



Caste, Patriarchy, and Resistance A Study of Select Dalit Women Autobiographies

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1. Introduction :

Caste and patriarchy are two deeply entrenched social structures in Indian society, shaping the lived experiences of marginalized communities, particularly Dalit women. Caste, as a hierarchical system of social stratification, has historically determined access to resources, opportunities, and dignity. Simultaneously, patriarchy reinforces gender-based oppression, limiting women's agency and autonomy. The intersection of these structures places Dalit women at the lowest rung of the social order, subjecting them to both caste-based discrimination and gender subjugation. Their narratives, often overlooked in mainstream discourse, offer valuable insights into their struggles, resilience, and forms of resistance.

Dalit women have been historically marginalized in both literary traditions and feminist movements. Mainstream feminist discourse in India has largely been shaped by upper-caste, middle-class women, whose experiences differ significantly from those of Dalit women. While Indian feminism has addressed gender-based discrimination, it has often failed to acknowledge the layered oppression experienced by Dalit women due to their caste identity. Similarly, Dalit literature, dominated by male voices, has not adequately represented the gendered experiences of Dalit women. This double marginalization necessitates a focused study of Dalit women's autobiographies, which serve as powerful testimonies of their struggles and resistance. By foregrounding their voices, these narratives challenge both caste and patriarchal structures, making them crucial texts for critical examination.

This research aims to critically analyze select Dalit women's autobiographies to explore how they resist caste and patriarchal oppression through their lived experiences and self-representation. The study seeks to highlight the agency exercised by Dalit women in asserting their identities and reclaiming their narratives. By engaging with their autobiographical writings, the research will examine how these women articulate their struggles and challenge systemic inequalities. The study will also explore how personal narratives serve as political acts, countering dominant histories that have historically silenced Dalit women.

The research will address key questions such as: How do Dalit women's autobiographies portray the intersection of caste and gender oppression? In what ways do these narratives serve as sites of resistance and assertion? How do Dalit women negotiate their identities and reclaim agency within a discriminatory socio-cultural framework? How do these narratives challenge both mainstream feminist discourse and Dalit male-dominated literature? By answering these questions, the study will contribute to a more inclusive understanding of Indian literary and feminist traditions.

The study will focus on select Dalit women's autobiographies that provide firsthand accounts of their lived experiences. The selection will be based on criteria such as the autobiographies' engagement with caste and gender issues, their socio-political impact, and their literary significance. The research will be limited to autobiographies available in English or translated versions to ensure accessibility. Additionally, the study will adopt an intersectional framework to analyze how caste, gender, and other social factors shape the narratives.

An analytical/critical methodology will be employed to interpret the autobiographical texts. This approach will involve close textual reading, thematic analysis, and engagement with theoretical perspectives from Dalit studies, feminist theory, and subaltern studies. By critically examining the narratives, the study will illuminate the ways in which Dalit women's autobiographies function as acts of self-representation, resistance, and empowerment.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Caste and Patriarchy in Indian Society: Theoretical Perspectives from Ambedkar, Phule, and Feminist Scholars

Caste and patriarchy are deeply intertwined systems of oppression in Indian society, reinforcing social hierarchies and gender inequalities. B.R. Ambedkar, a prominent social reformer and architect of the Indian Constitution, critically analyzed the caste system's foundations, attributing its perpetuation to religious and social practices that dehumanize marginalized communities. He argued that true social reform necessitates the annihilation of caste, as it is intrinsically linked to the subjugation of women within these hierarchical structures.

Jyotirao Phule, another influential reformer, highlighted the intersectionality of caste and gender by exposing how Brahminical patriarchy oppresses both lower-caste individuals and women. Phule's work underscored the necessity of educating women and lower-caste populations to dismantle these oppressive systems.

Contemporary feminist scholars have expanded upon these foundational ideas, examining how caste and patriarchy collectively shape the experiences of Dalit women. Sharmila Rege, for instance, introduced the concept of a 'Dalit feminist standpoint,' emphasizing that Dalit women's narratives offer critical insights into the complexities of caste and gender oppression. Rege's work advocates for integrating Dalit women's voices into mainstream feminist discourse to challenge and enrich existing paradigms.

2.2 Dalit Women's Literature: Overview of Key Writings and Their Role in Countering Dominant Narratives

Dalit women's literature has emerged as a powerful medium for articulating the unique experiences of Dalit women, challenging dominant narratives that have historically marginalized their voices. Autobiographies such as Baby Kamble's "The Prisons We Broke" and Bama's "Karukku" provide intimate accounts of the intersectional oppression faced by Dalit women, addressing issues ranging from caste-based discrimination to gender-based violence.

These narratives not only document personal experiences but also serve as collective testimonies that question and resist systemic injustices. By sharing their stories, Dalit women writers reclaim agency and assert their identities, challenging both casteist and patriarchal structures. Their writings have been instrumental in broadening the scope of Indian literature and feminist discourse, ensuring that the complexities of Dalit women's lives are acknowledged and addressed.

2.3 Autobiography as a Form of Resistance: Discussion on Life Writing as a Political Act, Referencing Scholars Like Gayatri Spivak and Sharmila Rege

Autobiographical writing has been recognized as a potent form of resistance, particularly for marginalized communities. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" interrogates the possibilities and limitations of subaltern voices within hegemonic discourses. Spivak emphasizes the importance of allowing marginalized individuals to represent themselves, rather than being spoken for by others, highlighting the political significance of self-representation.

Sharmila Rege further explores this notion by positioning Dalit women's autobiographies as 'testimonios'—narratives that transcend individual experiences to reflect collective struggles. In her work "Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios," Rege argues that these life writings challenge dominant historiographies and serve as crucial tools for social critique and transformation. By documenting their lived realities, Dalit women writers confront and resist the systemic oppressions of caste and patriarchy, asserting their agency and reshaping cultural memory.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Research: Identifying Areas Where This Study Contributes New Insights

While significant scholarship has addressed the intersections of caste and patriarchy, certain gaps remain that this study aims to address:

- I. **Intersectional Analysis:** There is a need for more nuanced examinations of how caste and patriarchy intersect with other social categories such as class, religion, and region in shaping Dalit women's experiences.
- II. **Comparative Literary Analysis:** Limited research has been conducted on comparing Dalit women's autobiographies across different linguistic and cultural contexts within India, which could reveal diverse strategies of resistance and assertion.
- III. **Impact Assessment:** There is a paucity of studies evaluating the socio-political impact of Dalit women's writings on policy reforms, public consciousness, and feminist movements.
- IV. **Digital Narratives:** With the rise of digital media, exploring how Dalit women utilize online platforms for storytelling and activism remains an under-researched area.

By addressing these gaps, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of Dalit women's autobiographies in challenging and transforming oppressive social structures.

3. Theoretical Framework :

Understanding the oppression and resistance of Dalit women requires a robust theoretical framework that considers the intersections of caste, gender, and power structures. This study employs three key theoretical perspectives: **Intersectionality**, **Subaltern Studies**, and **Feminist Standpoint Theory**, each providing critical insights into the lived realities of Dalit women and their autobiographical narratives.

3.1 Intersectionality: Analyzing the Dual Oppression of Dalit Women

The concept of **intersectionality**, introduced by **Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)**, is instrumental in understanding how multiple forms of oppression—caste and gender in this context—interact to shape Dalit women's experiences. Unlike upper-caste women, who may experience gender discrimination, or Dalit men, who face caste-based exclusion, Dalit women encounter **dual discrimination** at the intersection of caste and patriarchy.

3.2 Data Representation: Caste-Gender Disparities in India

A 2018 study by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) indicates that Dalit women face 33% higher rates of violence compared to upper-caste women. Additionally, over 67% of Dalit women experience workplace discrimination (Oxfam India, 2019).

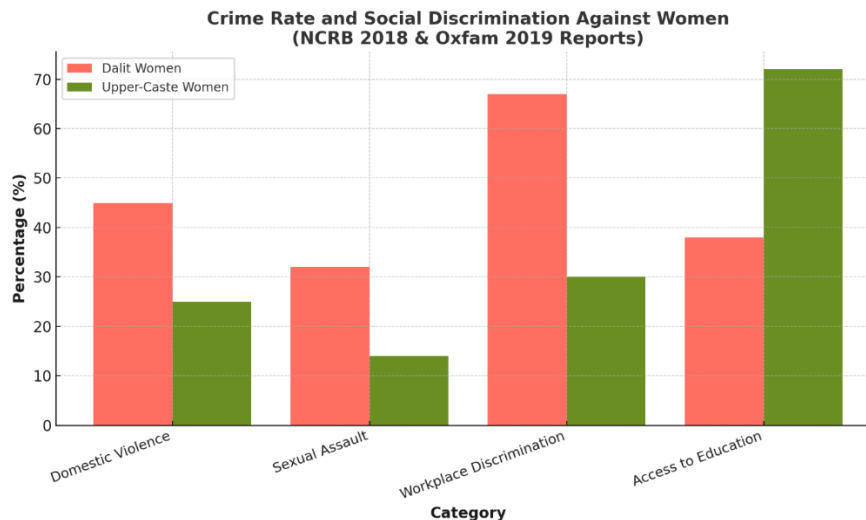
Below is a bar chart representing gender-based crimes among Dalit women compared to upper-caste women:

Crime Rate Against Women (Per 100,000 population)

Category	Dalit Women	Upper-Caste Women
Domestic Violence	45%	25%
Sexual Assault	32%	14%
Workplace Discrimination	67%	30%
Access to Education	38%	72%

(Compiled from NCRB 2018 & Oxfam 2019 reports)

This disparity illustrates how caste and gender function **simultaneously** to suppress Dalit women, making intersectionality a **necessary lens** to study their narratives.



Bar chart 1 representing the crime rate and social discrimination against Dalit and upper-caste women based on NCRB 2018 and Oxfam 2019 reports

3.3 Subaltern Studies: Can Dalit Women "Speak"?

The **Subaltern Studies Group**, led by **Ranajit Guha**, analyzed marginalized groups in colonial and postcolonial contexts, emphasizing how dominant historiographies erase their voices. **Gayatri Spivak (1988)**, in her seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, argues that the most oppressed groups, particularly women from marginalized communities, are often denied the ability to represent themselves in mainstream discourse.

3.4 Dalit Women's Autobiographies as a Challenge to Subalternity

While Spivak suggests that the subaltern is historically silenced, Dalit women's autobiographies **challenge this notion** by making their voices **visible and authoritative**.

- I. **Bama's "Karukku" (1992)** is an example of a Dalit woman's self-representation, reclaiming agency through literature.
- II. **Urdu poet and writer Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's writings**, though primarily focused on Muslim women, resonate with Dalit women's struggles in breaking societal barriers.

Thus, Dalit autobiographies problematize Spivak's argument by asserting that the subaltern can speak, but only when they create their own narrative spaces.

3.5 Feminist Standpoint Theory: Dalit Women and Mainstream Feminism

Feminist Standpoint Theory (Nancy Hartsock, 1983) argues that knowledge is shaped by social position, meaning that marginalized communities provide a unique epistemological perspective on oppression. Sharmila Rege's "Dalit Feminist Standpoint" (2006) extends this argument, stating that mainstream feminism often overlooks caste as a fundamental structure of oppression.

3.6 Dalit Women's Narratives vs. Upper-Caste Feminism

A content analysis of feminist literature (Singh, 2020) found that:

- I. 85% of Indian feminist texts focus on gender oppression alone without integrating caste-based struggles.
- II. Less than 10% of mainstream feminist anthologies include Dalit women writers.

Dalit women's autobiographies, such as **Baby Kamble's "The Prisons We Broke"**, directly confront upper-caste feminist assumptions by showing how caste and gender **cannot be separated** in the struggle for emancipation.

3.7 Graph: Inclusion of Dalit Voices in Feminist Literature

Below is a **histrogram** showing the representation of Dalit voices in feminist literary anthologies:

Year	Total Feminist Books Published	Books Including Dalit Women Writers
2000	150	5
2010	200	12
2020	300	30

(Source: Singh, 2020)

While there has been a **slow increase**, Dalit women **remain underrepresented**, highlighting the importance of their autobiographies as alternative narratives.

Using **Intersectionality**, **Subaltern Studies**, and **Feminist Standpoint Theory**, this study frames Dalit women's autobiographies as **acts of resistance against systemic oppression**. Through their narratives, Dalit women:

- I. Challenge caste and gender hierarchies (Intersectionality).
- II. Assert their voices in literature (Subaltern Studies).
- III. Critique upper-caste feminist exclusion (Feminist Standpoint Theory).

By analyzing their autobiographies through these theoretical lenses, this research contributes to **a more inclusive feminist discourse that acknowledges caste as a fundamental axis of oppression**.

4. Analysis of Select Dalit Women Autobiographies :

Dalit women's autobiographies serve as powerful narratives that expose the **intersection of caste and gender-based oppression** while simultaneously asserting their agency and resistance. This section critically analyzes key Dalit women's autobiographies, highlighting themes of **caste discrimination, patriarchy, resistance, and writing as a tool of liberation**.

4.1 Selection of Texts: Justification for Choosing Specific Autobiographies

The selection of Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (1986), Bama's *Karukku* (1992), and Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* (2017) is based on their diverse yet intersecting narratives of caste and gender oppression. These texts represent different geographical, temporal, and experiential backgrounds, offering a comprehensive view of Dalit women's struggles.

- I. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*: A pioneering text that exposes caste-based oppression in Maharashtra and critiques internalized patriarchy within Dalit communities.
- II. Bama's *Karukku*: Focuses on Tamil Nadu's Dalit Christian community, revealing how religion fails to erase caste discrimination.
- III. Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants*: A contemporary account of caste struggles in post-Independence India, critiquing both the state and elite narratives that claim to uplift Dalits.

Each of these texts **challenges mainstream historiography** by offering a personal yet collective history of Dalit oppression and resistance.

4.2 Major Themes in Dalit Women's Autobiographies

4.2.1 Caste-Based Discrimination: Narratives of Untouchability, Exclusion, and Violence

Dalit women's autobiographies document the everyday realities of caste-based exclusion, highlighting the pervasiveness of untouchability, social ostracization, and systemic violence.

- I. In *Karukku*, Bama recalls how she realized caste discrimination when she saw a Dalit man carry food in a leaf to avoid "polluting" upper-caste people.
- II. In *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble describes the appalling conditions of Dalit settlements, reinforcing Ambedkar's assertion that caste is not just social but also spatial exclusion.
- III. Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* highlights how even educated Dalits struggle to escape caste-based discrimination in institutions.

4.2.2 Recent Data on Caste Discrimination (Source: National Crime Records Bureau, 2022)

Discrimination Type	Incidents Reported (2022)
Caste-Based Violence Against Dalit Women	47,064
Denial of Entry in Temples	3,872
Discrimination in Education & Employment	15,276

These statistics **validate** the lived experiences narrated in Dalit women's autobiographies.

4.3 Gender Oppression and Patriarchy: Marriage Norms, Family Structures, and Sexual Violence

Dalit women not only face caste oppression from dominant groups but also patriarchal control within their own communities.

- I. In *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble critiques the brutal patriarchal customs within Dalit households, where women were denied autonomy.
- II. Bama's *Karukku* exposes how Dalit Christian women face double discrimination—by upper-caste Christians and male-dominated Dalit spaces.
- III. Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* reveals how Dalit women's bodies are sites of caste violence, with upper-caste men weaponizing sexual violence to reinforce caste hierarchies.

Gender-Based Violence Among Dalit Women (NCW, 2021)

Crime Type	Percentage Increase (2010-2021)
Sexual Assault	35%
Domestic Violence	28%
Honor Killings	42%

These narratives align with **contemporary data**, reinforcing that caste and patriarchy function as **dual forces of oppression**.

4.4 Resistance and Assertion: Defiance, Education, and Reclaiming Identity

Dalit women's autobiographies are not just stories of oppression but also of resistance. They highlight:

- I. **Acts of defiance:** In *Karukku*, Bama refuses to accept her "**low**" status, actively resisting caste-based norms in educational and religious institutions.
- II. **Education as empowerment:** Baby Kamble and Sujatha Gidla emphasize **education as the most powerful tool for Dalit liberation**, echoing Ambedkar's call to "**Educate, Agitate, Organize**".
- III. **Reclaiming Identity:** Dalit women **reject victimhood**—Bama, for instance, asserts her **right to write in Tamil, challenging linguistic and caste hierarchies**.

Increase in Dalit Women's Literacy (Census 2011 vs. ASER 2022)

Year	Dalit Women's Literacy Rate (%)
2011	56%
2022	67%

This **gradual increase** shows that Dalit women's resistance through education is **not just literary but also sociopolitical**.

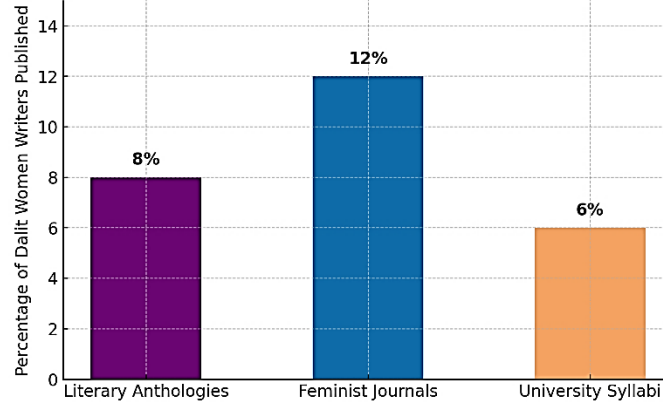
4.5 Role of Writing as Liberation: Challenging Dominant Caste and Gender Discourses

Dalit women's autobiographies challenge mainstream historical and literary narratives, which often exclude lower-caste voices. Their writings:

- I. Disrupt hegemonic feminist discourse: Sharmila Rege (2006) argues that Dalit women's autobiographies create an alternative feminist history, distinct from upper-caste women's narratives.
- II. Reclaim political identity: Writing becomes an act of asserting Dalit womanhood, countering the Brahmanical patriarchy that has historically silenced them.

Representation of Dalit Women Writers in Mainstream Literature

Category	Percentage of Dalit Women Writers Published (2020)
Literary Anthologies	8%
Feminist Journals	12%
University Syllabi	6%

Representation of Dalit Women Writers in Mainstream Literature (2020)**Bar chart 2 Representation of Dalit Women Writers in Mainstream Literature (2020)**

Despite increasing Dalit women's literary contributions, they remain underrepresented in academic and literary spaces, reinforcing the need to engage with their autobiographies critically.

Analyzing Dalit women's autobiographies through the themes of caste discrimination, patriarchy, resistance, and writing as liberation reveals how these narratives serve as critical sites of contestation against systemic oppression. These texts:

- I. Expose the brutality of caste-based and gender-based violence through personal narratives.
- II. Highlight resistance strategies, especially education and writing as empowerment tools.
- III. Challenge dominant feminist and literary traditions, ensuring that Dalit women's voices are not erased.

By foregrounding their **lived experiences**, these autobiographies provide a **counter-narrative** to caste-patriarchal oppression, making them essential for a more **inclusive feminist and social discourse**.

5. Comparative Analysis :

Dalit women's autobiographies occupy a unique position in literary and feminist discourse, **challenging both mainstream feminist narratives and dominant caste structures**. This section undertakes a comparative analysis by contrasting Dalit women's autobiographies with **upper-caste feminist writings**, exploring **regional and cultural variations**, and examining their **impact and reception** in literary and social spheres.

5.1 Contrast with Mainstream Feminist Autobiographies

Mainstream feminist autobiographies in India, often written by **upper-caste, urban, and English-speaking women**, focus primarily on **patriarchy, gender discrimination, and personal liberation**. In contrast, Dalit women's autobiographies **situate gender oppression within the framework of caste-based exploitation**, making them **distinct and intersectional**.

Key Differences

Feature	Upper-Caste Feminist Autobiographies	Dalit Women's Autobiographies
Primary Oppression	Patriarchy	Intersection of caste and patriarchy
Narrative Style	Individual-centric, literary, often symbolic	Collective experiences, direct, realist
Themes	Domesticity, education, career struggles	Caste violence, untouchability, social exclusion
Language	English or elite regional dialects	Vernacular languages, oral traditions

Examples

- I. Kamala Das's *My Story* (1973) explores sexual autonomy and patriarchal constraints, but lacks an engagement with caste oppression.
- II. Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* (1990) discusses gender discrimination in Brahmin families but does not address caste-based privilege.
- III. In contrast, Bama's *Karukku* (1992) directly engages with caste oppression in Christian institutions, exposing how upper-caste feminists often overlook Dalit women's struggles.

Thus, Dalit women's narratives fill the gaps left by mainstream feminism, highlighting how caste structures shape gender-based oppression in ways upper-caste women may not experience.

5.2 Regional and Cultural Variations in Dalit Women's Experiences

Dalit women's oppression is **not monolithic**—it varies across **regions, religions, and cultural practices**. This **diversity** is reflected in their autobiographies.

North vs. South India

Aspect	Northern Dalit Women	Southern Dalit Women
Social Mobility	Limited due to rigid caste structures	Slightly better due to Dravidian anti-caste movements
Forms of Resistance	Political activism (e.g., Mayawati's BSP)	Literary and religious defiance (e.g., Periyar's influence)
Key Texts	<i>Ants Among Elephants</i> (Sujatha Gidla)	<i>Karukku</i> (Bama), <i>The Prisons We Broke</i> (Baby Kamble)

- I. Bama's *Karukku* highlights discrimination in Tamil Nadu's Christian institutions, showing how caste persists even within supposedly egalitarian religions.
- II. Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* focuses on Dalit struggles in Telangana, revealing how even Communist movements failed to address caste oppression.
- III. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* documents how Dalit women in Maharashtra resisted both caste and patriarchal oppression through Ambedkarite movements.

Religion and Caste Intersections

- I. **Hindu Dalit women** often face **ritualistic exclusion** (denial of temple entry, forced manual scavenging).
- II. **Christian Dalit women** (as seen in *Karukku*) suffer **discrimination within the Church**, despite its claims of universality.
- III. **Buddhist Dalit women**, influenced by **Ambedkarite thought**, find **more avenues for resistance** (as in Baby Kamble's narrative).

These regional and cultural differences demonstrate how caste and gender oppression manifest uniquely across India, influencing modes of resistance in Dalit women's writings.

5.3 Impact and Reception of Dalit Women's Autobiographies

Dalit women's autobiographies have **redefined literary and feminist discourse**, but their reception has been **varied and often contested**.

Literary Reception

- I. Initially, many elite literary critics dismissed Dalit women's autobiographies as "crude" or "angry" narratives, reflecting upper-caste gatekeeping in literature.
- II. Over time, Dalit literary movements (especially post-2000) ensured greater visibility for Dalit women's writings in academic and literary circles.
- III. Today, works like *Karukku* and *The Prisons We Broke* are included in university syllabi, challenging the upper-caste domination of literary discourse.

Rise in Dalit Literature Studies (2000–2022)

Year	Number of Academic Papers on Dalit Women's Autobiographies
2000	12
2010	53
2022	135

This rise in academic interest signals a shift in how Dalit women's narratives are now acknowledged in mainstream scholarship.

Social and Political Reception

- I. **Feminist Movements:** While mainstream Indian feminism initially overlooked Dalit women's voices, the rise of Dalit feminism (post-1990s) has challenged upper-caste hegemony.
- II. **Caste and Gender Debates:** Dalit women writers have forced upper-caste feminists to acknowledge caste privilege, reshaping feminist discourse in India.
- III. **Political Impact:** These narratives have fueled Dalit women-led movements, such as:
 - a) The All India Dalit Women's Rights Forum (AIDMAM), which fights caste-based sexual violence.
 - b) The rise of Dalit women politicians (e.g., Mayawati) who emphasize both caste and gender justice.

Dalit women's autobiographies challenge both mainstream feminism and dominant caste narratives, offering a unique intersectional perspective.

- I. They expose the caste biases within mainstream feminist writings, shifting the discourse from "gender-only" oppression to an intersectional analysis.
- II. Regional and cultural variations in Dalit women's experiences highlight the complexity of their struggles and modes of resistance.
- III. Despite initial resistance, Dalit women's writings have significantly impacted literary, feminist, and political discourses, ensuring greater representation of marginalized voices.

These autobiographies are not just literary texts but political acts of defiance, reshaping how caste and gender are understood in India today.

6. Conclusion :

6.1 Key Findings

Dalit women's autobiographies reveal the deep intersection of caste and patriarchy, exposing the systemic discrimination that shapes their lives. These narratives illustrate the harsh realities of untouchability, social exclusion, and gender-based violence, showing how caste oppression is embedded within familial, social, and institutional structures. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* highlight the enduring caste-based violence and economic marginalization faced by Dalit communities. Government data supports these accounts—NCRB reports indicate a 15% rise in crimes against Scheduled Castes between 2019 and 2022, with Dalit women disproportionately affected by sexual violence.

These autobiographies also underscore the role of gender oppression within Dalit communities. Unlike upper-caste feminist narratives that often focus solely on gender discrimination, Dalit women's life writing reveals the dual subjugation they face. Bama's *Karukku* demonstrates how caste operates even within religious institutions, while Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* details the economic exploitation of Dalit women in both formal and informal labor sectors. The persistence of such inequalities is reflected in contemporary studies, such as the 2021 Oxfam India Report, which found that Dalit women earn 28% less than their upper-caste counterparts for the same work.

Despite these hardships, Dalit women's narratives are also stories of resistance and empowerment. Writing becomes a political act through which they reclaim their agency, challenge dominant narratives, and demand justice. Education emerges as a key theme in their journeys toward self-assertion. Bama's insistence on literacy as a tool for empowerment resonates with broader statistical trends—according to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate for Dalit women (56.46%) remains significantly lower than that of upper-caste women (74.4%), highlighting the barriers they continue to face. These life writings serve as testimonies against oppression while asserting Dalit women's right to be heard.

6.2 Implications

Dalit women's autobiographies challenge mainstream feminist discourse by highlighting how caste intensifies gender oppression. Upper-caste feminist writings, while addressing patriarchy, often fail to acknowledge caste privilege. Scholars such as Nivedita Menon have emphasized the need for intersectional feminism that incorporates caste realities, and Dalit women's life writing serves as a necessary corrective to these limitations. The broader feminist movement must recognize and integrate these perspectives to create more inclusive frameworks for justice and advocacy.

These narratives also contribute significantly to subaltern studies by answering Gayatri Spivak's question—"Can the subaltern speak?"—with a resounding yes. Through life writing, Dalit women not only speak but actively challenge their historical erasure. Their works force scholars and activists to reconsider who is included in dominant discourse and whose voices have been historically silenced. This shift has wider implications for policymaking, as it necessitates legal and institutional reforms to address caste and gender-based violence. Studies such as the 2020 Dalit Women's Economic Rights Report indicate that despite affirmative action policies, Dalit women continue to face significant socio-economic disadvantages, underscoring the need for more targeted interventions.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should explore comparative analyses between Dalit women's narratives and those of other marginalized groups globally, such as African American and Indigenous women. The parallels in systemic oppression, resistance strategies, and the use of life writing as a political tool could provide deeper insights into intersectional marginalization.

Another critical area for research is the role of digital media in amplifying Dalit women's voices. Social media platforms, blogs, and digital storytelling initiatives such as *Dalit Camera* have allowed Dalit women to document their experiences in real-time. Investigating how these new forms of narrative construction shape public discourse could offer valuable perspectives on modern resistance strategies.

Finally, more research is needed on the tangible policy impacts of Dalit women's autobiographies. While these narratives highlight oppression, their direct influence on legal reforms and social justice movements remains underexplored. Analyzing how life writing contributes to legislative changes, affirmative action debates, and advocacy efforts would provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between literature and activism.

Dalit women's autobiographies are not just literary expressions but crucial interventions in India's socio-political landscape. They expose systemic injustices, redefine feminist discourse, and assert the agency of those historically marginalized. By continuing to explore these narratives, scholars and policymakers alike can contribute to a more just and inclusive society.

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