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## **Mainstream, and Dalit Literature in Women's Perspective**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the different portrayals of women in Dalit, and mainstream Indian literature, with an emphasis on how these stories highlight the particular challenges faced by Dalit women. Women's experiences are often marginalized or oversimplified in mainstream literature, which is usually influenced by upper-caste viewpoints and presents them through a patriarchal prism that ignores the challenges of caste-based discrimination. On the other hand, Dalit literature provides a trustworthy depiction of the twofold dominance Dalit women face as they negotiate the intersections of caste and gender, primarily through the voices of female authors like Bama and Baby Kamble. These accounts reveal the cultural, societal, and individual struggles Dalit women encounter, emphasizing problems including social exclusion, economic inequality, and widespread abuse. By examining various literary traditions, the study promotes a more inclusive portrayal in literature and highlights the value of intersectionality in comprehending women's perspectives. It highlights how important Dalit women's voices are in changing descriptions and advancing more general conversations about social justice, identity, and resistance in Indian society.

**Keywords:** Indian Literature, Dalit Literature, Gender and Caste, Marginalized Voices, Gender Discrimination.

### **Introduction**

Narratives that mirror prevailing social hierarchies, and cultural norms have long been supported by mainstream literature. This frequently meant giving upper-caste, elitist, or patriarchal voices precedence over those of oppressed groups like women and Dalits.

Women and Dalits are two examples of marginalized communities that face institutional oppression and social exclusion. Yet, their hardships and tenacity highlight the pressing need for a more just and equal society that recognizes the humanity of every person (Mandal, 67).

The experiences, and hardships of women have always been viewed through a male-centric prism in popular literature, frequently omitting the complex facets of womanhood, particularly for those from underprivileged areas. Consequently, mainstream literature has come under fire for failing to adequately depict the intersectional problems that women who live at the nexus of oppression based on gender, caste, and class experience. This disparity has contributed to the emergence of feminist and Dalit literature as crucial counter-narratives.

The goal of Dalit literature, which has become a powerful literary and socio-political movement, is to elevate the voices and real-life experiences of the persecuted Dalit caste in India. The subjects of this literature are radical; caste-based inequality, poverty, and social exclusion are frequently discussed. It challenges the sanitized depictions of India sometimes found in popular literature with its urgency and rawness. Even in this literary arena, Dalit women's viewpoints have occasionally continued to be marginalized. The dual oppression of being both Dalit and female is examined in stories written by Dalit women authors such as Baby Kamble, Bama, and Urmila Pawar. These stories highlight aspects of the Dalit experience that are focused on gendered violence, exploitation, and resilience.

Even though gendered violence and exploitation are widespread realities that disproportionately impact women, particularly those from underprivileged areas, their fortitude turns into a potent form of resistance, opposing the very systems that aim to oppress them ( Bhana, Devika 34).

Since Dalit women frequently experience sexual and gendered violence that combines with caste-based discrimination, Dalit literature offers a crucial perspective on caste oppression from the viewpoint of women. A more complex understanding of systematic oppression is made possible by this intersectional perspective. Dalit women writers position themselves as change agents by opposing both the patriarchal and caste systems in their communities. Themes that have historically been constrained by caste and gender, such as the body, sexuality, autonomy, and agency, are explored in their works. In addition to challenging popular myths,

this feminist perspective in Dalit writing broadens the conversation on what it means to resist in a highly stratified society.

The female viewpoint is a crucial force in both mainstream and Dalit literature, changing the landscape of Indian literature to become more inclusive and representative. Literature turns into a potent tool for Dalit women to express resistance and recover their identities, departing from the victim narrative that is frequently forced upon them. As feminist and Dalit authors continue to tell their stories, they shed light on the complex experiences of oppression and resiliency, creating a more diverse and rich literary landscape that pushes readers to confront and inquire about social injustices, ultimately advancing a larger public conversation about equality and human rights.

Women's stories are frequently presented in mainstream Indian literature through a solitary gender lens, usually giving upper-caste women's experiences precedence despite the intricacies brought about by caste, class, and other identities. A homogenous representation of femininity results from this lack of intersectional awareness. "The homogenized portrayal of womanhood in literature often reduces diverse female experiences to a single narrative, ignoring the unique struggles of women from various backgrounds and reinforcing stereotypes that perpetuate inequality" (Showalter, Elaine 78), language is unable to convey the variety of realities that women in various social classes confront.

Therefore, by ignoring the experiences and struggles of women who are oppressed by caste and economic status, dominant narratives may unintentionally perpetuate exclusion and promote stereotypes. On the other hand, by directly addressing the intersections of gender and caste, Dalit literature provides a more complex understanding of women's lives. Bama and Baby Kamble are two authors who show how Dalit women deal with a special set of difficulties brought on by being both female and belonging to a caste that is repressed. Their writings explore the particular types of exploitation, abuse, and social stigma faced by Dalit women, offering readers a perspective that helps them understand the complexity of their challenges. By highlighting the experiences of Dalit women, this literature questions prevailing narratives that frequently oversimplify or ignore the complexity of identity, highlighting the fact that understanding women's experiences requires taking into account how different social categories interact.

The complexities of identity arise from the interplay of various social categories such as caste, gender, and class, revealing that individual

experiences are shaped by multifaceted oppressions and privileges that cannot be understood in isolation (Anthias, Floya 23).

Dalit literature urges a re-examination of how literature portrays marginalized voices in addition to extending the reach of feminist discourse. It emphasizes how crucial it is to acknowledge that experiences of gender discrimination vary and are exacerbated by caste, class, and ethnicity. Dalit literature promotes an inclusive view of femininity that takes into account the various realities inside Indian culture by shedding light on the unique challenges encountered by Dalit women.

### **Review of Literature**

**According to Meenakshi Mukherjee (1994):** Traditionally, males have dominated mainstream Indian literature, with stories mostly concentrating on patriarchal, upper-caste viewpoints. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, popular literature frequently romanticizes and glosses over difficult caste and gender issues, making it inaccurately portray the challenges of oppressed communities. Research on early Indian literature shows that, in keeping with the cultural norms of a male-dominated culture, women's voices were usually silenced or reduced to supporting roles.

**According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2023):** The concept of 'subaltern voices,' or those of underrepresented groups, particularly women, whose viewpoints are either missing or changed in popular literature. There is a knowledge gap regarding the experiences of women, especially those from lower castes, as a result of this lack of representation.

**According to B.R. Ambedkar (2022):** In India after independence, Dalit literature emerged as a potent voice that sparked a campaign for caste equality and dignity. Supporting academics like Gopal Guru and Sharmila Rege stress that Dalit writing gives the voiceless a platform and confronts poverty, violence, and injustice based on caste openly and sincerely. Dalit literature was acknowledged as a significant literary and social movement that emphasized Dalit realities in the 1980s and 1990s. Since Dalit men were the main authors and activists in this literature, the focus at first tended to be male-centered. Nonetheless, female writers like Bama and Baby Kamble gave Dalit writing a gendered viewpoint while emphasizing the particular difficulties encountered by Dalit women. Their writings established a unique Dalit literary subgenre that highlighted the intersecting conflicts of caste and gender.

**According to Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2009):** Dalit women's experiences with sexual violence, labor exploitation, and lack of autonomy are illustrated by their themes of gendered oppression within patriarchal and caste systems, offering an intersectional perspective on social injustice. By emphasizing the unique problems encountered by Dalit women, which were frequently disregarded in earlier male-dominated Dalit writings, scholars contend that these works expand the purview of Dalit literature.

**According to Sharmila Rege (2006):** She popularized the idea of the 'Dalit feminist standpoint,' which promotes a distinct viewpoint that blends anti-caste and feminist analysis. This strategy has sparked studies on Dalit literature that focus on and recognize the experiences of Dalit women, signaling a change to more inclusive representation. There are notable distinctions between Dalit and mainstream literature in terms of representation, subjects, and narrative style. The underprivileged are frequently portrayed in mainstream literature as docile, depending on a savior story that maintains caste inequalities. Dalit feminist literature, on the other hand, presents marginalized people as proactive changemakers who oppose and fight against repressive structures. Scholars observe that Dalit feminist writing offers a more genuine and nuanced representation of Dalit women's intersecting experiences, whereas the mainstream literary tradition has mainly failed to do so.

**According to Bama's *Karukku* (1992):** This compelling autobiographical book details the upbringing of a Dalit Christian woman in rural Tamil Nadu. Bama reveals the brutal realities of poverty, gender inequality, and caste-based prejudice through evocative storytelling. It explores issues of social justice, identity, and resiliency while providing a moving and unapologetic depiction of the oppressed lives of Dalit women in India.

## I

Stories from the viewpoints and experiences of upper-caste, male-dominated society have frequently been portrayed in mainstream Indian literature, usually mirroring dominant social norms and hierarchies. Voices outside of this prevailing narrative, especially those of women and oppressed castes, are often marginalized by this centuries-old tradition. The lives and hardships of women are usually portrayed in such literature from a patriarchal perspective, "Patriarchy is a set of social norms and behaviors where men rule over, subjugate, and take advantage of women" (Walby,56) frequently making them play passive parts.

The multiplicity and complexity of femininity are not well represented in this treatment, particularly for Dalit women and others who live at the crossroads of gender and caste. Because

of this, popular literature has come under fire for perpetuating stereotypes, ignoring the realities of marginalized women's lives, "The experiences of marginalized women are deeply ingrained in the structural injustices that mold our society; they are not just anecdotal"(Crenshaw, Kimberlé 34), and hardly ever recognizing the social and structural difficulties they face.

In Indian literary history, the rise of Dalit writing marks a significant turning point. "By giving voice to people who have historically been silenced and bringing attention to the reality of caste-based oppression, Dalit literature aims to reclaim the stories of the downtrodden" (Narayan, K 45) because it emphasizes the real experiences of the oppressed, actively challenging and redefining conventional narratives. Dalit literature, which is frequently viewed as a kind of social protest, emerged to oppose the sanitization of caste-based themes in popular literature and to give voice to those who have traditionally been marginalized.

Dalit writers, who draw inspiration from leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, address topics like economic hardship, injustice, and social exclusion with unvarnished Candor. However, early Dalit literature unwittingly mirrored mainstream literature's disregard for women's concerns by focusing mostly on the experiences of Dalit men. Consequently, the stories of Dalit women were originally disregarded, "In a society that aims to silence them, Dalit women's stories are a potent tool for resistance, exposing the intersections of gender and caste and reclaiming their identity and agency" (Bama 34), bringing attention to a deficit that would only be filled once more Dalit women started writing. Dalit women writers like Baby Kamble and Bama brought a vital viewpoint to Dalit literature by highlighting the particular difficulties encountered by Dalit women, who experience the combined oppression of gender and caste.

These authors examine issues including domestic exploitation, sexual violence, and the lack of autonomy Dalit women face in both their communities and society at large in pieces like *Karukku* and *The Prisons We Broke*. To effectively address the unique difficulties of Dalit women, feminist scholars such as Sharmila Rege have advocated for the significance of a 'Dalit feminist standpoint,' which blends feminist and anti-caste viewpoints. "Dalit feminism challenges the prevailing narratives that aim to marginalize Dalit women and asserts a collective identity that encompasses their lived experiences; it is not just about caste and gender" (Pawar, Urmila 67).

This method emphasizes how important it is to acknowledge intersectionality in literature and how understanding the full scope of caste and gender oppression in India requires the inclusion of Dalit feminist perspectives.

For Dalit women, the intersection of caste and gender creates a unique axis of oppression, complicating their fight for equality and dignity in a patriarchal society as they experience systemic violence and discrimination due to both their gender and caste status (Crenshaw, Kimberle 34).

There are significant contrasts in the narrative style, characterization, and topic focus between Dalit feminist fiction and mainstream Indian literature. Dalit women have often been depicted in mainstream literature via conventional or passive perspectives, ignoring their agency and resiliency. Dalit feminist writing, on the other hand, highlights the strength and active resistance of underprivileged women, presenting them as multifaceted people negotiating repressive systems.

The narratives of Dalit women expose the realities of their lives, emphasizing the importance of their voices in the broader feminist discourse and highlighting how caste intersects with gender to shape their experiences (Kumari, Aarti 123).

Dalit women writers provide readers with a more comprehensive picture of the human condition under caste and gender systems by focusing on tales of perseverance and empowerment. Although conventional narratives still fail to adequately represent Dalit women's viewpoints, this method has not only pushed for a remaking of Indian literature but also challenged dominant depictions. Beyond the realm of literature, Dalit feminist literature has a significant impact on social discourse and emphasizes the value of representation.

These works promote empathy and push readers to face the realities of systemic inequities in society by elevating the experiences of Dalit women. This literature has demonstrated the transformational power of storytelling to alter social views and has added to larger discussions about equality, resiliency, and agency. "Dalit feminist literature emerges as a powerful critique of both patriarchy and caste, offering a space for Dalit women to voice their struggles and assert their identities in a society that seeks to silence them" (Kamble, Baby 78). Thus, Dalit feminist writing continues to be a potent instrument for social critique and transformation, bringing voices that have been all too frequently left out of India's literary landscape and advocating for a more inclusive, representative, and compassionate storytelling tradition in India.



## II

Caste and gender inequality are frequently dismissed as unimportant topics or oversimplified in popular Indian literature to conform to a narrative dominated by upper-caste viewpoints. This method frequently emphasizes the experiences of men while neglecting the additional difficulties experienced by Dalit women, stereotyping or tokenizing underprivileged cultures, especially Dalits. "Women are frequently portrayed as supporting characters in mainstream literature, which perpetuates stereotypes and restricts their agency in stories that focus on male experiences"(Showalter, Elaine 67). In popular literature, women are usually portrayed as supporting characters whose roles are constrained by patriarchal and traditional ideals, unable to adequately convey the nuanced realities of their lives.

The distinct challenges of Dalit women, who face both caste and gender-based oppression, are rarely recognized due to the lack of intersectional viewpoints, which perpetuates social myths that silence these voices. In contrast, Dalit literature arose to address the underrepresentation of India's downtrodden castes and to chronicle their hard circumstances. "Millions of people from lower castes are denied basic human rights and dignity, and the caste system in India continues to perpetuate a cycle of oppression" (Omvedt, Gail 45).

The groundwork for literature that would openly and truthfully address caste-based inequalities was established by authors such as B.R. Ambedkar and others. But in its early years, Dalit literature also tended to emphasize male viewpoints, reflecting a vacuum in mainstream literature where Dalit women's views were marginalized. The nexus of caste and gender was only thoroughly examined when Dalit women started writing their own stories. Writers like Baby Kamble and Bama exposed the double disadvantage Dalit women face, highlighting problems like domestic abuse, and sexual exploitation, "Dalit women experience a distinct dual burden of gender oppression and caste, frequently falling prey to domestic abuse and sexual assault in a patriarchal society that diminishes their worth" (Kamble 34), and the difficulties of being a woman in a patriarchal society while also being Dalit.

Through pieces like Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Bama's *Karukku*, these Dalit women writers brought attention to the fact that Dalit women face persecution not only from higher castes but also from within their communities, where patriarchal structures continue to hold sway. They deal with gender-specific violence and societal stigmas that are exacerbated by caste hierarchy. Feminist academics have observed that the stories written by

Dalit women reveal the interconnectedness of caste and gender-based discrimination, offering an intersectional perspective that is absent from mainstream literature.

A complex web of oppression that disproportionately impacts women, pushing them to the periphery of society and depriving them of basic rights and freedoms, is created by the intersection of caste and gender-based discrimination (Crenshaw, Kimberlé 67).

These pieces highlight Dalit women's agency, tenacity, and aggressive resistance to oppression, in contrast to the passive representations of these women in popular narratives.

The importance of representation is made evident by juxtaposing Dalit feminist texts with mainstream literature. Dalit feminist literature is forced to face up to difficult realities concerning societal hierarchies and how they affect the lives of those who are oppressed. By giving genuine voices precedence over prevailing viewpoints, it reinterprets the narrative space and enables Dalit women to share their experiences in their own words.

In addition to diversifying Indian literature, the rise of Dalit women's voices has spurred crucial conversations on intersectionality and equality. "Dalit feminist literature weaves narratives that challenge caste and gender injustices in society, articulating the pain of oppression while simultaneously celebrating resilience" (Bama 34). In this sense, Dalit feminist literature promotes a more comprehensive view of caste and gender oppression in Indian society by acting as both a critique and an alternative to dominant depictions.

### III

Due to their position at the nexus of gender-based discrimination and caste, which frequently defines their identity in restrictive, oppressive terms, Dalit women in Indian society face particularly difficult challenges. However, this intricacy is usually ignored or oversimplified in popular Indian literature, resulting in a portrayal that falls short of capturing the particular challenges faced by Dalit women. Pawar, Urmila opines:

Due to their gender and caste, Dalit women experience several forms of oppression. They endure patriarchal standards that aim to control their bodies and lives in addition to the structural violence of the caste system. Their battles are characterized by an unwavering pursuit of justice, autonomy, and dignity in a culture that has historically silenced their voices. Their identities are shaped by the combined weight of

caste and gender, which forces them to live in a society that frequently denies them fundamental human rights. Their stories also serve as potent examples of tenacity and defiance in the face of systemic societal injustices (55).

When Dalit characters do emerge, they are frequently portrayed through a perspective influenced by preconceptions or caste biases, as mainstream literature has historically focused primarily on the experiences of upper-caste characters. As a result, Dalit women's voices are either ignored or are portrayed in a way that deprives them of agency, which serves to further a narrative in which their identities are minimized to passive objects of contempt or sympathy from society. "In a society that has long marginalized them, Dalit women's voices are potent testaments of tenacity and resistance, opposing the structural oppression of gender and caste and redefining their identities" (Bama 78).

Their tenacity, hardships, and the varied ways they challenge and reinterpret their identities under inflexible social institutions are all overlooked by this erasure. On the other hand, Dalit literature, especially that written by Dalit women authors, challenges the representations of Dalit women in mainstream literature by focusing on their identities and experiences. Stories that explore the dual prejudice Dalit women experience caste-based exclusion and gender-based oppression are brought up by authors such as Bama and Baby Kamble.

These writers highlight how repressive social standards forcefully shape Dalit women's identities in their writings, but they also highlight the resilience, unity, and inner strength that Dalit women develop in reaction. Dalit women's tenacity in overcoming social rejection and attempting to express their independence and dignity is illustrated in works such as Bama's *Karukku*. Dalit women writers reclaim their identities from the dominant narrative by revealing their lived experiences, presenting themselves as strong people who actively oppose the oppressive systems that attempt to define them rather than as helpless victims.

Dalit women's identities in Dalit feminist writing are strongly linked to their defiance of patriarchal and caste norms. Dalit women writers show how this multilayered oppression affects their sense of self and community in addition to their daily hardships.

Dalit women writers assert their right to speak and be heard in a literary landscape that has frequently silenced them by reclaiming their narratives and articulating the struggles and injustices faced by their communities (Kamble 34).

The severe realities of being both Dalit and female are documented in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, for instance, which shows how social forces aim to limit Dalit women to predetermined positions. However, Kamble also demonstrates how Dalit women create strong ties of solidarity and draw strength from group resistance.

By using these tales, Dalit feminist writing presents Dalit women's identities as more nuanced and truthful, showing them as resilient and diverse individuals rather than as flat representations of oppression.

Since it affects societal attitudes and public perceptions of oppressed communities, literary representations of Dalit women's identities are vital. Dalit feminist writing dispels prevalent misconceptions and advances a more complex comprehension of the intertwined issues faced by Dalit women. This body of work challenges popular narratives that ignore or oversimplify the lives of Dalit women.

In a culture that consistently marginalizes their existence, the experiences of Dalit women are characterized by a unique intersection of caste and gender oppression, revealing a complex reality of violence, resilience, and the struggle for dignity (Pawar, Urmila 23).

Stating that genuine, self-represented voices are important. In addition to reclaiming Dalit women's identities from a system that aims to marginalize them, Dalit feminist literature expands the reach of Indian literature overall by elevating the perspectives of Dalit women, which promotes greater empathy, comprehension, and respect for the variety of identities found in Indian society. "The rich tapestry of identities shaped by caste, religion, gender, and culture in India is its strength; each one adds to the complex social landscape and calls for an inclusive understanding of humanity" (Nussbaum, Martha C 67). Dalit women's literature highlights the strength of identity as a means of resistance and fortitude in the face of multiple forms of oppression through these stories.

#### IV

When examined from the viewpoint of women, the distinctions between mainstream and Dalit literature highlight divergent responses to the societal, cultural, and individual challenges that Dalit women encounter. Indian mainstream literature, "The realities of Dalit women, whose voices and struggles are marginalized, are frequently overlooked in mainstream Indian literature, reflecting a societal tendency to ignore the intersections of caste and gender that shape their experiences" (Bama 78).

Frequently influenced by patriarchal, upper-caste viewpoints, it usually romanticizes or generalizes women's issues without thoroughly addressing the particular difficulties faced by Dalit women.

Dalit women's particular struggles stem from the intersection of caste and gender, where they must contend with systemic oppression and violence as well as the weight of social expectations, which call for their agency and resilience in a society that frequently tries to make them invisible (Pawar, Urmila 23).

Women are frequently depicted in these works as passive victims of gender oppression, with their storylines limited to duties of domesticity, family strife, or social expectations. "Gender oppression victims carry the burden of systemic violence and societal expectations, frequently having their identities defined by the very structures that aim to silence and subjugate them" (Lorde, Audre 45). Although occasionally enlightening, these depictions typically ignore the intersectional difficulties Dalit women have, leaving out caste-based discrimination-shaped experiences that exacerbate gender-based hardships. Because of this, Dalit women's identities are usually either completely absent or inaccurately depicted, which leads to a literary landscape that only partially captures the realities of Indian women. The experiences of Dalit women are presented honestly and nuancedly in Dalit literature, especially through Dalit feminist writers.

Authors like Bama, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar offer a viewpoint that examines the complex relationship between caste and gender discrimination, addressing aspects of social exclusion, abuse, and exploitation that are rarely recognized in mainstream literature. These authors highlight the various layers of struggle Dalit women face, from systemic poverty and caste-based violence to exploitation in both the public and private spheres.

Caste-based violence is a violent manifestation of social hierarchy in which members of underprivileged castes face systematic discrimination, social exclusion, and physical attack. This violence is not just a collection of individual events; rather, it is a reflection of deeply ingrained social standards that oppress and dehumanize entire communities, feeding a vicious cycle of tyranny and terror. "In a society that still values caste over humanity, victims of such violence suffer from both acute physical pain and long-lasting psychological trauma as their rights and dignity are violated" (Omvedt, Gail 23).

Dalit women's endurance and agency in a very hierarchical culture are authentically portrayed in works like Bama's *Karukku* and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, which depict them as strong, independent people who defy and undermine repressive standards. Dalit

literature's focus on caste-based experiences highlights the social exclusion and alienation that are exclusive to Dalit women, whereas mainstream literature frequently depicts women's difficulties in ways that speak to larger female realities. For example, while gender disparity may be mentioned in popular narratives, caste's control over wealth, education, and fundamental dignity is rarely discussed.

In India, caste identity is a complicated and multidimensional concept that influences both social dynamics and individual lives. It includes the daily experiences of people who negotiate their identities within these limitations in addition to the historical and social background of hierarchical divisions. In addition to ensnaring people in a system of bias and discrimination, caste identification can control social mobility, educational possibilities, and resource access. Caste identity can be a place of resistance and solidarity among people who have experienced comparable oppression, but it can also be a source of stigma and marginalization for many. As a result, the fight for respect and dignity becomes entwined with the campaign against the strict caste system, advocating for a redefining of identity that embraces equality and justice (Ghurye, G.S 78).

This exclusion is made clear in Dalit literature, which shows how caste identification influences every facet of Dalit women's lives, from their vulnerability to gender-based violence both inside and outside of their communities to their denial of educational and economic prospects.

Access to education and employment opportunities for Dalits is not merely a matter of social justice; it is a fundamental prerequisite for breaking the chains of caste-based oppression and poverty, enabling individuals to reclaim their dignity and contribute meaningfully to society (Shah, G. A 45).

By highlighting how Dalit women are doubly excluded in ways that mainstream narratives do not adequately address, this emphasis on intersectionality within Dalit literature broadens our understanding of caste as a factor that exacerbates gender oppression. It is clear from comparing Dalit and mainstream literature from the viewpoints of women that Dalit writing challenges readers to confront frequently disregarded reality and provides a critical correction to prevailing myths. In addition to extending the reach of Indian literature, Dalit

feminist writing reinterprets what it means to stand up in a culture that enforces numerous forms of inequality.

The realities of Dalit experiences must be explored in Indian literature because it is via these accounts that we can subvert the caste system, question prevailing ideologies, and open the door to a more inclusive comprehension of our social structure (Gairola, R 34).

By showcasing the resilience and camaraderie of Dalit women in the face of structural injustice, these pieces promote empathy and understanding. Dalit literature is shown as a potent medium for representation and resistance via this prism. In a culture that aims to silence them, Dalit women's stories are potent acts of resistance against structural oppression, reclaiming their identities and making their presence known.

In addition to challenging the prevailing depictions that minimize their experiences, they also give voice to their stories by emphasizing the confluence of gender and caste as crucial to their fight for justice and dignity”(Bama 45)

Bringing attention to the personal, social, and cultural challenges faced by Dalit women and challenging society to reconsider the boundaries of popular narratives.

## **Methodology**

A comparative literary study centered on the subject investigation, narrative style, and character depiction is the methodology used to compare caste and gender in mainstream Indian literature with Dalit writing from a woman's perspective. This method involves closely examining a few chosen works by popular writers, where caste and gender conventions are frequently implied or interpreted via the viewpoints of the dominant caste. Dalit women writers' works, on the other hand, are analyzed for their overt discussion of gender inequality and caste, emphasizing the genuineness of lived experiences.

The way Dalit women's stories subvert conventional representations and provide distinctive perspectives on the nexus of caste and gender is examined via an intersectional feminist lens. To contextualize how mainstream literature has historically influenced how the public perceives marginalized identities and how Dalit feminist literature offers a counter-narrative that reshapes these perceptions, the methodology also draws on secondary sources, such as feminist and Dalit critical theory. This method makes it possible to comprehend the

representations of Dalit women's identities and struggles in various literary traditions in a more nuanced way.

## **Conclusion**

Women's perspectives on Dalit and mainstream Indian literature show a stark difference in the representation of gender and caste, with each tradition influencing attitudes in notably distinct ways. The hardships of Dalit women are frequently ignored or oversimplified in mainstream literature, which is frequently influenced by upper-caste, patriarchal ideals. Instead, they are reduced to symbols in a story that is fashioned by prevailing viewpoints. By hardly addressing the intersectional problems encountered by Dalit women who experience both gender-based oppression and caste-based discrimination, this narrow portrayal perpetuates societal stereotypes. Therefore, by denying Dalit women the narrative space to be viewed as fully fledged individuals with agency and resilience, mainstream literature has unintentionally contributed to the suppression of their voices.

However, Dalit feminist writing has radically changed this narrative by offering a potent counterpoint that puts Dalit women's daily realities front and center. Dalit feminist literature, as exemplified by the writings of authors such as Bama and Baby Kamble, praises the tenacity, defiance, and camaraderie of Dalit women in addition to bringing attention to their particular hardships. By redefining Dalit women's identities, these authors present them as proactive fighters against oppression based on gender and caste. By providing a realistic depiction of Dalit women's experiences, Dalit feminist literature helps readers better understand their identities and dispels preconceptions that are reinforced in popular narratives. Dalit women writers force audiences to face the nuanced realities of caste and gender in India by taking back their stories and rewriting them.

The significance of inclusive literary representation that recognizes and values underrepresented voices is emphasized by this comparative analysis. By giving voices that mainstream literature has traditionally ignored a forum, Dalit feminist fiction not only expands the canon of Indian literature but also promotes empathy, awareness, and social change. These stories demonstrate the critical role that literature plays in promoting social justice and equality as Dalit women fight for their right to be seen, heard, and understood. In the end, the difference between mainstream and Dalit feminist fiction emphasizes the necessity of varied viewpoints in literature to provide a more complete, equitable representation of society's complexity and to celebrate the bravery of individuals who oppose oppression in all of its manifestations.



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