

Dalit Women as Outsider Within: A Standpoint Exploration

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Abstract

Owing to the graded inequality inherent in Indian society, Dalit women lie at the bottom of the hierarchy with no power to execute. In short, one can say that they are “Dalit of Dalits.” The present paper looks at the challenges and exclusionary practices faced by the Dalit women with reference to the works of Bama’s *Sangati* (2005) and Baby Kamble’s *The Prison We Broke* (2008). Delving into the concepts of gender and caste, the paper aims to demonstrate how both writers portray the idea of the outsider within the identity of Dalit women. It will also deal with how this outsider within identity gives them a standpoint of their own. In its entirety, the paper highlights the challenges and haplessness of Dalit women because of their identity and their zealously in fighting the oppressive forces.

Keywords

Experiencing marginalisation, outsider-within, Dalit women, Dalit feminism, standpoint theory

Introduction

The “outsider-within” is a phenomenon in which a specific group is marginalised and relegated to the periphery due to their gender or other factors. The oppressed group, by the capacity, develops the power to write about traversing various spaces they occupy and tell people by collecting the inside knowledge and happenings. Coined by Patricia Hills in 1986, “Outsider-Within” describes people who have “particular knowledge/power relationship” (Collins 6), which is given to them due to the special status that their differences bring to them. They have a unique perspective because of their intersectional identities, which includes their gender, caste, class, race, and religion. These agents of interculturality partake to give an active role in the critical construction and reconstruction procedure and to bring/tell experience/knowledge of marginality at the public forum.

Standpoint is a social theory that talks about oppressed/marginalised groups in the broader perspective of resistance against the power structure and hierarchical power prevalent in society. The origins of standpoint theory can be

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traced in Hegel's analysis of the master-slave relationship and his elaboration on the notion that the slave can achieve liberation through consciousness developed through the constant struggle with the master. As Harding argues:

Standpoint focuses on the historical and social locatedness of knowledge... Collective political and intellectual work can transform a source of oppression into a source of knowledge and political liberation makes a distinctive contribution to social justice. (Harding 10)

The emergence of feminist standpoint theory/feminist perspective can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, during which it gained recognition as a critical feminist theory that explores the intricate connections between knowledge production and power dynamics. The idea has been posited as a means of granting agency to marginalised collectives, acknowledging the significance of their articulations, and fostering a counter-hegemonic awareness. The concept of the standpoint has been examined and elucidated by feminist theorists, resulting in the evolution of the theory into a comprehensive framework that encompasses various approaches. These approaches include Donna Haraway's analysis of situated knowledges (57), Nancy Hartsock's feminist historical materialist perspective (570), Patricia Hill Collins' black feminist thought (87), and Dorothy E. Smith's notion of everyday world sociology for women. These scholars argue that women perceive and interpret the world differently, thereby challenging existing perspectives. According to Narayan (217), it is argued that women possess a distinct form of knowledge.

When a marginalised group obtains a collective voice, it establishes a position that generates new understanding, and the philosophy that encourages social well-being and justice. In academia, standpoint could be traced to the rise of subalterns or proletariats, particularly in the Marxist movement where it is built in the form of resistance to encapsulate political consciousness, empowerment, and intellectual achievement. It is useful to analyse intersubjective discourses since the body of work claimed that authority is rooted in a person's knowledge and viewpoints, as well as the power that such authority wields, and that it is utilised to speak the truth and perspective from a social position and location. Women, being the subaltern, claim that their domain needs to be explored more in addition to experiences and perspectives underlined for equal opportunities. As Dorothy Smith points out in *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, women have been disregarded and objectified by sociology and are turned into other (36). Sociologists have always ignored and decentered the women's experience. The standpoint theory questions the economic exploitations of women's labour, the political denial of their rights, and the way society assigns them a negative cultural and social image. Collins calls for the inclusive scholarship that rejects knowledge that dehumanises and objectifies people (35). Women are not credited for their invisible labour, socioeconomic

positions, and responsibility to run the home. The theory contends that marginalised people's experiences reveal underlying problems that must be voiced, brought to light, and explained. These problems can inspire research and raise questions about ways of life, social structures, dominant social communities' bigotry, and the assertion that has initially counted as knowledge. Since the social structure is defined and generated by the dominating groups, men's society cannot understand how Dalit women suffer general exclusion and threat of power relation.

The term outsider-within is employed to understand the condition of Dalit women in perspective and not as things in themselves. The same object, event, or here as a class or sociocultural group in themselves i.e., Dalit women may appear differently to different observers and actors depending upon their positionality and location in the societal hierarchy. Dalit women have a distinctive advantage as an outsider within because their identity, centred around marginalisation, which allow them to see/experience facts or realities that may not be visible to others. The concept of outsider within argues that Dalit women produce their own feminist standpoint exceptional on self, family, society, and culture. Analysing the significance of Dalit agency, they interlock multiple themes such as writing on self-definition and self-valuation, systematic and structural oppression, and cultural production. While talking about themselves, culture, and society, they hold their outsider-within vision, which shapes their perspectives. Dalit women writers employ their social position to establish a Dalit feminist standpoint, effectively amplifying the voices of the socially marginalised. These voices possess a heightened comprehension of social reality due to their first-hand experiences of marginalisation (Rolin 218), aligning with the fundamental principles of standpoint theory (Harding 10).

In this regard, I have chosen *Sangati* (2005) by Bama and *The Prison We Broke* (2008) by Kamble, two of the influential works in Dalit literature to discuss how marginalisation functions not only through upper-caste people but also through Dalit men. Their marginalised state in society gives them a standpoint as an outsider-within. This becomes apparent in their representation of the self as well as the community. The centrality covered in this paper is how Dalit women use their outsider-within status to assert their identity and bring a consciousness in transforming from voiceless to voiced. Besides this, writings by Dalit women converge the caste as well as gender issues. The writers of the chosen texts have a strong disposition towards the feminist ideology as gender when combined with caste especially the lower caste makes these women particularly vulnerable. In writing their story of haplessness and limitations, they have transversed and metamorphosed it into a saga of struggle for survival and selfhood.

Articulating and Asserting the Self

For there to be a need for identity, there needs to be an assertion. Baby Kamble in her forward to the *Jinna Amachi* (the original Marathi title to *The Prison We Broke*) claimed how she is proud of being called a Mahar. As she puts it “I love our caste name, Mahar – it flows in my veins, in my blood, and reminds me of our terrific struggle for truth” (Kamble xiii). Baby Kamble’s assertion of pride in her Mahar identity is reclaiming of a term that has historically been used to demean and dehumanise Dalits. By openly embracing her caste name, she is challenging the stigma associated with it and turning it into a symbol of resilience and struggle. Her claim that her name “flows in my veins, in my blood” emphasises the deep connection she feels to her community’s history of fighting for justice. Through this assertion, she is reframing the narrative, transforming her identity from a source of shame to a source of strength. This sense of pride and ownership can be seen as a form of resistance against the oppressive norms that have sought to suppress Dalit identity.

In the same way, for Laxmi Holmstrom (the translator of *Sangati* from Tamil to French), *Sangati* “teases out a positive cultural identity as Dalit and woman (and also to a lesser extent as Christian) which can resist upper-caste and upper-class norms” (Holmstrom xviii). Holmstrom’s comment regarding *Sangati* highlights the text’s capacity to facilitate the formation of a constructive cultural identity. The literature portrays several narratives and accounts that collectively reveal a complex Dalit identity, which covers the intersectionality of gender, caste, and religious affiliation. The construction of this identity is established via resistance against the societal standards enforced by privileged castes and classes. The narratives presented in *Sangati* serve as a medium through which Dalit women can articulate their challenges and desires, so constructing a counter-narrative that challenges prevailing discourses and fosters a sense of empowerment among Dalit individuals, enabling them to accept their complete identity without any sense of guilt or reluctance.

By writing about their experiences, Bama and Kamble have crafted out a positive cultural identity for themselves as well as their community. Their assertion for identity and pride in themselves stems from Ambedkar’s call for self-respect. The very fact that Kamble’s *The Prison We Broke* talks of the Ambedkarite movement highlights the call of these writers for self-respect. Besides this, the writings by Dalit women writers have a unique positionality in voicing their experiences. These writers not only talked of the experiences but also of the thoughts that shape the lives of Dalit women. However, while recounting their experiences, they are self-reflective and self-critical as well. These writings bring out not the depraved women but valiant and dynamic women who revolt to protect their self-respect. The revolt of Dalit women is not person-centred but society-centred and their courage to fight, resoluteness, rebelliousness is the very essence of their life.

Dalit women writers possess a distinct positionality in articulating their lived experiences. The memoirs of Dalit women beyond mere depictions of difficulties and instead dive into the profound contemplations that influence their life. These authors demonstrate the diverse facets of their identities and experiences, highlighting their ability to persevere and their reluctance to adopt a victim mentality. Significantly, the narratives produced by individuals are not limited to personal experiences, but rather encompass and address wider societal concerns, promoting the notion of communal empowerment. The crux of the Dalit women's uprising is not rooted in individual grudges, but rather in their valiant resistance against systemic inequities throughout society. The narratives of these individuals depict them not as passive recipients of victimhood, but rather as courageous and active agents who strive to uphold their self-worth and honour. The aforementioned transformation in storytelling deconstructs and portrays a more precise and empowered life of Dalit women.

The writings of Dalit women exemplify the profound impact of literature in forming one's sense of self and cultivating feelings of dignity and empowerment. The act of proclaiming one's identity serves as a kind of resistance against oppressive structures that have historically aimed to erase or undermine the value of Dalit experiences. The arguments made by writers such as Baby Kamble and books like *Sangati* contribute to the wider movement of Dalit literature by challenging stereotypes, promoting empowerment, and creating platforms for the recognition and appreciation of Dalit voices. The literary works produced by Dalit women writers are in accordance with the ideas espoused by Ambedkar, emphasising the need of self-respect. These narratives effectively utilise personal experiences to question existing societal standards and promote a constructive cultural identity. By use of their narratives, these individuals not only reconstructed their own personal identities, but also made significant contributions to a wider movement aimed at achieving justice, equality, and empowerment within the Dalit community.

Narratives of Humiliation and Survival

Dalit female autobiographies or "testimonies" (Rege 39) are laced with the odyssey of the survival of the Dalit in the face of abject humiliation. Women, "the second sex" (Beauvoir 1989) have the secondary status in society. Gender and belongingness to the Dalit or "depressed class" (Ambedkar 8) make Dalit women "the weakest in the society." As the patriarchal nature of Indian society does not recognise the rights of women and as a member of the lower caste in a hierarchical social structure, they do not have any right. The writings of Bama and Kamble have the commonality of heart wrenching episodes of sufferings and miseries faced by Dalit women. The conditions of Dalit women in their works

clearly highlight the fact that the oppression and exploitation of Dalit women has crossed the border of time.

Baby Kamble has highlighted how the mahar women would address the shopkeeper: “Appasab, would you please give this despicable Mahar woman some shikakai for one paisa” (Kamble 23). Or, while walking on the road if they come across any upper caste man or even a child they had to say, “The humble Mahar woman fall at your feet master” (Kamble 52). Kamble argues that the centuries of oppression and slavery have left Dalits especially Dalit women in a very despicable state. The hegemonic social structure of Indian society has forced them to crush their sense of self. They are left without any voice of their own. These chants drive them to recognise their enslavement and subordination to the social hierarchy.

Sangati gives us a glimpse into the world of Dalit women who experience both caste and gender prejudice besides giving us an insight into the world of Dalit women and the marginal position they occupy at the intersection of gender and caste. These women are constantly exposed to the abuses and harassment. Bama has exposed the inhuman treatment meted out to Dalit women through the detailed account of Mariamma. Despite being a victim and falsely accused by upper-caste man, Mariamma is humiliated, and is forced to pay a fine of rupees two hundred. As gender and caste politics blamed her as the perpetrator, it led her to become a victim. Despite, being aware of the fact that Mariamma has been falsely accused, the members of her community don't have the courage to go and confront upper-caste people. “Suppose these fellows go and question upper-caste men. What if those rich men start a fight, saying how dare these Paraiyar be so insolent?... Can we bring them to justice, though? After all, we have to go crawling to them tomorrow and beg for work” (Bama 25). Gender inequality and dominance of the upper-caste people in their daily lives have left these women without any security. The social structure of their world is constructed in such a way that even in their day-to-day life, they are considered as an inert object, to be appropriated without any scope for protest or representation in the decisions affecting them. The dependence of the lower caste people on the upper caste landlords for their daily wages has even crippled their sense of duty and justice.

The texts explore the complex interplay between the marginalisation experienced by Dalit women, the overlapping forms of caste and gender discrimination, and their active role in challenging these inequities. Bama and Kamble utilise their literary works to illuminate the persistent and complex obstacles faced by Dalit women. Through the act of recollecting instances of tyranny and humiliation, the intention is to emphasise that Dalit women do not passively endure abuse, but rather actively establish their identities by embracing their unique personality. The act of narrating and disseminating their personal experiences functions as a mode of resistance. The objective is to enhance

individuals' capacity to critically analyse dominant narratives that perpetuate their marginalisation.

Dalit women encounter a complex interplay of caste and gender-based marginalisation, resulting in a multi-layered framework of discrimination that originates from their simultaneous identification as Dalits and as women. The convergence of their distinct personal identities gives rise to a distinct manifestation of oppression that is frequently disregarded or undervalued. The occurrence of social marginalisation encountered by individuals categorised as subhuman can be attributed to well entrenched social structures, wherein their marginalised position is further exacerbated by the intersectionality of caste and gender. The diverse nature of prejudice becomes apparent through its several expressions, encompassing economic adversity, social marginalisation, restricted educational and healthcare opportunities, and occurrences of both bodily and psychological detriment. The book provides a thorough examination of the interconnectedness of these oppressive establishments, presenting incisive perspectives on their contribution to the ongoing marginalisation of individuals.

The decision made by Bama and Baby Kamble to document their own experiences has a dual function. The utilisation of this specific approach is crucial in the endeavour to reclaim agency for Dalit women's accounts from the prevailing discourse, which frequently depicts them as passive entities vulnerable to victimisation. Through the open sharing of personal stories of oppression and degradation, these individuals are actively contesting the prevailing discourse that aims to marginalise their perspectives and lived experiences. The written work of the author acts as a concrete manifestation of their core thesis of individual agency, emphasising the profound influence of historical circumstances on human empowerment.

Moreover, the narratives of Dalit women emphasise the exceptional resilience and steadfast determination demonstrated by these individuals throughout difficult situations. By engaging in the process of narrating the injustices they have encountered, individuals underscore the intrinsic significance of recognition and communal assistance within the wider society structure. The act of writing functions as a means to cultivate empathy and understanding, while also serving as a platform for promoting dialogue on the interplay between caste and gender-based discrimination. In the novel *Sangati*, Bama emphasises the need for self-initiated transformation, stating: "[I]f we ourselves do not change our condition, then who will come and change it for us?" (Bama 132). The emphasis placed by Bama on affirmative action highlights the significance of Dalit women assuming agency in effecting transformative changes in their own conditions. This statement reflects the notion that the occurrence of exterior change is contingent upon an individual's interior dedication to undergoing transformation.

Marginality and Marginalisation within the Dalit Community

When we think about marginality, the word conjures up images of margin. However, when discussed into sociological sense it shifts from location to people. Margin, constructed around the idea of centre stands as the other of centre. David D. Laitin defines it as “thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity, as well as for physical security” (Laitin 32). It conjures within itself the exclusion and deprivation faced by the *others*. A thorough and in-depth study clearly highlights how Dalit women are ousted by Dalit men. Despite being occluded by Dalit men, Dalit women are marginalised within their community as well.

The works of Bama and Kamble highlight the extensive marginalisation that Dalit women endure from the earliest stages of their lives. Bama places significant stress on the manifestation of marginalisation at infancy, highlighting the early recognition of differential treatment between boys and girls. The differential reaction to the vocalisations of infant males, swiftly addressed through the provision of sustenance, in contrast to the comparatively inadequate attention given to females, establishes the foundation for enduring inequality throughout their lives. During the early stages of adolescence, girls are introduced to distinct societal expectations and assigned gender roles that differ from those allocated to boys. The mandated exercises and games perpetuate old gender norms by assigning girls to domestic responsibilities, while boys are encouraged to participate in physical activities. Moreover, the practise of excluding women from active involvement in festivals serves to reinforce the subordinate status of women, as it involves men assuming female duties. The aforementioned account of initial encounters serves as a testament to the entrenched nature of marginalisation experienced by Dalit women.

Kamble also underscores the deeply ingrained character of social marginalisation experienced by Dalit women. The author adopts a devastating metaphor to depict her mother’s state of confinement as comparable to that of a “bird in a cage” (Kamble 5), so symbolising the lack of personal liberty and autonomy. The current state of confinement imposes limitations on the mother’s ability to move freely, so reinforcing the ongoing cycle of oppression inside the domestic realm. These testimonies provide insight into the deep feelings of oppression and distress that Dalit women endure within their familial and communal contexts. The individuals’ displays of distress arise as a direct reaction to the painful recognition of being marginalised by their own relatives, prompting them to convey these sentiments through their written works.

The economic vulnerability and restricted access to resources faced by Dalit women exacerbate their suffering. Despite their active participation as valuable members of their communities, engaging in daily wage labour alongside

males, women nonetheless experience marginalisation even from their male counterparts. The lack of fair acknowledgement and decision-making power highlights a significant gender-related disparity in their respective groups. The economic involvement of individuals does not function as a means of achieving equality, but rather serves to underscore the interconnectedness of their marginalised status, wherein caste and gender cross to sustain exclusionary practises.

The reinterpretation of Dalit women's marginalisation by Bama and Kamble is grounded in their intricate research that interconnects the dynamics of caste and gender. By establishing a connection between these two dimensions, they present a novel viewpoint on the lived realities of Dalit women. The utilisation of an intersectional approach by the authors reveals the intricate and complex character of marginalisation, shedding light on its pervasive influence across different dimensions of the life of Dalit women. This recontextualisation enhances our comprehension of the intricate dynamics between societal frameworks and individual identities, revealing the systemic nature of the obstacles they present and fostering a revitalised dedication to confronting and altering these deeply entrenched disparities.

The Unending Chain of Oppression

Dalits are disadvantaged as they do not receive the dignity of their existence in the eyes of upper-caste people, but Dalit women are even worse off because they are viewed as objects by Dalit males as well as by upper-caste people. The social history of Dalit lives clearly marks the dehumanised treatment of Dalit women on account of them being both women and Dalit. The present texts illustrate the marginality faced by Dalit women, and the violence, poverty, and ignorance that characterise their subjugation. Bama in *Sangati* has rightfully summarised it thus:

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 must 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 had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down or rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husbands' torment. (Bama 35)

This depiction shows the susceptibility and lack of agency that women encounter, even when endeavouring to participate in work and generate income. Shifting focus to the domain of religion, Bama elucidates the repressive dynamics experienced by women inside church environments. The individuals are anticipated to demonstrate subservience through the use of metaphorical representations that symbolise unwavering compliance and submission. The aforementioned manipulation highlights the utilisation of religious beliefs to sustain the oppression of individuals depending on their gender. Bama's

statement succinctly captures the complex obstacles that women in their society encounter. The essay elucidates the susceptibility of women in many professional domains, their subordinate position within religious contexts, and the persistent anguish experienced inside their domestic spheres.

Similarly, Kamble has also talked about the misery and violence that Dalit women face, stating:

The life of the women in the lower caste was thus shaped by the fire of the calamities..... Just as the chaturvarna system created castes and sanctioned discriminatory practices, the cunning creator of the world established the practice of making women dependent on men. (102)

Kamble underscores the interconnection of oppressive systems by drawing a parallel between the influence of the Chaturvarna system and the subjection of women based on gender. The plight experienced by Dalit women, exacerbated by the intersectionality of their caste and gender, results in a dual state of marginalisation that renders them particularly susceptible to increased levels of vulnerability. Kamble's statement highlights the complex and pervasive nature of discrimination, illustrating its impact on various dimensions of the life of Dalit women. The manner in which she depicts the subject matter demonstrates a profound comprehension of the intricate relationship between societal frameworks, conventional gender expectations, and the complexities of power dynamics. This particular viewpoint functions as a potent analysis of the underlying inequities that are deeply embedded into the structure of society.

The texts also recount the violent treatment meted out to these women by the male members of their family namely father, brothers, and husbands. The acute display of violence is shown by these writers. Bama writes of how women are beaten by their husbands on slight or no pretexts at all: "I reared a parrot and then handed it over to be mauled by a cat. Your *Periappan* actually beat her to death. My womb, which gave birth to her, is still on fire. He killed her so outrageously, the bastard" (Bama 10). In another episode she recounted how a Dalit woman, named Thayyi, was beaten mercilessly by her husband, stating:

I could hear Thayyi weeping. As I came closer and saw what was going on, my eyes filled with tears. Thayyi's husband was beating her up again and again with the belt from his waist. She didn't even have a chattai on. Everywhere the strap fell on her light skin, there were bright red weals." (Bama 42)

Non-Dalit feminists' assumptions that Dalit women can stand and fight against domestic violence are refuted by Dalit women's accounts (Dietrich 4552). *Sangati* and *The Prison We Broke* portray this ugly side of Dalit society. How men from these communities exploit their women. The exploitation that the lower caste people face at the hands of the upper caste of people is further extended from lower caste men to their women. The interlinked chain of oppressions has

crippled the existence of Dalit women. Having a life worse than the animal, these writers have highlighted the targeted violence of the Dalit women. Dalit men and their twisted patriarchy have become the beacons of brutality against their families.

The Outsider-Within and Their Standpoint

Dalit women's works should be viewed as a social discourse and reflection on their life experience in a historical context rather than as a simple personal narrative that chronicles the trajectory of their development. These stories also demonstrate their vivacity and determination to recover. Stemmed from their sufferings is their zeal to survive and their motivation to persevere. Bama asserts that "our women have an abundant will to survive however they might have to struggle for their last breath" (68). They somehow or other manage to find ways to cope with their pains and sufferings at times with patience, and other times by resorting to coping mechanisms. Bama talked about the incident that she witnessed between Pakkiaraj and his wife, Raakkamma. To avoid the thrashing from her husband, Raakkamma started cursing him: "Ayyayyo, he's killing me. Vile man, you'll die, you'll be carried out as a corpse, you low-life, you bastard," (Bama 61). The narratives provide evidence of the coping strategies employed by Dalit women in response to their experiences of adversity. The demonstration of agency among these women is evident in Raakkamma's verbal pushback against her husband's abusive behaviour as they engage in acts of defiance and strategic resistance. These accounts offer insights into the many strategies employed by individuals to negotiate their circumstances, demonstrating both patience and a willingness to challenge established conventions. The depiction of these episodes by Bama highlights the diverse tactics employed by Dalit women in order to manage the obstacles they face, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of their acts of resistance.

The literary works produced by Dalit women hold a broader significance that surpasses personal narratives. They serve as complex societal narratives that reflect their lived experiences within a historical context. Rather than presenting a simple narrative of personal development, these narratives contain the complex interplay of caste, gender, and historical factors that have shaped their experiences. The accounts demonstrate a profound embodiment of vitality and determination, exemplifying the enduring fortitude and resilience that emerge from their adversities. Bama asserts that Dalit women demonstrate a steadfast resolve to persevere, especially when confronted with challenges, hence emphasising their unwavering fortitude that propels them forward despite difficult conditions.

Analysing these narratives from the perspective of Dalit women yields an epistemic advantage. Situated inside the societal hierarchy's lowest echelon,

these individuals possess a keen comprehension of the mechanisms governing society and the inherent power dynamics embedded within it. The complex network of power dynamics, which are frequently concealed within establishments, is revealed by examining the framework of caste classifications. The literary contributions of Dalit women are crucial in elucidating the latent political dynamics that influence their existence and revealing the entrenched power dynamics that maintain their marginalised status. The marginalised position of Dalit women highlights a deep understanding of India's stratified social system. The aforementioned framework imposes many forms of oppression, repression, and marginalisation upon Dalit women. The individual's distinctive viewpoint, honed through personal encounters, offers a particular standpoint from which to grasp the complex nature of social interactions. This particular viewpoint allows individuals to uncover the concealed mechanisms that uphold systems of caste-based discrimination and gender bias.

At the core of their narratives lies the exploration of systematic oppression, a phenomenon that grants individuals the ability to question and contest the dominant social structure. These narratives function as a medium through which individuals express their opposition to the repressive societal standards that contribute to their subordination. The narratives not only provide a platform for individuals who are marginalised by the prevailing political and social limitations but also offer insights into the intricate dynamics of those who actively perpetuate oppression within the same societal framework. Through this action, these written works create an opportunity for an extensive examination of social ecology. The literary compositions produced by Dalit women extend beyond individual accounts, functioning as potent social commentaries that mirror historical circumstances, thereby articulating a distinct perspective. These accounts exemplify the vibrancy and resilience that stem from the individuals' experiences of hardship. Through the adoption of an ideology rooted in their individual experiences, individuals are able to understand the complex and nuanced power dynamics that exist within a society structured around a caste system. The tales presented by the individuals in question serve as a medium through which resistance against systemic oppression is expressed while also offering significant perspectives on the intricate dynamics between those who perpetrate oppression and those who are subjected to it.

Conclusion

Within the societal framework marked by caste-based hierarchies, as observed in India, Dalit women experience a multitude of discriminatory practices that emanate from their dual identity as both women and members of the Dalit caste. This study explores the concept of Dalit women as the "outsider within" through a comprehensive analysis of two literary works, namely Bama's *Sangati* and Baby

Kamble's *The Prison We Broke*. Dalit women, who occupy the lowest position in the caste hierarchy, encounter a notable dearth of autonomy in their existence, facing the combined weight of discrimination based on caste and the supremacy of patriarchal structures. The concept of twofold marginalisation exposes individuals to heightened vulnerability, hence exacerbating their difficulties in achieving empowerment and recognition.

Dalit women exhibit notable fortitude and resolve in confronting severe obstacles, despite their marginalised social status. The portrayal of their unwavering resolve in battling repressive entities highlights their capacity for self-governance and ability to endure. Dalit women, by virtue of their marginalised position have a unique standpoint that empowers them to recognise and challenge dominant power structures with a heightened understanding of the linked manifestations of oppression they encounter. This particular viewpoint offers a significant agency for conceptualising a society that is characterised by more fairness, in which the perspectives of the most disadvantaged individuals are recognised and given appropriate consideration.

To cultivate a societal environment characterised by inclusivity and equity, it is crucial for policymakers, activists, and communities to actively participate in cooperative initiatives. The first stage in addressing the systemic obstacles that contribute to the continued oppression of Dalit women entails recognising the existence of intersectional discrimination they face. The opportunity for empowering Dalit women to break out from cycles of marginalisation and poverty lies in the availability of high-quality education and economic possibilities. In addition, the incorporation of marginalised individuals in decision-making processes can successfully enhance their voices and effectively advocate for their rights and needs. Bama and Baby Kamble present a powerful testimony that advocates for the acknowledgment and appreciation of the agency and perseverance demonstrated by Dalit women. These writings also underscore the significance of collaborative endeavours in eliminating the widespread disparities deeply ingrained in both caste and gender. The attainment of a societal framework that upholds the principles of dignity, respect, and equality for all individuals, regardless of their caste or gender, necessitates collective efforts.

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