

The Literary Contribution of Contemporary Ambedkarite Women Writers of Maharashtra

¹Mrs. Minal Wankhede*, ²Dr. Bhagyashree Bavare

¹Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor

^{1, 2} Affiliation Address: K. J. Somaiya Institute of Dharma Studies, Somaiya University, Vidyavihar, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400077

¹Email: minal.w@somaiya.edu, ²Email: bhagyashree.bavare@somaiya.edu

*Corresponding Mail: minal.w@somaiya.edu

Abstract

This study analyzes how the literary work of modern-day regional *Ambedkarite* women writers, including *Urmila Pawar* and *Baby Kamble*, has contributed to the understanding of *Ambedkarite* feminism. The study uses qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methods to analyze the autobiographical texts selected for analysis. Study shows that these writings create counter-discursive spaces that challenge the caste/gender hierarchy and reconstructs one's identity, resistance, and empowerment. It enables women's transformation of their own lives into a social political consciousness and thus contributes to the larger collective processes of changing the society/culture in which they live. Literature is demonstrated to be an important medium for creating resistance and identity among historically oppressed/ marginalized communities. Future work could broaden the scope of this analysis by including multiple authors, using interdisciplinary approaches, and using empirical analysis to assess the broader impact of *Ambedkarite* women writing in today's society.

Keywords: *Ambedkarite Feminism, Intersectionality, Identity, Resistance*

1. Introduction

1.1. Historical Emergence of Ambedkarite Literature in Maharashtra

Ambedkarite literature emerged after independence in India and is directly tied to the social and political changes affecting the country since then, particularly through the ongoing effect of Ambedkarite movements (Biswas et al., 49). These social and political changes led to many marginalized communities increasingly asserting themselves as having their own identity by rejecting their exclusion from mainstream literary and cultural spheres. In this context, Ambedkarite literature emerged as a means of challenging these forms of exclusion and creating a forum for voicing personal experiences of caste-based oppression and social inequality. It represents a complete departure from traditional literary forms because it emphasizes authenticity, resistance, and critique of society (Dangle, 23).

A significant portion of this evolution has been the transition from oral traditions to written forms of storytelling. Historically, Ambedkarite groups preserved their history via oral art forms through the use of song, folklore and testimony. The transition to creating written art forms signalled a new era of self-representation for Ambedkarite communities; giving individuals the opportunity to record their own experiences in their own voice. This transition validated the existence of Ambedkarite voices in the literary canon and called into question the authority of the mainstream literature and had the effect of producing literature in an egalitarian manner (Satyanarayana, 64).

1.2. Genesis of Ambedkarite Women's Writing

Ambedkarite women's writing has developed as a result of both caste oppression and the oppression of women (patriarchy). The marginalization that Ambedkarite women experience is compounded by their position within the caste system and in society, making them doubly marginalized (Nubile, 34). While Ambedkarite men experience caste discrimination, they do not experience the same level of discrimination on the basis of gender. Therefore, even within socially progressive movements, Ambedkarite women's voices are often rendered invisible. As a result, Ambedkarite women's literature

serves to reveal the multi-layered process of oppression and challenge both the structures of caste and patriarchy simultaneously (Rege, 92).

Early Ambedkarite women writers have been instrumental in changing the way that literature is created and understood by offering narratives and stories which had previously not been included within the literary tradition for generations. Through their autobiographies and personal narratives, writers such as *Shantabai Kamble* and *Baby Kamble* highlight their experiences of everyday humiliation, labor, and survival. In addition to being personal testimonies, these works serve as collective histories of the various struggles of marginalized groups of people. Through their assertion of their identities and experiences, Ambedkarite women writers have broken through the silence that has historically existed around them, and have created a new space for Ambedkarite feminist literature (Kamble, 58).

The shift from invisibility to asserting one's identity is an important change in Ambedkarite literary traditions. The purpose of Ambedkarite women's writing is not only to be represented through literature but also to actively oppose oppressive behaviour while asserting their own self-respect, dignity, and empowerment. Their writing is in line with Ambedkar's vision of social transformation and shows that literature can act as a tool for reclaiming one's own agency as well as being able to fight against oppressive structures.

1.3. Ambedkarite Feminism: A Distinct Paradigm

Ambedkarite feminism represents a feminist paradigm that challenges mainstream feminist discourse by focusing on the caste system as the primary source of oppression. Mainstream feminist literature produced in India has been predominantly gender-specific, whereas Ambedkarite feminism asserts that caste intersects with class and gender to create the lived experiences of women. In critiquing the universalization of women's struggles, the framework also expands the definition of oppression to be more inclusive and intersecting of caste, class, and gender (Rege, 110).

Understanding how Ambedkarite women articulate their lived experiences in their writings is best accomplished through the intersection of caste, class, and gender. To understand Ambedkarite women's experiences, it is essential to acknowledge that discrimination based on caste has very different implications than discrimination based solely on gender (Shakya, 5). An intersectional approach to understanding the complexity of oppression allows for a more nuanced critique of power structures and recognizes the limitations of dominant feminist narratives, which often ignore the implications of the caste system on women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1245).

The ideological foundation for women's liberation is based on the Ambedkarite paradigm which supports women in achieving full equality through law, education, and family. Ambedkar supported women's rights, including equal access to education and legal rights, as part of a larger struggle against caste oppression. Authors today such as *Urmila Pawar*, using Ambedkarite ideology as their foundation, create narratives that confront both caste and gender by offering a more inclusive feminist discourse in India (Omvedt, 89).

1.4. Contemporary Context and Relevance

Within the current era of contemporary writers, more Ambedkarite women writers are emerging in Maharashtra; as a reflection of the larger socio-political changes, the increase of access to education, and the availability of more literary outlets for women. Writers such as *Urmila Pawar* and *Hira Bansode* expand upon the work of the early Ambedkarite women authors while engaging contemporary issues like globalization, urbanization, changing gender roles, as they both continue and expand the thematic and stylistic boundaries of Ambedkarite literature (Paik, 173).

Ambedkarite writers are now creating literature that can be read globally. This includes translations of their texts as well as academic interest in the literature. Consequently, the struggles these writers address can now be discussed in a much wider context of other literature that discusses race, gender, and social justice issues. In addition, while the context in which Ambedkarite live can be different

around the world, their struggles as a result of caste oppression are universal and each of their literary creations speak to the uniqueness of their respective cultures (Satyanarayana 201).

1.5. Major Concerns in Ambedkarite Women's Writing

Ambedkarite writers that are women have a great deal of concern with how caste and patriarchy are connected systems of hegemony. These writers write about the daily realities they experience due to systemic caste oppression and the violence and exclusion from various social spheres. The stories they tell expose the structural nature of caste oppression, the everyday realities of those affected by it. As such, the writers use the medium of literature as a space to resist and challenge the status quo of caste oppression (Rege, 121).

Another significant aspect of Ambedkarite women's writing is how they emphasize the importance of establishing self-identity, dignity, and respect for one another as a fundamental tenet in their writings and in the larger context of Ambedkarite thought (Priyadarsini et al., 64). Ambedkarite women writers create identity for themselves in contrast to negatively perceived ideas of caste in their respective cultures, turning stories about their suffering into stories of strength and empowerment.

Ambedkarite women's writing is enriched by the intertwined themes of education, labor and resistance. In the work of these authors, education is usually depicted as a powerful means of achieving liberation, mirroring Ambedkar's belief in the potential of education to transform the lives of individuals and communities (Bansode, 14). Themes relating to labor reveal both the exploitation and the resilience of Ambedkarite women, while acts of resistance serve to illustrate the agency of Dalit women to contest oppressive systems. Together these themes create a living, evolving literary tradition that continues to motivate and inspire social change or produce critical discourse (Kamble, 73).

There is a dearth of critical literature on the contemporary Ambedkarite women writers in Maharashtra, despite the growing amount of study on Ambedkarite literature and feminist discourse. Existing research tends to be either focused on Ambedkarite literature as a larger body of work or on mainstream feminism, therefore leaving out the contributions of the Ambedkarite women writers such as *Urmila Pawar* and *Baby Kamble*. This study seeks to fill this gap in study by considering the works of these two Ambedkarite women writers through the lenses of Ambedkarite feminism, and to present their works as transformative texts of resistance, identity.

2. Literature review

Study has revealed Ambedkarite ideology especially the concept of conversion as liberation to be influential in the construction of Ambedkarite women's narratives. The literature shows how religious and cultural change provide a means of liberation, leading to the recreation of identity and dignity in oppressive social structures (Deo 2022, 3). In addition, the scholarship on Ambedkarite women writers provides insights into the role played by their literary contributions in larger processes of social reform. The work of Dalit women writers illustrates how their literary work served to challenge inherited hierarchies and encourage the formation of transformative socio-political consciousness (Chatterjee 2023, 58).

Works such as *The Prisons We Broke* and *The Weave of My Life* are frequently cited as being particularly relevant because they provide points of intersection between personal narratives and collective histories, re-contextualizing individual experiences. Studies that focus on Kamble demonstrate how her narrative reveals the systemic connections between caste oppression, the patriarchy, and economic marginalization while effectively creating a discourse of resistance within an Ambedkarite framework (Kumari and Sharma 2023, 3949).

In the same way, the autobiographical texts of Urmila Pawar were also examined with respect to how reframing identity occurs via the intersecting areas of education, work, and social memory. In contrast to telling a story in a sequential way, these works employ fragmented, experiential storytelling, thereby reflecting the multiple layers of reality for Ambedkarite women. Using these types of narrative strategies to disrupt normative literary forms serves not only to affirm the importance of storytelling as a site of

reclaiming one's agency but also indicates the nature of storytelling as a means of reconstructing one's subjectivity (Mishra 2021, 390).

Study has increasingly begun focusing on contemporary Ambedkarite feminist writings, with attention toward how newer subjectivities and modes of resistance emerge in relation to the various socio-political contexts in which they appear. As a consequence of this concentration on newer feminist discourses within contemporary Ambedkarite literature, the notion of the “New Woman” has evolved and developed into a character embodying resiliency, agency, and self-determination, while challenging systems of caste and patriarchy. Analyses of the works by *Baby Kamble* and *Urmila Pawar* demonstrated that their writings produced a politics of selfhood through the interrelation between individual subjectivity and collective consciousness, thus redefining the feminist discourse of their time via the Ambedkarite framework within which they created these texts (Lodhi and Indraguru 2026, 72).

Nevertheless, previous study did not adequately consider the contributions that contemporary Ambedkarite women writers from Maharashtra have made to literature. Most of the literature regarding these writers utilized broad or comparative methods; consequently, the unique socio-cultural context and regional particularities of their writing have not been fully understood. As such, there has been a lack of regionally specific analyses that examine how contemporary Ambedkarite women writers from Maharashtra addressed issues of caste, gender, and identity in their writing, while simultaneously developing new forms of literary and socio-political resistance.

While there have been many studies done about both Ambedkarite literature and Feminist Theory, much of the existing study tends to be either broad in scope or comparative in nature. This often results in the regional characteristics of numerous contemporary Ambedkarite feminine literary figures from Maharashtra not being represented in the academic discourse. Although there have been some exceptions, these have typically been focused on specific authors such as *Urmila Pawar* and *Baby Kamble* who discuss themes of caste, gender, and resistance, and this has resulted in a fragmented and limited representation that lacks a unifying, intersectional, and regionally grounded context (Kumari and Sharma 2023, 3949; Mishra 2021, 390). Oftentimes, studies that are either comparative in nature or theoretical in approach dilute regional specificity and place little value on capturing the unique socio-cultural and Ambedkarite characteristics of writing by authors in Maharashtra (Prasad, 2025, 4964; Lodhi and Indraguru, 2026, 69). Therefore, there is a significant void within the body of study related to literary production by contemporary Ambedkarite feminine writers from Maharashtra as sites of identity construction, resistance, and social change.

There has been much study on Ambedkarite literature and feminist discourse, however, the works of contemporary Ambedkarite women authors from Maharashtra remain largely overlooked as part of a single, interconnected regional framework based on intersectionality. Studies on writers *Urmila Pawar* and *Baby Kamble* are mostly fragmented and/or comparative in perspective, which limits our ability to gain an in-depth understanding of how these authors articulate their identities, as well as how they resist social norms and contribute to the transformation of society.

3. Analysis

An important characteristic of the literary work of contemporary Ambedkarite women writers of Maharashtra is their use of innovative narrative strategies that disrupt traditional literary conventions and forms of expression. Both Pawar and Kamble have utilized autobiographical forms of writing that blur the distinctions between personal memories and collective histories, thereby providing a social context for individual experiences. The narratives written by both women are typically fragmented, often non-linear, and contain aspects that are heavily influenced by oral culture; this serves to reflect the multiple facets of the Dalit experience, as well as the persisting effects of oppression and violence on the Dalit experience, over an unspecified amount of time. The disruptiveness of the narrative structure also serves to challenge the dominant conventions of narrative and serve as a means of reclaiming voice and agency for marginalized communities (KAUSHIK, 10).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Literary Contributions and Narrative Strategies

Dimension	Urmila Pawar	Baby Kamble
Literary Form	Autobiographical writing blending personal memory with collective history	Autobiographical narrative rooted in collective community experiences
Narrative Style	Non-linear, reflective, memory-driven	Direct, descriptive, community-centered
Themes	Gender, caste, identity, education, empowerment	Caste oppression, patriarchy, social inequality
Language Use	Colloquial, culturally embedded expressions	Simple, oral tradition-based language
Representation	Individual experience linked with collective struggle	Collective representation of Dalit women's experiences
Purpose	Assertion of identity and resistance	Social critique and awareness generation
Contribution to Ambedkarite Feminism	Highlights intersection of caste and gender	Emphasizes structural oppression and collective resistance

Source: Author's Own Compilation

In examining the comparative analysis above, we see similar yet different approaches taken by both *Urmila Pawar* and *Baby Kamble* through autobiographical narratives telling of their experiences through the lenses of caste/gender oppression as members of the Ambedkarite community. Through their approaches and differing styles both women provide immense contributions towards creating an Ambedkarite feminist perspective on contemporary issues at that time by challenging the existing dominant forms of literature and elevating these voices that exist on the margins (Pawar, 2003; Kamble, 2008).

Besides being innovative in terms of style, they also offer thematic considerations that demonstrate their contribution to Ambedkarite Feminism. The issues of identity, education as empowerment, labour and collective resistance are all presented throughout their works, and illustrate how literature can transform and create change against oppressive forces. As Pawar and Kamble narrate their lived experiences, they also provide a vision for the future based on the principles and values of Ambedkar (Thapan, 13). Therefore, these authors do not just provide an aesthetic contribution to literature; their work serves as a site of resistance, knowledge production and socio-political change that lives beyond aesthetics.

Furthermore, the writings of Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble illustrate that caste, gender and identity are an intersectional representation in Ambedkarite women's contemporary literature. By foregrounding the simultaneous experience of caste oppression and gender oppression, these writers challenge any attempts to study these categories separately (Kumari, 36). These writers convey that caste and gender identity are created in a way that reflects their experiences as women of Ambedkarite backgrounds within a wider sociopolitical context of marginalization As B. R. Ambedkar observes, "*The outcast is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes,*" which underscores the structural nature of caste-based exclusion that informs these narratives. This intersectional approach not only exposes the limitations of mainstream feminist discourse but also redefines identity as a site of resistance and negotiation within Ambedkarite thought (Singh, 1252).

In addition, the representations of identity within these texts are not static, but rather are in a constant state of evolution, as they are shaped by the lived processes of assertion, resistance and self-realisation. Through the use of narratives about education, labour and community life, these authors illustrate how Ambedkarite women continuously negotiate and redefine their identities as they encounter oppressive institutional and social structures (Sarode, 34). They demonstrate how Ambedkarite women

actively assert their identities by resisting the imposition of oppressive categories onto them, thereby reclaiming their dignity through the application of the principles espoused by Ambedkar concerning the importance of equality and self-respect. As Baby Kamble observes, “*We were treated worse than animals; we were not even considered human,*” highlighting the dehumanizing conditions that Dalit women resist in their process of identity formation. This rearticulation of identity challenges dominant narratives that portray Dalit women as passive victims, instead positioning them as active agents of social change.

Through their work, contemporary Ambedkarite women authors create counter-discursive spaces that counter-dominant casteist and patriarchal narratives in contemporary Indian society. By calling attention to the experiences of those marginalized and previously silenced or misrepresented by patriarchy, authors like *Urmila Pawar* and *Baby Kamble* rewrite hegemonic discourses. These works interrogate the ideological bases of patriarchy by exposing the structural inequalities that shape caste and gender relations. In doing so, these authors' works intervene in social realities and do not just reflect them; they provide alternative interpretive frameworks based on Ambedkarite principles of justice and equality (Shah et al., 382).

Examples of the aforementioned include the quest for education; the assertion of one's own worth; and the refusal to accept the oppressive norms of society. By depicting resistance in this manner, the writers presented resistance as a continuing experience that works against systemic oppression at several levels. This view corresponds with the Ambedkarite philosophy concerning self-respect and education being means of liberation; therefore, placing expressions in literature within a larger socio-political context (Giffard-Foret, 3).

In addition to being a vehicle of resistance, the works examined serve as sites of empowerment for Ambedkarite women through the representation of their identities as active participants rather than passive victims (Lodhi et al., 68). The reconstruction of identity challenges existing dominant representations of Ambedkarite women as “marginalized” and “victims.” Therefore, it creates a knowledge base from which Ambedkarite women may act to create change. These literary depictions serve an important role in contributing to the development of an emancipatory discourse within both Ambedkarite Literature and feminist theory (BEZBARUAH, 12).

The writings mentioned above are a major component of the process of socio-cultural transformation as they help redefine (and reshape) cultural norms and values through an Ambedkarite lens. These writings' critiques of oppressive traditions and their support for equality are critical to reconfiguring and modifying social consciousness and cultural practices. Additionally, they also create (foster) a sense of collective identity and solidarity among those people who have been marginalized or excluded from society, thereby enhancing movements for social justice and equality (Deo, 43). In this way, the literary works of Ambedkarite female writers serve as vehicles of cultural resistance and transformation beyond their aesthetic qualities, highlighting the power of literature to shape the future of society.

4. Conclusion

In summary, both *Urmila Pawar's* and *Baby Kamble's* bodies of work serve as important contributions to modern Indian literature by discussing caste, gender, and identity through an Ambedkarite feminist lens. Through their use of innovative narrative strategies and language in representing the experiences of people who have been made invisible (i.e., marginalized) or oppressed. Their work also represents the power of literature to function as a site for individuals to engage socio-politically, and to redefine what agency is, to create a collective consciousness, and to enact social change that is founded upon principles of equality and justice.

There are limitations that may impact the findings of this study and restrict its applicability. The analysis concludes many works of *Urmila Pawar* and *Baby Kamble* were used; these works themselves do not capture the wide variety of writing produced by current contemporary Ambedkarite women. The analysis employed only textual interpretation and analysis of secondary sources; therefore, there is potential for significant bias within the analytical process due to subjective opinion. There are other literary

and sociocultural factors that may not have been taken into consideration with respect to analysis of caste, gender, and identity as they pertain to this analysis.

Future studies will encompass more Ambedkarite women writers; giving a broader scope for understanding Ambedkarite feminist discourse. There are many comparisons to be made between regions and various languages illustrating different points of view regarding how caste and gender are interrelated in Indian literature. Inclusion of other methodologies (sociology, gender studies, cultural studies) could greatly add to the socio-political context information available for analysis. Empirical research (reader response studies, field studies) would provide an understanding of how *Urmila Pawar's* and *Baby Kamble's* works have affected the present social climate and literary discourse.

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