feminism: Women of the Black Left 1945–1995 by Cheryl Higashida examines the contributions made by Black female writers to the feminist movement, specifically the Black feminist movement.

DALIT WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Only a few Dalit women in India have published autobiographies. The majority of the writing by these authors is translated into English from their native regional languages. Perhaps for this reason, Dalit women's autobiographies continue to go unnamed and misidentified in purported intellectual circles, especially in the disciplines of English literary critique. They are rare in number, though, and not all readers are aware of them. The position of Dalit women writers is as marginalized in Dalit literature as they are in their community, according to several caste literary critics, who have commented on the situation. Like male authors, Dalit women have also used their autobiographies to express their fears of poverty, isolation from society, and humiliation. Through their personal tales, Bama Faustina Soosairaj, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Kumud Pawade, and Janabai Girhe examined their experiences with exploitation and discrimination. In her book *Karukku*, Bama discusses the difficulties she had growing up as a Dalit. *The Prison We Broke* by Baby Kamble is a personal account that depicts the struggles faced by Dalit women in patriarchal communities as well as the emotions and situation of helplessness faced by Mahar women. *The Weaving of My Life* by Urmila Pawar sheds light on how Dalits describe their experiences and feelings in respect to their families and communities.

Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke*:

The Prison We Broke (2008) and *The Weave of My Life* (2007) are translations of Baby Kamble's *Jina Amucha*, which was first written in Marathi and serialized in 1982 before being published as a book in 1986. According to *The Prison We Broke*, the Dalits' lives start with filth and dirt and conclude in the same area and state without even a faint sign of advancement or success. The essential element of *Jina Amucha* is Baby Kamble's Dalit feminist critique of patriarchy, as stated by Maya Pandit in the preface. She gives a graphic account of the physical and psychological abuse that women must put up with in both the public and private worlds. When Brahmins make up the Mahar group, Mahar women are viewed as the "other" by Mahar males. Despite caste and patriarchy's changes, exploitative practices against women remain in Baby Kamble's existence. Baby Kamble is still the pioneer for the underprivileged areas. However, the Dalit women can be rescued from the kinds of societal and domestic issues they face with knowledge and self-worth. According to Baby Kamble's memoirs.

Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*:

Feminist and well-known Dalit author Urmila Pawar. Originally authored in Marathi, her memoir *Aaydan* (*The Wave of my Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoir*) was eventually translated into English by Dr. Maya Pandit and Urmilatai, who became a well-known figure internationally. Pawar shares her own suffering, including interpersonal and intercommunal societal conflicts, in this brave and vulnerable book. In the context of India, it problematizes crucial caste, class, and gender concerns. Urmila Pawar portrays Dalit women consistently in her literary works. She bases many of her short stories on the suffering, agony, and challenges Dalit women face on a daily basis as well as how they deal with these challenges. Dalit male writers have ignored these issues for a long time. There were therefore objections from Dalit men when Urmila began writing on the plight of Dalit women. Pawar has cited incredibly thin proof of the exploitation and abuse of women and girls. Rarely is the humiliation so severe that it offends the reader's sensibilities. She has talked about her schoolmates and the sexual exploitation she experienced as a young adult. Her biography makes clear instances of sexual exploitation and this narration.

Bama' Karukku:

Bama's Karukku was initially published in a Dalit Christian woman's Tamil autobiography. It was nominated for an international Crossword Award and won in 2001. With their serrated edges on both sides, palmyra leaves resemble double-edged swords, according to Bama, who uses the word karukku. The agony, suffering, resistance, and horrors done against Dalit Christian women are all depicted in this book. It is a story about poverty, violence, rejection, and misery, as well as about how the author works very hard to overcome these issues and rebuilds her sense of "self."

All Dalit women who have endured atrocities in the past are represented by the author. Bama accurately depicts her suffering and degradation in order to give a historical picture of India. She is one of the most difficult characters in the Dalit feminist community. When she left the convent in 1992, she began a career as a writer. She has received a lifetime achievement award from the Toronto branch of the Canada Tamil Literary Garden. A Dalit woman's existence is always filled with obstacles. Bama berates both herself for being born a woman and the government for not hiring her despite her qualifications. Both married and single Dalit women, in Bama's opinion, are despised by everyone. Bama deals daily with racial injustice and adapts to its repressive realities. Bama uses formal terminology that is foreign to writers in the mainstream. Bama depicted the discrimination that Dalits face in "Karukku" by showing how upper caste people divide them into different groups. Ultimately, Bama failed to offer a solution for these issues in her autobiography "Karukku." Bama expressed her rage via her writing and refrained from protesting caste prejudice in public.

CONCLUSION:

Autobiography recognises the secrets of a person's life. The aforementioned Dalit author has depicted Dalit life and the emotions of social reformers like Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar, and Gautama Buddha Dalit in short tales, fiction, and nonfiction. The chosen authors had been a part of a deeply superstitious culture. Its subject matter and overall theme are typically restricted to a single person. Life narratives now cover a wider range thanks to Dalit authors. Dalit autobiographies include community stories as well. To introduce the Dalit reality to readers worldwide, all of the Dalit authors have made a contribution.

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