

Empowering Dalit Women Through Narrative Resistance

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Abstract

In the context of India, where the concepts of "woman" and "Dalit" frequently give Savarna women and Dalit males a higher priority than other groups, feminist critique frequently focuses on distinctions and sameness. In the context of India, this observation is particularly pertinent. By doing so, the interaction that exists between gender and caste in society is disregarded. As a result of the intersectional identities of Dalit women, who are influenced by both patriarchy and caste, the homogeneity that is claimed by mainstream Indian feminism and Dalit politics is called into question. Both the practise of Brahmanism and the upholding of patriarchal norms within Dalit communities are targets of criticism from the Dalit feminist movement. It identifies the patriarchal system of Brahmanical society as the root cause of their oppression. This is because the ideals of Brahmanical patriarchy are structurally incorporated into the caste system. As a consequence, different regulations are established for upper-caste women and Dalit women in terms of sexuality, marriage, and employment. This is the reason why this is the case. On the other hand, the politics of the Dalits make an effort to circumvent this assertion by claiming that all Dalits are subject to oppression. The Dalit feminists, on the other hand, are of the opinion that the patriarchal society does not have democracy because women are subjected to humiliation in public places, abuse in marriage, and physical issues at home. This study investigates the complexities of dual patriarchies by analysing Bama's *Sangati* and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of*

Change. The purpose of this investigation is to determine the extent to which these patriarchal structures contribute to violence against Dalit women.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Women empowerment, Oppression, Narrative Resistance.

1. Introduction

As Dalits, women, and members of the poor, Dalit women in India are subject to prejudice that is both systematic and structural. These individuals have been exposed to feelings of alienation, loneliness, and exploitation, often as a result of physical violence and abuse inside the home. The Ambedkar movement, which was headed by social reformers like as Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar, had the objective of offering educational opportunities to Dalit women and challenging the social customs that were prevalent at the time. The majority of these movements, on the other hand, were restricted to certain areas and did not categorize concerns according to caste, class, or gender. The inability of the economy to provide work possibilities and the absence of equality were both factors that contributed significantly to the situation of Dalit women after the country gained its independence. In order to identify the condition of being for Dalit women via the use of Dalit female language, the formation of Dalit feminist theory was required.

With the exception of the Dadasaheb Gaikwad-led battle for land rights and the Namaantar movement, women's engagement in India decreased during the era after the Ambdkarite revolt. On the other hand, the Dalit Panther and the women's movement in the 1970s were the factors that led to the cultural uprising by putting an emphasis on the rights and emancipation of women. On the other hand, the roles of the "mother" and the "victimized sexual being" continued to be contained in the Dalit literature that evolved, which gave voice to those who had no voice.

There was an increase in the number of women authors who were recounting their stories throughout the 1980s and 1990s, which led to the growth of independent and autonomous claims of Dalit women's identities as persons. By exposing the privileged area for control and oppression, these tales bring attention to the double injustice that Dalit women are subjected to. The Hindu social order is criticized in writings by

Dalit women, such as Faustina Bama's *Sangati*, which also draws attention to the effects of prejudice, poverty, and violence on Dalit women. On the other hand, the majority of their works are written in regional languages, and they are not translated into English. As a result, contemporary literary circles do not recognize them.

1.1. Defining "Dalit": A complex and evolving term

The term "Dalit" holds a significant and complex meaning in the context of the Indian subcontinent. Here's a breakdown:

Literal meaning: "Dalit" comes from the Sanskrit word "dalita," which translates to "broken" or "oppressed."

In the old Hindu rank framework, Dalits were generally alluded to as "untouchables," and they held the most reduced place from which they could accomplish. Due to their caste, they were subjected to severe discrimination and exclusion, which limited their access to basic human rights, employment opportunities, and educational opportunities. In this day and age, the name "Dalit" has been recovered by countless people inside this gathering as a positive self-identifier. It emphasizes their struggle for social justice and equality as well as the experience of oppression that they have all shared. Regardless of the way that "Dalit" is the name that is most frequently utilized inside the local area, understanding the sensitive idea of the phrase is fundamental. The expression "unapproachable" is today considered disparaging, in spite of the way that it was previously satisfactory. Dalits are alluded to as "Booked Standing" by the Indian government, which is the authority assignment for them. Disregarding this, the expression "Dalit" is much of the time utilized in the media, scholarly circles, and activism in light of the fact that to the political and social significance it conveys.

Regardless of the way that it is most frequently connected with India, "Dalit" may likewise be utilized to apply to other South Asian countries that have station-based victimization individuals that are burdened notwithstanding India. Having the option to fathom "Dalit" requires knowing its verifiable foundation, its hostile history, and its recovering as an image of solidarity and personality. It is essential to use the term in a courteous and deliberate manner when interacting with Dalit individuals or discussing issues that are important to them.

1.2. The Significance of Empowering Dalit Women

Strengthening is a pivotal part of society progress and headway since it includes the fair designation of force between the genders. This is the justification for why engaged people are so significant. It is fundamental for address the issue of debilitation, which incorporates double-dealing, segregation, and savagery. Self-power, discretion, fearlessness, independence, self-decision, self-esteem, and self-pride are parts of strengthening. Furthermore, opposing social, political, monetary, social, and strict requests on oneself is a fundamental part of strengthening. Inside the domain of improvement help, global associations, for example, the World Bank put a high need on orientation mainstreaming. Admittance to assets, material prosperity, dynamic power, and the capacity to pursue individual choices without being exposed to pressure are parts of strengthening. The idea of individual strengthening is interlaced with the idea of local area strengthening, offering individuals the chance to adjust their perspectives and simply decide. Gender, caste, religion, culture, and social inclusion are all areas in which women are held in subservience by the concept of empowerment.



Figure 1: Dalit Women Empowerment

The limit of individuals to simply decide and complete demonstrations that they wish is expanded accordingly.

2. Literature review

Ahmad (2010) An investigation of the various aspects of Dalit assertion in cultural contexts, literary works, and historical records is carried out in order to accomplish the goal of this study. To acquire a consciousness of the hardships that Dalits experience and the endeavors that they attempt to state their privileges and character, this article gives a clarification. This book is a thorough examination of the sociopolitical climate

that encompasses Dalit individuals in India. It is an exhaustive evaluation of the circumstance. This paper contains a far-reaching conversation of the issue in extraordinary profundity.

Ananya (2016) presents a shrewd perspective on the contribution of women in the Chalo Udupi development, calling to light the significance of women pioneers as far as their ability to rouse a greater number of women to participate in the dissent for the Chalo Udupi development. The data that is provided by this source reveals insight into the job that women play in arranging aggregate activity and participated in exercises that are contrary to the guidelines that have been laid out by society. The fact that brings out such data makes specifically, this particular source the one.

Bama's work, "Sangati Events" (2005), One of the most persuading delineations regarding the challenges that Dalits defy in the present society might be seen as in this novel, which was deciphered by Holmstrom. Moreover, this book dives into the complicated elements that exist between rank, orientation, and social class ties in Indian culture. It specifically investigates the development of these relationships. All through the book, a perplexing trap of occasions is woven together to outline the regular battles that Dalit people group face and the determination with which they leave on the most common way of tracking down answers for these issues.

Chakravarti (2003) As a women's activist, the creator of this piece breaks down the convergence of orientation and rank where these two ideas meet. The author focuses specifically on the relationship between caste and gender. The findings of this study provide information that is both revealing and instructive regarding the ways in which gender oppression and caste hierarchies interact with one another. On a reliable premise all through the entire of the book, the significance of grasping segregation based on position inside the setting of women's activist talk is underlined. This move is made to stress the meaning of the previous topic.

Irudayam, Mangubhai, and Lee (2014) In view of the covering types of persecution that are characterized by station, class, and orientation viciousness, it is of the greatest importance to offer a persuading picture regarding the encounters of Dalit women inside the setting of India. This is to fight the abuse that is portrayed by these three elements. The way that these few types of savagery connect with each other might be the justification for why this is what is going on. Through the

course of this book, the voices of Dalit women are amplified, and it focuses light on the truth that they face in their lives as well as the versatility that they have displayed even with institutional mistreatment. Dalit women's voices are emphasized throughout this book.

Karmakar's (2022) Utilizing the perspectives of Jennifer C. Nash and the exploration that has been finished on Dark women's activist examinations, the target of this article is to research the convergences among woman's rights and multifaceted Ness. By taking into consideration both of these sources, this will be accomplished. This article depends on the consequences of the examination that was done with the end goal of this article. The consequences of this examination shed light on the need of embracing interconnected sees inside women's activist talk. This is especially significant with regards to tending to the complexities of force relations and abuse.

3. Specificities of Oppression: Violence on Dalit Women

In the Dalit people group, man-controlled society shows itself in various ways, including by means of physically unequivocal games and strict practices. In Bama's Sangati, the narrator learns that men are expected to perform different tasks than women are, like cooking, getting married, and keeping the house clean. Women play a significant role in the early formation of masculinity in children as this patriarchal system establishes boundaries between characteristics that are considered to be male and those that are considered to be feminine.



Figure 2: Violence on Dalit Women

An alliance is formed between patriarchy and religion, with women serving as influential agents in the process of instructing young girls on how to behave and how to become perfect brides. As a result of poverty, Dalit women are forced to leave the confines of their homes in order to earn money. However, they are also responsible for the whole family and are subjected to regular physical abuse at the hands of the brothers and fathers in their households. In a report that provides an overview of violence against Dalit women, Irudayam and colleagues classify the various forms of violence that are committed against Dalit women. These include verbal abuse, physical assault, forced prostitution, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, rape, kidnapping, and other forms of violence.

Additionally, they classify the locations of violence as follows: public space, within the home, workplace, perpetrator's home, government's space, and so on. By working together, the Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchies work together to guarantee that Dalit women are in a position of dominance. However, they restrict themselves to the view that gender discrimination within the Dalit community develops largely as an outgrowth of reactive patriarchy, where the Dalit male vents his wrath against the upper-caste people onto the Dalit woman at home by verbally and physically beating her.

It is underlined in an intersectional study of Mariamma's case in Sangati how Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchies collaborate for their mutual advantage by maintaining the Dalit woman at the receiving end of oppression. This occurred because the Dalit lady was the target of oppression. Mariamma is subjected to physical violence at the hands of Kumarasamy, a landowner from a higher caste, and is compelled to pay a fine. Additionally, her father beats her. Not only does the village court label her a whore, but it also thinks that an upper-caste man would never want a Dalit woman due to the fear of contamination. This is because the village court adheres to the Brahmanical standards of chastity for women. A monetary settlement is reached for the issue; but the humiliation that Mariamma endures will continue to follow her throughout her life.

When it comes to endogamy and marriages across castes, the Brahmanical concept of contamination is also evident in both the Brahmanical institution and the Dalit patriarchy. As soon as a young lady reaches the age of majority, these groups of

Dalits restrict her freedom of travel and take away her independence. The fact that a menstruating Dalit woman who travels outside to work poses a danger to her community is due to the fact that she opens the door to the possibility of an inter-caste marriage. This is because she undermines the marriage system, which would otherwise favour heteronormative marriages that are procreative.

A marriage between people of different castes has the potential to destroy all caste barriers and gives the woman the opportunity to choose her lawful sexual partner from a different caste. For example, in the book "The Grip of Change," Dalit males like Katha Muthu and Mariamma's father are shown as exemplifying both the contemplative and reactive components of the patriarchal system that exists among Dalits. In order to emulate Brahmanical customs, such as reciting Mantram after bathing, which they acquired from Vakil Venkatakrishnan, a Brahmin lawyer, they imitate these kinds of behaviours. This reflection is readily apparent in the family of Katha Muthu, where he resides with two women and has a position of great importance among the Dalit community. Among the many Brahmanical customs that he imitates, such as reciting Mantram after taking a bath, he is profoundly established.

A similar position of portraying Brahmanical patriarchy is taken by Chandran, the head of the Union, when he keeps his wife at home after they have been married. This creates a picture of a flawless upper-caste housewife. In addition to being exposed to public abuse by the brahmins, Thangam, a widow who is of Dalit descent, is stripped of all of the property rights related to her late husband. She gets kicked out of the home because she does not comply with the sexual expectations that are made by her husband's parents. In an effort to create a macho conflict at work, Katha Muthu is attempting to redirect attention away from the assault and toward the concept that she "chosen that upper-caste fellow" over Dalit men.

It is universally agreed upon by Thantgam's brothers-in-law that Thangam should be punished for her decision to choose the upper-caste Udayar over the Dalit males. Thangam defies the authority of her brothers-in-law by choosing the guy from the higher caste. This demonstrates that she now has a more powerful man on whom she can rely, and it also gives her own

sexual wants greater prominence. Because Thangam now a member of their family via marriage, it is essential for the brothers-in-law to exert a highly sexualized control over her. This is done in order to recover their male dominance over the Dalit women and to demonstrate that they are the rightful owners of her.

In an effort to turn women against one other, Katha Muthu and other Dalit males engage in activities such as starting a fight between his two wives, Kanagavalli and Nagamani, and providing relief monies after the fire that occurred in the hamlet of Paraya. As a result of the feminization of young males and the implementation of a policy that divides and rules women, the baton is now held by a relatively limited number of powerful men. The humiliation that Dalit males experience at the hands of upper-caste individuals is the source of their rage. The study, on the other hand, puts into question the basic anti-casteist beliefs that only upper-caste males control Dalit men and women. Instead, the oppression of Dalit women is maintained by the collaboration of different patriarchal structures. It is essential to acknowledge the presence of double patriarchies in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of oppression and to discover methods to combat it.

4. Narrative Resistance: Empowering Dalit Women and Challenging Oppression

With regards to engaging Dalit women, the expression "story obstruction" alludes to the most common way of challenging and undermining winning accounts that keep on propagating mistreatment and minimization. Dalit women, who are individuals from the most minimal rank in the Hindu position framework in South Asia, have generally been exposed to different kinds of separation based on their station, orientation, and financial condition. These harsh legends are tested through various procedures, including narrating, activism, craftsmanship, writing, and grassroots association. Account opposition is the most common way of recapturing organization and challenging these stories.



Figure 3: Narrative Resistance: Empowering Dalit Women Against Oppression

This hypothetical structure recognizes the critical effect that stories have on the arrangement of social convictions and foundations. Various times, prevailing accounts effectively sustain generalizations, give a clarification to imbalance, and maintain the norm. The objective of account obstruction, then again, is to challenge these stories by underscoring the truth of Dalit women' encounters, introducing elective perspectives, and lifting the voices of the people who are underestimated inside the populace. To engage Dalit women, it is important to accomplish more than just location monetary imbalances; it is additionally important to challenge the social and philosophical foundations that keep on sustaining their underestimation. During the time spent partaking in account opposition, Dalit women can lay out their personalities, guarantee their privileges, and go against the abusive designs that are endeavouring to quietness them. It is imperative to go through this cycle to build social orders that are both comprehensive and fair, in which each individual gets the opportunity to prosper and partake completely in the social, financial, and political existence of the general public.

4.1. Example of Narrative Resistance

- **Literature and poetry:** Bama, Sukhi Smash, and Meena Kandasamy are only a couple of instances of Dalit women writers whose works have been huge weapons for fighting rank separation and enhancing the voices of Dalit women through their composition.

- **Oral storytelling and folk traditions:** There is potential for customary narrating techniques among Dalit people group to act major areas of strength for as for the safeguarding of their set of experiences, social obstruction, and aggregate memory all in all.
- **Digital platforms and social media:** A developing number of Dalit women are going to computerized stages to disperse their stories, make associations with others, and coordinate for social impact.

The utilization of story opposition can fundamentally challenge the persecution that Dalit women are exposed to and to carry their voices to the very front. A few significant contemplations are recorded underneath:

4.2. Challenging Oppression

- **Exposing and critiquing caste and patriarchal structures:** Through the medium of storytelling, women of the Dalit caste are able to shed light on the realities of their oppression. Caste-based discrimination, sexual abuse, and economic inequality are examples of these realities. This can possibly assist prevailing social orders with creating compassion and understanding for each other, as well as to battle the standardization of social imbalances.
- **Disrupting dominant narratives:** Dalit women are many times depicted as vulnerable casualties or objects of compassion in stories that are affected by male controlled society and rank. Dalit women can question these fantasies and recuperate their organization by communicating their very own encounters. They are able to show that they are resilient, strong, and have experienced a wide range of things.
- **Highlighting the interconnectedness of oppressions:** By and large, Dalit women are exposed to bias in light of both their standing and their orientation. Using account obstruction, this multifaceted Ness might be exposed, and the manners by which these harsh frameworks support each other can be shown.

4.3. Amplifying Voices

- **Giving voice to the marginalized:** Dalit women are able to express themselves in their own words and in their own voices by telling stories about their experiences,

aspirations, and wishes. The eradication and quiet that they frequently experience might be moderated by this.

- **Creating platforms for collective action:** It is workable for Dalit women to interface with each other across geographical and social limits by means of the sharing of stories, which might make fortitude and aggregate activity against abuse. They might be provided the capacity to request change and battle for their privileges subsequently.
- **Raising awareness and generating support:** If Dalit women tell their stories to a wider audience, they can raise awareness of their difficulties and gain allies who can help them raise their voices and fight for their cause.

5. Conclusion

With regards to fighting the covering severe frameworks that Dalit women are exposed to based on rank, orientation, and financial position, the strengthening of Dalit women by means of account obstruction is an undertaking that is complex and essentially significant. Dalit women are recuperating their organization, testing predominant accounts, and intensifying their voices by means of different sorts of activism, including yet not restricted to writing, oral narrating, web stages, and various kinds of activism. To lay out their characters, request equity, and sort out for change, Dalit women might involve story opposition as a solid instrument. This is accomplished by highlighting the interconnectedness of oppressions, discrediting dominant narratives, and exposing and criticizing caste and patriarchal institutions. Initiatives to empower Dalit women must continue to emphasize their voices, experiences, and agency while also encouraging solidarity and collective action to overthrow oppressive structures and build more inclusive and equitable communities.

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