

Dalit Women's Feminist Views: A Research Of Bama and Urmila Pawar

Swapna Emmadi¹, Dr. Babina Bohra²

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of English,
Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences,
Sehore, Bhopal-Indore Road, MadhyaPradesh, India

²Research Guide, Dept. of English,
Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences,
Sehore, Bhopal-Indore Road, MadhyaPradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Dalit women's feminist views explained about the subaltern feminism. It explains that "Women's oppression is the most widespread and the deepest form of oppression in society. ... Based on this assumption of inferior position, women are called the "subalterns". The issues agitating women belonging to different cultures are different."The representation of the subaltern women, who is the subordinate officer of British army of postcolonialism. She is always inadequate or virtually nil in the literary discourses of the subaltern men as well as the mainstream women writers. These writers turn a blind eye towards the persecution, trials and tribulations, physical and mental trauma faced by these women. Thus it becomes imperative for the subaltern women writers to bring to the fore, the predicament of subaltern women, the victims of "triple exploitation (caste, class and gender)" through their literary works. This paper attempts to explore the extent of the representation of Dalit women and their victimization in the life writings of the selected Dalit men and women writers and endeavours to highlight the need for and the relevance of Dalit women voice.

Keywords: Caste, Dalits, Gender, Intersectional oppressions, Outsider-within status, Substituted knowledge, Standpoint.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dalit literature is one of the important literatures in India. Dalit literature gives voice to Dalit people. The word Dalit is derived from the Sanskrit word " Dalita " which means crushed, broken to piece and suppressed. The word Dalit refers to a particular group of people or community who are economically and educationally backward. Dalit people are dominated and isolated by the upper caste people. During the Vedic period Dalits were treated as slaves. Rig-Veda describes that all human beings have descended from God. Rig-Veda tells the Brahmanas were his mouth, the Kshatriyas become his arms, the Vishay's were his thighs and the Shudras were his feet. The interpretation and belief give space to caste system.

"Millions of Dalits, Tribals and others still face discrimination, especially the women and girls. In too many communities, religious minorities also suffer. We must continue Gandhi's battle for equality".

Dalit literature emerged as an area of social reformation movement. Dalit literature is primarily written to allow voice to the Dalits, and ready of the protest appeared Dalit literature primarily to support the movement. Hence, its own aesthetics with newer subjects, styles, techniques, and forms. During the twentieth century, within the age of post-modernism and post-colonialism, the world faced a democratic revolution that

demanded a society with equal human rights. The new waves of humanism unfold across India conjointly and plenty of social revolutionaries started movements against the stigmatized social practices. The movement additionally challenged the hierarchy of the caste system that is believed to be a root explanation for the oppression of many Dalits for hundreds of years. Beside different social revolutionaries, JyotibaPhule and Dr. Ambedkar protested against the oppressive and discriminating class structure. Dalit literature initially emerged in Marathi spread unfold across India. It's primarily written in regional languages because it is frozen within the soil. It brought forth the marginal, aboriginal, and thus the burdened. It's additionally a contradiction for Dalit literature as on one hand it is written in regional languages for credibility and on the opposite hand, the only real purpose of translating a Dalit text will serve the aim of its existence by attending to an outsized variety of people. It ought to even be noted that most of the Dalit literature accessible in English is through translation against little that is written originally in English. Hence, translating a Dalit literary text is an extremely crucial contribution to Dalit literature. Because it is the case with any literary text, translating a Dalit literary text is developed for each the Dalit literature and also the thought literature its creation is to form the world hear concerning their existence and oppressed condition. In such a case, one among the most effective ways that to satisfy each the wants is translation.

CONTRIBUTION OF DALIT FEMINISM TO THE FEMINIST THEORY

"The stories of women entering into public discussions with men on most abstruse subjects of religion, philosophy and metaphysics are by in no means few." – Dr.B.R.Ambedhkar.

Feminist theories, in an all-embracing way, talk about equality of the sexes in all spheres; they accord importance to „difference“ as it is the different experiences of women with respect to the systematic domination faced by them in the patriarchal society that adds up to the feminist body of thought. There are various streams in feminism: Black feminism, Liberal, Marxist, Post-structuralist etc. Similarly, Dalit feminism is a stream of feminism that came into light with the rise of the Third World feminist struggles. Dalit feminists argue that women, and in particular Dalit women, are the worst sufferers of the structural domination of men over women, they are dual victims to both patriarchy and the evil of caste. Dalit feminism largely captures the individual experiences of marginalized women within the larger social structures. The contribution of these women has been legendary and needs assertion. Their literature and strife needs the media that it deserves. The sacrifices of Dalit women must never be associated directly with the cause of modern-day feminism as the needs they serve, were served years ago to the upper castes. This is a revolution running backwards to help, preserve and change the future.

Dual Victims of Caste and Patriarchy: The movement of Dalit feminism can be traced back to JyotibaPhule's writings on how the Brahmanical patriarchy oppressed women. However, it was only in the 1990s when Dalit women advocated that their concerns and ideologies were different from that of the „upper caste women“. All women face the brunt of the patriarchal society but the very nature of this structural violence is more extreme with respect to women belonging to the lower castes, they are oppressed not only by the men in their own caste but also by the men who belong to the „upper caste“. This point is validated by the very nature of sexual violence that Dalit women are subjected to wherein most of these cases the perpetrators belong to the upper caste. In contemporary times, the infamous Hathras case reflects how even those who are responsible for the maintenance of law and order turn a blind eye towards the concerns of a woman belonging to the lower caste. It is this very essence of caste and gender that Dalit feminism captures. Just like Black feminism, Dalit feminism has an emancipatory potential wherein the concerns of caste and gender get transformed as the main facets of Dalit women's mobilization. The movement found its first autonomous expression with the formation of the National Federation of Dalit Women in New Delhi in 1995. Since then, there have been a number of Dalit women organizations that have come up asserting the cause of recognition of the experiences of Dalit women and call for a notion of equality that takes into account not only gender but also the very caste-based experiences of these women.

URMILA PAWAR'S THE WEAVER OF MY LIFE

"My Mother used to weave aaydans, the marathi generic term for all things made from bamboo. I find that her act weaving are organically linked. The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering and agony that links us" –Urmila Pawar.

Urmila Pawar is a renowned Dalit writer and feminist. Her memoir Aaydan (The Wave of my life: Dalit woman's memoir) is originally written in Marathi and later translated into English by Dr. Maya Pandit and Urmilatai transformed an international personality. In this daring and intimate memoir, Pawar bit her personal tragedy including personal and inter-communal social clashes and patience. It problematizes major issues of caste, class, and gender in the Indian context. In her creative writings, Urmila Pawar permanently gives a portrayal of Dalit women. Many of her short stories are based on the pain, agony, and difficulties the Dalit women have to go through in their everyday life and the way they overcome such life-situations. For many years Dalit male writers have been indifferent to these issues. So when Urmila started writing about the plight of Dalit women there were protests from Dalit men. Pawar has specified very minute evidence of oppression and exploitation of girl children and women. Infrequently the humiliation is so much that it is bitter to the reader with his/her sensibility. She has described her experiences of sexual exploitation in her early adulthood and about her schoolmates. This narration and incidents of sexual exploitation are evident in her biography.

Urmila Pawar recounts three generations of Dalit women who struggled to overcome the burden of their caste. Dalits, or untouchables, make up India's poorest class. Forbidden from performing anything but the most undesirable and unsanitary duties, for years Dalits were believed to be racially inferior and polluted by nature and were therefore forced to live in isolated communities. Pawar grew up on the rugged Konkan coast, near Mumbai, where the Mahar Dalits were housed in the center of the village so the upper castes could summon them at any time. As Pawar writes, "the community grew up with a sense of perpetual insecurity, fearing that they could be attacked from all four sides in times of conflict. That is why there has always been a tendency in our people to shrink within ourselves like a tortoise and proceed at a snail's pace." Pawar eventually left Konkan for Mumbai, where she fought for Dalit rights and became a major figure in the Dalit literary movement. Though she writes in Marathi, she has found fame in all of India. In this frank and intimate memoir, Pawar not only shares her tireless effort to surmount hideous personal tragedy but also conveys the excitement of an awakening consciousness during a time of profound political and social change.

BABY KAMBLE'S "THE PRISONS WE BROKE"

"We shall see better days soon and our progress will be accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education." – Dr.B.R.Ambedhkar.

Baby Kamble worked as an activist in Phaltan, a small town in Satara district of Maharashtra. A veteran of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra, she was inspired by the radical leadership of Dr.BabasahebAmbedkar, and got involved with the struggle from a very young age. Later she went on to establish a governmentapproved residential school for socially backward students in Nimbure, a small village near Phaltan. She has published collections of poetry, and been honoured with several awards for her literary and social work. Her autobiography JinaAmucha was first published as a book in Marathi in 1986, and first translated into

English by Maya Pandit as The Prisons We Broke (Orient Longman, 2008). This is the second edition of The Prisons We Broke, which includes Baby Kamble's prefaces to the first (1986) and second (1990) editions of JinaAmucha. She passed away on 21 April 2012.

“The Prisons We Broke” is the first work that comes in Dalit Literature which is written by a woman. It is because of that itself, the book deals with the two major problems of the society: firstly, the oppression and exploitation of the Dalit by the upper class: secondly, the discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. In the memoir, the retrospections of the author flow out profusely in beautiful colors. She talks about the life in her village, called Veergaon. In her memory, the Maharwadas never had a prosperous life. On one side, ignorance and lack of reasoning ruled them, on the other side, the Maharwadas life was dominated by poverty and epidemics. Death rate was high because of the ceaseless starvation and lack of medical facilities for the fatal epidemics. More over superstitions adorned their blindness.

Though Hindu Religion and Gods considered Mahars as dirt, Mahar community upheld the Hindu principles and they thought of Gods with great sanctity. Potrajas, and possessed women are common in the village. They never forget to give offerings to gods. Generations after generations Mahar community broke their heads on the stones of Hindu temples with hopes. But the effect was curses. They cried at the feet of idles with hopes. But the gods never heard them. They smeared kumkum and haldi on the gods. The possessed women are greeted with respect. It is believed that they could speak about the future of the Maharwada, and they could bless them with good wishes. So they often practiced the rituals that are taught by the same religion which considered the Mahars as dirt.

Poverty was an unresolved problem among the Mahars. They were fated to eat left-overs. The stale bhakris, and the rotten rotis were their common food. Upper caste considered them as the dirt in the garbage where others throw away their waste materials. Mahars had to fight with the animals like cats, dogs and vultures for their food. They were the masters of the dead animals. The upper caste Brahmins wiped away all the human qualities from the Mahars and converted them into beasts. They were enclosed in dark cells, and their hands and foot were in the chains of slavery. Mahars also valorize the prestige of Yeskar stick. And they thought that it is their duty to work for their masters. They never had complaints. They lead a very satisfactory life. They ate the leftovers and were content. They accepted their fate as part of their life. They considered themselves as untouchables. For their hardships, and laborious work for their masters, they earned miseries and abuses as remuneration. Even in their poverty stricken life, they never forgot to love each other and show kindness to their fellowmen. Generations after generations, the Mahars served their masters very obediently. The upper caste community threw abuses at the Mahars, if they did not fall at the feet of their masters, or if they did not give the way to their masters when the masters came across in their way. The condition of the Mahar women was miserable. They had to do all the house hold duties, and go for selling wood to earn for their daily bread. They collected all the left overs from other places to give them to their children. Most of the time women had to go on hunger unendingly. When a ritual comes, the work of the women got doubled. They had to plaster their house with cow dung, and clean the utensils and the clothes. Girls got married at the age of eight or nine. And they became pregnant at a very tender age which created a lot of complications in their first delivery. They lead a very pathetic life in their husband’s home. If a girl could not do the house hold duties, she was abused by her in-laws. She could not go back to her home also, in the fear of scolding from her father and brothers.

The author talks about the influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the memoir. Ambedkar was the light of their life. He asked the Mahars to educate their children, and inspired them to fight against the atrocities. He asked them not to give offerings to the gods who never cared about them. And he also asked them not to eat the dead animals. Baby Kamble and her relatives actively participated in the revolutionary activities. She was very much influenced by Ambedkar. She loved her father also. Her father often told not to work for money. Money is not the ever valuable thing in the world. The value of money will go, when we become poor. But the dignity that we earned in the course of our life will be there to support us. Money cannot always give us a satisfaction to our life. Author and her relatives and some of her friends went to school. They were ill treated

by the teachers and others in the upper caste. But they managed to survive. Author is very much influenced by the movie „Sati Savithri“. Ambedkar’s speech reverberated in the village, and the villagers reiterated his words. We can also see an influence of Buddha in the text.

In the last part of her book Kamble talked about the responsibility of the present society. Even now discrimination is not completely wiped out from our society. There are a lot of villages which should be brought into the light of main stream. The educated people should work for them. Once, Baba Sahib worked for the community. That is why the society got freedom. Now those who enjoy freedom should work to unchain others. I, as a reader could hear another reformer’s sound in Baby Kamble’s voice. A new inspiration is born out of her voice. Education, prosperity and comforts should not make us unaware of the problems of society. We will have to utilize our faculties to support and guide others to the main stream, only then we can enjoy the real value of our life.

BAMA’S REALITY OF SANGATI

“Oppression, ruled and still being ruled by patriarchy, government, caste and religion, Dalit women are forced to break all the strictures of the society in order to live”

Bama’s „Sangati“ is a unique Dalit feminist narrative. It is mainly concern with women’s movement in India. Literature also contributes in the Dalit movement and to the women’s movement in India especially in Tamilnadu movement of 1960s may be noted as the starting point of feminism. But of course before this there already occurred various struggle against male oppression, the privilege systems and inequality. As an exponent of Dalit feminism, Bama has found Karukku the right way to explore the sufferings of Dalit women. Sangati carries an autobiographical element in their narrative, but it is a story of a whole community, not an individual. In Sangati, many strong Dalit women who had the shackles of authority are also focused. The condition of dalits were very bad as they were not allowed to enter in to the temple, and schools for education .This form of discrimination based on identity akin to racism.

Sangati deals with gender bias faced by dalit women right from their childhood. Girl babies are always considered inferior and taken less care. The narrator of this book is a young girl in the early chapters grows pensive due to the myriad events happening around her. As she grows into a young woman, she stresses on the need for change and is calling out for action against atrocities that happen to the girls and women in her community. Invidious patriarchal distinctions are initially inculcated in girl children within the first ten years of their lives. Gender games act as effective tools to achieve this goal. Bama as a young girl of twelve learns that boys have different roles to play than girls which are perpetuated in the form of gender games that they are made to play as children. While games like „ kabadi“ and „marbles“ are meant for boys, girls play at cooking, getting married and other domestic matters.

Bama realistically portrays the physical violence like lynching, whipping and canning that dalit women suffers by their fathers, brothers and husbands. She explores the psychological stress and strains of them. Bama cleverly ropes in the prevailing subordinate condition of women through the ages as a girl, woman, a bread winner for the family and her place in the church. All of these proved claustrophobic to the women folk of the dalit community. The two stories that Bama reminds is that of Mariamma and Thayi whose marital disharmonies are revealed in an attempt to stereotype the dalit predicament. They are ill-treated and beaten up daily by their husbands. Although both the husband and wife came after a hard day’s work in the field, the husband went straight to the Chavadi to while away their time, coming home only for their meal. But as for the wife they return home wash vessels, clean the house, collect water, gather firewood, go to the shops to buy rice for cooking and other provision, feed the husband and children before they sleep, eat what is left over and go to bed.

“Even they lay down their bodies wracked with pain, they are not allowed to sleep, whether she dies or survived, she had to give pleasure and enjoyment to her husband”.

Bama uses a language unfamiliar to the mainstream, upper caste society to write her works. She discards the so called “chaste” Tamil made unavailable for her people but employs the oral folk language, which is familiar to her society. Unlike other writers who have dealt with Dalit life in Tamil like Sivakami, Vidivelli and Imayam, who use the Dalit language only in dialogues between their characters, Bama writes her whole work in the language of her community through her works especially Sangati.

Sangati both mirror up the state of depression and also reveals the vigor, courage and the resilience of dalit women even in the midst of all misery. In the end of this novel, the dalit women celebrate their newly found identity and inner strength. The narrator of this novel finally becomes free from clutches of her limitations. She works and lives by herself. Bama realizes that it is up to the dalit women to take their lives into their own hands. She makes an appeal for a change and betterment of the dalit women’s life in various aspects which includes sex and gender discrimination, equal treatment in the workplace, right to education etc. That is why Bama depicted the various stages of dalit women as a girl, women and the old age women.

In most rural homes the Dalit woman is an earning member, widow re-marriages are possible and tali or the sacred thread worn as a chain during the marriage is not this binding symbol as in other communities. It is interesting that the Dalit woman cannot be suppressed in spite of caste, gender oppression.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Dalit women have unique lived experiences, as this faction comprises of the intersectional oppressions of two groups oppressed on account of their birth: „Dalits” and „women”. Dalits in India are the „depressed classes” (Ambedkar, 1936) and women „the second sex” (Beauvoir, 1989). These doubly oppressed women are subjugated, downgraded, and marginalized. Hence the need to create a Dalit Feminist Standpoint has been identified by many researchers: Gopal Guru (1995), Sharmila Rege (1998), and Chhaya Datar (1999). However, „lived experience” of Dalit women and their perspectives could be articulated accurately in their writing.

The scrutiny of select texts: Sangati, The Weave of My Life, and The Prisons We Broke reveal the common aspect of the lives of their respective writers: Bama Faustina, Urmila Pawar, and Baby Kamble, that they all certainly have a privileged standpoint as an „outsider-within’. The study reflects their development from childhood to fully conscious grown-ups; their odyssey from a marginal space to the dominant social structures fetching them the epistemic benefit of the „double vision” as a result of bestriding both sides of a dichotomous social divide. This shaped their new perspectives on life. These narratives can be called „social epiphanies” which led Dalit women to follow the ethics of Black women writers, especially „politicizing of their memory”, „remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (hooks 1990: 147). Another commonality among Dalit women writers is that they all have written their narratives in their regional languages; therefore, the visibility of these minor texts has been accredited to the political commitment of their translators. Maya Pandit has crossed many borders and very proficiently introduced the readers who are „outsiders”, to the nooks and crannies of Indian Marathi region in her translations of the two original Marathi texts into English: Kamble’s Jina Aamcha (1985) as The Prisons We Broke (2008) and Pawar’s Aaydan (2003) as The Weave of My Life: Dalit Women’s Memoirs (2008). Sangati, an English translation by Lakshmi Holmstrom of the second work of Bama, published in Tamil (1994) conveys the essence of the original text without sensationalizing its subject matter. As a result, what is from the margins in the regional language and culture has been brought into the vanguard of the international arena for the sake of bonding with similar cultural forces operating within other cultures. Thus, as with Black women intellectuals, the „double vision” of Dalit women writers helped them to understand that the privileged classes and the patriarchy use ideologies to

restrict these women to the periphery, consequently limiting their access to societal resources and institutions to control, define, and marginalize their location.

The term „outsider-within“ was first coined by Patricia Hill Collins (1986). „Outsider-within“ status holder occupies a special space that their difference makes; they become different people, „the other“, „marginalized“. It shapes the perspective of the experiencer which locates a unique standpoint. „Outsiderwithin“ status was captured by Bell Hooks, a black feminist critic while giving an account of her small- town, Kentucky childhood, she registers, „living as we did on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out... we understood both“ (1984: vii). Their difference makes them conscious of patterns or social constructions that may be beyond the comprehension or sight of sociological insiders. Therefore, the select narratives reveal some common themes.

THEMES IN DALIT WOMEN“S LIFE NARRATIVES

Dalit women are often trapped in highly patriarchal societies. The severe discrimination they face from being both a Dalit and a woman, makes them a key target of violence and systematically denies them choices and freedoms in all spheres of life. This endemic intersection of gender-and-caste discrimination is the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations. Dalit women suffer from severe limitations in access to justice and there is widespread impunity in cases where the perpetrator is a member of a dominant caste, above the Dalits in the caste system. Dalit women are therefore considered easy targets for sexual violence and other crimes, because the perpetrators almost always get away with it. For example, in India, studies show that the conviction rate for rapes against Dalit women is under 2% compared to a conviction rate of 25% in rape cases against all women in India. Sanctioned impunity on behalf of the offenders is a key problem. Police often neglect or deny the Dalit women of their right to seek legal and judicial aid. In many cases, the judiciary fails to enforce the laws that protect Dalit women from discrimination.

Caste and gender discrimination in the delivery of education health care, water, sanitation and other basic services are also major obstacles for Dalit women severely impacting on their welfare and opportunities. This discrimination has been documented repeatedly by UN agencies and major international human rights and development NGOS.

THE INTERLOCKING NATURE OF OPPRESSION

The texts illustrate that the marginality and social exclusion of the Dalit community further pushed Dalit women as the second sex, into a state of repression, poverty, and ignorance. The interlocking nature of caste, class, and gender oppression of women is appropriately summarized by Bama:

The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating. In the fields, they have to escape from upper-caste men's molestations. At church, they first lick the priest's shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husband“s torment (Bama 2005: 35).

This shows Dalit women suffer within the household, the workplace, and religious spaces. They are agonized physically, mentally, economically, and spiritually, with the effect of caste closely related to their location within Indian society. The select texts demonstrate that the caste system is most prevalent and stern in rural areas. The texts elucidate power relations and the framework of the intersectional oppressions of caste, gender, and class responsible for the crippled existence of women. Their main struggle is for survival in a space of social exclusion and marginal spatial realities: “In the face of poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense

in schooling, and stayed at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for the babies, and doing household chores” (Bama 2012: 79). Kamble states, “Our place was in the garbage pits outside the village, where everyone threw away their waste... We ate the leftovers without complaining and labored for others” (2008: 49). The majority, of women who belong to these repressed communities, work as food gatherers, and are mostly dependent on natural resources for their survival. They collect firewood, dry grass, wild fruits from forests, and a variety of fish, crabs, and shells from the creeks. The Weave portrays the conditions of a subhuman existence of an entire community, shamelessly exploited by the upper castes, reduced to a status of beasts of burden, extremely marginalized” (Pandit 2015: xvi). The text presents an authentic picture of Dalit women’s hardships: Women hunted for crawfish or crabs in the rocks by pushing their hands inside. They got drenched in the waves dashing against the rocks. Their hands and feet would be cut by the sharp edges of the rocks, and the salty seawater stung the wounds (Pawar 2015: 44).

Some women lost their lives because they did not notice the water rising” (Pawar 2015). These women are also compelled to undertake dicey journeys for their survival to sell their wares. Kamble’s Aaji⁴ would also go with other women to fetch wood. Once the big branches were cut and tied in small bundles they were carried to the village for sale; the caste factor traversed their labor. They were not allowed to use the regular road that was used by the higher castes. When somebody from these castes walked from the opposite direction, the Mahars had to leave the road, descend into the shrubbery and walk through the thorny bushes on the roadside. They had to cover themselves fully if they saw any man from the higher castes coming down the road, and when he came close, they had to say, „The humble Mahar women fall at your feet.“ This was like a chant which they had to repeat innumerable times, even to a small child if it belonged to a higher caste (Kamble 2008: 52).

They were forced to accept their subjugation and submission to the social hierarchy, through these chants founded on religious ideology. They could not pass without showing due respect to upper-caste men, otherwise, they had to face the rage of their masters and elder male members of their family. The gathered firewood was mostly sold on the Brahmin lane. Every house on this lane had a platform of approximate chest height, meant to prohibit the Maharwomen from directly reaching the entrance. Instead, they would call out, “Kaki, firewood! The Mahar women are here with firewood.” (Kamble 2008: 54). The kaki⁶ would then bargain with them. And finally, these women were asked to carry the bundles to the courtyard of the house. They had to stack all the wood neatly after checking if any of their thread or hair was not left sticking to the wood that might pollute the lady’s house. Akin to the same principle of submission in the name of caste or religion, hegemonic gender ideology also forced them to accept their subservient positions in marital relations:

We believe that if a woman has her husband, she has the whole world; if she does not have a husband, then the world holds nothing for her. It’s another thing that these masters of Kumkum generally bestow upon us nothing but grief and suffering (Kamble 2008: 41).

The writers represent numerous cases of violence against Dalit women. „At the slightest pretext, the husband showered blows and kicks on her. Sometimes he even whipped her.“ (Pawar 2015: 112-113). „He would beat me up for a flimsy reason... This was the life most women-lead“(Kamble 2008: 155). „... the poor women would take her children and cross the hills and valleys at night, her face broken, body swollen, bleeding and aching all over, and reach her mother’s house“ (Pawar 2015: 33). These quotations indicate that Dalit women are only subservient partners in marital relations, only an object of lust fulfillment and unpaid servants.

Systems of justice meant to protect Dalit women at the national level are completely failing us. We are asking for immediate loud and clear global support in our struggle. – Asha kowtal.

Bama’s Sangati is an illustration of how patriarchy works in the case of Dalit women. The foremost question is economic inequality. Women presented in Sangati are wage earners working as agricultural and building site laborers but earning less than men do. Yet the money that men earn is their own to spend as they please,

whereas women bear the financial burden of running the family, often on their own. They are also constantly vulnerable to abuses in the world of work. Hard labor and economic precariousness lead to a culture of violence. This is the theme that Bama explores boldly throughout the book. Bama also exposes the atrocities and sexual exploitation of Dalit women who work as farm laborers for the upper caste landlords. The whole account of Mariamma in Sangati validates the inhuman treatment given to poor Dalit girls. She fell into a well while working and was almost crippled; she suffered from malnutrition, and a landlord attempted to rape her. But gender and caste politics blamed her as the perpetrator, and she is made to pay a fine of 200 rupees. In the Dalit community „[I]t’s one justice for men and quite another for women“ (uri 2005: 24). Mariamma is then scolded by the naattaamai:

“The landowners get up to all sorts of evil in the fields. Can we bring them to justice? ... After all, we have to go crawling to them tomorrow and beg for work” (Bama 2005: 25). Thus, the Gender discrimination in the Dalit community is pervasive and begins from birth. A girl’s birth is never welcomed in a family, and it is a must for a woman to beget a boy. Baby boys receive more attention and care; they are even fed longer. Boys are given more support, liberty, and respect than girls. Gender bias which begins from the birth of girls continues throughout life for all women including progressive women. If a woman wants to pursue her education or search for a job, she can only do so under the condition that she must first finish her daily chores in the house. Even if she does work outside the home, the community has established an exploitative culture for working women who must hand over their salaries to their husbands. Pawar notes that this is like “deliberately offering your head for butcher’s knife” (2015: 208). Gender discrimination is also seen at the time of promotions. Moreover, “The moment a man is promoted; he immediately becomes a Bhausaheb. But women can never earn the title of Saheb¹⁰. Even after they are promoted, women remain „bai l l, without the „Saheb“ (Pawar 2015:235). Therefore, many social practices, far from being neutral, are gendered, sustaining a patriarchal social order. And caste is the biggest enemy. The practice of untouchability is imposed on Dalits from birth; there is the belief that caste is inherent and dictates their fate of repression and marginalization. Children become aware of Caste bias in the course of daily life without anybody telling them. Many Dalit writers have memories of a difficult childhood, starvation, repression, and social exclusion. Pawar still has the colonial imprints in her memories: Aajisent Urmila to deliver baskets to her customers whenever allowed her to enter their house and made her stand at the threshold. They sprinkled water on the baskets to wash away the pollution. To avoid contact with her they would drop coins in her hand from above. She also remembers her accounts with a Pandit family to whom her Aayewould send her with some paisa coins to buy some pickles from them. She was not allowed to go beyond the first step of Pandit’s (upper-caste) house.

COURAGE, STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE OF DALIT WOMEN

“Our outrage is not enough. We must take real and focused action to mend our societies” dramatic failure to support the rights of people of discriminated castes, particularly women and girls”.

Despite all these experiences of violence that leave grave marks on Dalit women’s lives and dominant caste perpetrators constantly reiterating gender-based caste norms and Dalit gender subordination, the narratives of the Dalit women also evidence their courage, strength and resilience to assert their right to live a life with dignity. Apart from the courage that Dalit women have shown during violence, their resilience in the postviolence phase is manifested in two respects: first, their determination to pursue a course of action, whatever may be the expected or unexpected outcome, to set right the harm done by the violence; secondly, the tenacity they have shown in their various attempts to sustain their lives against all odds, refusing to let their lives disintegrate further as a result of the violence they have experienced. Whether this was done with success or otherwise in terms of achieving a legal remedy for the injustice they had faced or improving their living conditions, what is significant are their efforts to survive and sustain their lives in some form or another. It is ironic that instead of the Indian State being the custodian of constitutional rights, it is Dalit women themselves who often dare to uphold the rule of law in the face of the “rule of caste”. This is evident from

cases where Dalit women assert their rights to equality and fundamental freedoms of life, and also where they approach established legal justice mechanisms instead of taking the law into their own hands as the perpetrators have done. And yet, in only a few cases does the state rise up to meet Dalit women's expectations of justice. Therefore, what Dalit women look to is not a paternal way of providing them remedial justice, but support mechanisms that clearly establish and uphold their rights, and bring them into mainstream society with dignity.

Vinnarasi, a 30-year old Dalit woman from Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu filed a police case of sexual assault against a dominant caste man who wanted to take over her land in 2002. She says, "A thing of this sort, a humiliating affair, has happened to me because I was born into a Dalit community. Never would such a humiliating situation befall a „high“ caste woman. I won't leave the man who assaulted me without seeing him punished. To abolish the caste system and to procure punishment for all casteist and chauvinist men, I would act by extending all possible help to anyone working for this cause." Failure by the Indian state and civil society to respond to Dalit women's legitimate expectations results in these women experiencing greater marginalisation, to the detriment of a healthy and vibrant democratic polity. There also lies a possibility of increased questioning of the rule of law as the appropriate means to securing justice. What Dr B.R. Ambedkar said in 1949 on the occasion of the Third Reading of the Indian Constitution is well worth noting in this regard:

"On enacting the Constitution], we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one [wo]man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up."

II. CONCLUSION

Legislation alone does not address structural discrimination. The UN has an important role to play and must step up to the plate to help stop caste-based violence against women.

Since Dalit memoirs are social documents, students can be sensitized to the various issues related to the lives of women in general and Dalit women in particular. Students and teachers may discuss the contemporary social issues in the class such as divorce, exploitation of women, the causes of rise in rape cases etc. By studying the memoirs of the Dalit writers, students will develop a sense that gender discrimination, caste discrimination and atrocities on women are the hurdles in a nation's progress. The socio-cultural issues depicted in the memoirs of the Dalit writers have a wider appeal. Therefore, the teacher in the class can make his students understand that self-esteem, equality, justice and freedom are important factors for establishing social equilibrium.

The powerful language used by the writers can be only understood in the Indian socio-cultural context. The students are largely benefited by developing their interpretative ability. The teacher being a facilitator can inculcate in the students to interpret literary discourse especially Dalit writing by applying the principles of sociolinguistics. The autobiographical writing can be best understood by juxtaposing the works of other Dalit writers. It becomes an interesting as well as a joyful literary activity. The teacher can show the documentary on the lines of the theme of untouchability, sensitize the students on the current social issues facing the country, and help them make better citizens. This kind of study also facilitates the exploration of the nature of Dalit society and the aspirations of its members in the modern Indian society.

REFERENCES

1. Ambedkar.B.R.1990. The Annihilation of caste: An undelivered speech New Delhi: Arnold Publishers.
2. Bama Faustina.2005.Sangati Events Translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom.New Delhi Oxford University press.
3. Kamble Baby, 2008, The Prisons we Broke. Translated by Mayapandit Delhi: Orient Private limited.
4. Pandit Maya 2015 Introduction “The weaves of my life by Urmila Pawar” Translated by Maya Pandit.
5. Rolin, Kristina 2009, “Standpoint theory as a Methodology for the study of Power Relations” Hypatia vol.24(4).pp.218-226.
6. RanveerKashinath, “Dalit Literature and African American Literature: Roots against Dominant ideology and cultural Hegemony”.
7. “Writing Black writing Dalit: Essays in Black African and Dalit Indian writings Ed.HarishNarang, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study 202, 107-115 print.
8. The Village and the City: Dalit Feminism in the autobiographies of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar-Shoma Sen Research Article July 21, 2017.
9. Experiencing Dalit Women’s life: An analysis of selected Dalit Autobiographies.
10. Bama, Karukki Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1945 print.
11. Zeliot,E.1996 from Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar movement New Delhi: Manohar publishers.
12. Narayan Uma 1989. “The Project of a feminist Epistemology: perspectives from Non-western feminist, The Feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies (pp213-224), New York and London: Routledge.
13. Dumont.L.1999.Homo Hierarchies: the caste system and it’s implications. New Delhi.
14. Guru, Gopal.1995. “Dalit women Talk differently” Economic and Political weekly pp.2548-2550.
15. Chandran. I.R and R.S. Hashim 2014 “When feminism oberpowers caste marginalization: A Behavioural Science 18 pp 383-388.
16. Dietrich, G.2003, “Dalit movement and women’s movement” in A.Rao(Ed).Gender and Caste, Delhi: Kali for women.
17. Manorama. R.2008. “Dalit women: the Downtrodden” in Mary E.Jhon (ed) women studies in India: A Reader New Delhi: Penguin Books pp.445-452.