

# FEMINIST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DENOTATIONS OF DOUBLY DOWNTRODDEN DALIT IDENTITY: BABY KAMBLE'S 'THE PRISONS WE BROKE' AS INDIAN CASTEIST-CLASSIST LIBERATORY KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

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*“Autobiography offers an almost unlimited opportunity for exploration of personality – not solely of the author’s but also of the people with whom he is intimately involved” (Pascal 162). It is this collective, multiple, dispersed and conflicted sense of identity that Dalit women seek to appropriate. For Feminist politics, by means of expression of common struggle, women became increasingly aware of their collective identity by highlighting the common aspects of women’s lives. The act of writing assumes a creative, form from the mundane chores thrust on them. With this powerful tool of expression, they can carve out a niche and space in the masculine territory. The ‘Prisons we Broke’ by Baby Kamble is written with a deep-rooted urge to engage with the history of the Mahar community’s oppression and contribute to the Indian knowledge systems through literature from the position of being an outcaste.*

**Keywords:** Dalit, autobiography, Indian knowledge system, feminism,

## 1.1 Politics of Translation

British sociologist Michele Barrett believes that language is the process of meaning-constructions. Making sense of our own selves is the first step towards production of identity. One of the ways of resisting capitalist multiculturalism’s invitation to self-identity and compete, is to give the name of “woman” to the unimaginable other. As easy seduction of translation is to produce an expository prose at someone else’s title which in turn will create the limits of one’s own identity. The prerogative of a feminist translator is to posit language as the first step towards the functioning of gendered agency. It is a given fact that a translator cannot engage with or sufficiently bring out the ‘rhetoricity’ of the original. But a more homely staging of it occurs across two earthly languages. Also it is just to the large number of feminists that the text be converted into the language of the majority. Spivak holds Lacan’s psychic structure of the Western feminist gaze in terms of group political behaviour under shaky grounds. She says: “It is merely the easiest way of being “democratic” with minorities” (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 182). It is essential for the translator to surrender to the text and be its intimate reader and also converse in that language. It is not necessary that a woman because of her gendered similarity scores over men as it is not possible as ethical agents to imagine otherness or ‘alterity’ maximally. “The history of the language, the history of the author’s moment, the history of the language-in-and-as-translation” (186), must figure in the weaving of the translated text. The translator of a third world language should be sufficiently in touch with what is going on in literary production in that language to be capable of distinguishing between the good or bad and the resistant or conformist writing by women. The intimacy of cultural translation can only be achieved by learning the author’s mother-tongue. It is of vital importance to achieve the ethics of sexual differences that can confront the emergence of fundamentalisms without apology or dismissal in the name of Enlightenment—then ‘pouvoir-savoir’ and the care for the self as Foucault calls it can be illuminating.

## 1.2 Comparative Literature and English: a Non-Essentialist Reflection

The Indian language writers with their sense of unease about their secondary role as a constituent of Indian literatures articulated their dissent in no uncertain manner. They attributed their minor role to either the globalization of English or to the poor quality of the English translations in which their works are available. The overshadowing presence of the colonial cringe and trying to fit in with an alien cultural register, has loomed large upon the minds of the people. There was a time when the Indian language writers deemed that all Indian writing in English was aimed at an English-speaking readership. There was another way English was proving to be useful earlier. Since translations from one Indian language into another were rare, English was used as a launch pad. The writings of regional languages were first turned into English as master translation. Further, from there they were reconverted into other Indian languages, the target being by definition twice removed from the source. This phenomenon saw a sea change as more first-hand translations are now available and the English translations are being done more for their own sake. The fruitful change is that this English accommodates a lot of culture specifics. There are vivid footnotes and long appendixes following the text that capture the quintessential Indian essence, aesthetics, nuances, stylistics and sensibilities. After all, reading a translation is not quite the same as reading in one’s own language, but rather reading another’s language in

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one's own. So, by definition, there is an overlap and when that is smoothed out much is lost. One fights a certain hegemony while imposing another. As to the hegemony of English, it is yet to be seen whether we are moving towards a counter-hegemony. The issue in translation always remains not of quality in a broad sense but of intensity in a fine sense. As hybridity in theory and hybridity in practice may be two different things, for it also admits of acculturation, no matter how undigested or how riotous in part. Whereas Maya Pandit, who has translated Kamble's memoir, takes it as a proud privilege to translate it and make it available to the readers of English. Kamble brings to the forefront the entire gamut of experiences as well as discursive practices rarely attended to in mainstream writings. The marginalised and resistant selves of an entire community are brought out in the voice of a single person and that they can make a difference in changing their lives for the better. Pandit uses the English language to facilitate this transformation on a wider scale.

### 1.3 Caste Specificities

"What comes by birth and can't be cast off by dying—that is caste." (Kumud Pawade)

The caste system comprises a series of hereditary groups or 'jatis' characterised by hierarchy or gradations according to ritual status. The basis of inequality underlying the caste system in India is the hegemonic application of the evaluative—value-based—standards in placing particular castes as high or low. These standards take their roots from the Dharmashastras, the religio-legal texts of the Hindus. With the passage of time, the notion of 'pure high' and 'impure low' came to be expressed ideologically in ritual terms. This translated into stringent rules of contact due to which public spaces were divided in such a way that access to certain streets was barred to the lower castes because they were regarded as defiling. Each caste is a closely bound group, there being profound inequality in terms of eating, physical contact, marriage, productive resources, social status and access to knowledge when there is 'cross-pollination' among the castes or the sub-castes. According to Manu, "the name of a brahmana should have a word for auspicious, of a kshatriya for strength, the name of a vaishya for wealth, and the name of a sudra should breed disgust" (Buhler 267). A mere breaking of any of the laws would invite a quantum of punishment in the ascending order to the offender as one goes down the caste hierarchy. Berreman aptly describes the caste system as 'institutionalised inequality' which 'guaranteed differential access to the valued things of life'. Dichotomies got juxtaposed against one another for the humans 'groaning under the ages yoke' of the caste system. 'Power and vulnerability, privilege and oppression, honour and degradation, plenty and want, reward and deprivation, security and anxiety' became the hegemonic pure-impure paradoxes. Intangibility and unnatural markers became the norms to identify the differences that constitute each caste. The most menial and downtrodden remained the ati-shudras (untouchables), later 're-named' as 'Harijans' by Gandhi and then 'Dalits' by Jyotirao Phule which now encompasses anyone who is economically, politically and socially oppressed on the basis of sex, caste, circumstances, body and class.

### 1.4 Class-Caste : an Intractable Dualism

Morton Klass places the origin of caste at the very beginning of Indian class society. To understand the relationship between class and caste it is important to recognise that two hierarchies are operative in the Indian society: one according to ritual purity and the other with respect to the political and economic status, with the landlords at the top and the landless labourers at the bottom. From the feudal period to capitalism, exploitation occurred, and continues, through the existence of compulsory loans and debts that last for generations that deter the harmonious pattern of interdependence and mutual cooperation as claimed by those who justify caste. Dominance is based on wealth, that is, control over land, which also gives access to political power. The difficulties of seeing the material dimensions of caste are because of the dichotomous ideology, which functions as 'a screen' that hides social reality by scattering social divisions along the whole length of a formal hierarchy. It 'invisibilizes' the oppressors and helps to sustain the system. As Ambedkar put it, "the caste system is a division of labourers, not division of labour." It is aptly summarised by Gail Omvedt thus: "Caste is a 'material reality' with a 'material base'; it is not only a form but a concrete material content, and it has historically shaped the very basis of Indian society and continues to have crucial economic implications even today" (*Caste and Dalit Lifeworlds* 96-102). She differs from the classical Marxist historians in that she rejects the superstructure theory of caste. She situates caste firmly in the domain of the base and sees it functioning at the levels of production. In the caste-struggle, she continues to assert the hegemony of the analytic of the class. Even a class struggle has no meaning unless it takes the form of community-based struggles, whether such struggles were based on caste, gender or religion. Engulfed by these two major stratagems is the grim and poignant identity-crisis of the Dalits who are striving to break out.

### 1.5 Denotations of Dalit Identity

The category Dalit is referred to as those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate way. There is, in the word itself, an inherent denial of pollution, 'karma' and justified caste hierarchy. The nature of hierarchical relations and the accompanying framework of values are essentially the same within the Dalit castes as they were amongst the 'twice-born'. Caste is a 'disability' in the choice of occupation. Though atrocities against them continue, or in some parts of the country have increased, the practice of untouchability has declined. They have much to owe to the policies of job reservations due to which a miniscule and articulate middle class has risen among Dalits. Competitive and cut-throat politics and seat reservation in political institutions increase their awareness of rights. Implementations of land reforms and other development

programmes have also helped some Dalits to acquire land. Even with many transformations, internal conflicts within the scheduled castes have not disappeared. The overarching identity of being Dalits has become much more popular. Nevertheless the differences and hierarchies based on sub-caste identities within them still persist. Yet, unlike the upper castes they have no material gains in maintaining such hierarchies. The ideology of purity and impurity plays an important role as it is the proximity to the dominant caste that determines the status of a Dalit caste in the village. Not all untouchable castes are treated equally by the higher castes. Some of them even get to participate in village rituals, albeit performing 'low roles'. Kancha Ilaiah contends that epistemologically the Dalit worldview has been radically different from that of the upper caste brahminical Hindu worldview. The 'brahminical epistemology' is constructed around supernatural forces and idealism. Therefore it is alienated and has no elements of 'progressivism'. Dalit-bahujan epistemology, on the other hand, is constructed around materialism and has all along had a different history.

Dalit has been a most potent category as it represents a radical shift in the discursive politics of caste. The most important symbol of contemporary Dalit identity politics is B. R. Ambedkar. Apart from researching and writing on the subject of caste and untouchability, he has inspired many cultural movements among the Dalits. As Eleanor Zelliot points out in her piece 'The Meanings of Ambedkar', he is perhaps the only pre-independence leader to grow in fame and influence throughout the contemporary period. Perhaps the most important aspect of Ambedkar is the fact that despite his western education and style of dressing, he identified completely with the Dalit cause and everyone recognises him so. Though within Maharashtra some may identify him by his sub-caste, outside the state he is owned by all the Dalit communities. There is also a very close link between the rise of Dalit identity and Dalit literary movements. Given that the level of literacy is low among the Dalits, the emergence of Dalit literature where both the writers and readers are mostly Dalits, is itself an evidence of a profound change taking place in Indian society. Short stories, novels, poems, critical essays and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provide useful insights on the question of Dalit identity. They also contain criticism of the prevailing structures and cultural or religious values that have been responsible for their subordination. While during the initial phase Dalit cultural and literary movements played a positive and progressive role, of late, they have been appropriated by the state and tend to have a regressive impact on the emancipation of the Dalit masses. Political strategies based on manipulation with short-term gains and without ideological considerations, cannot bring about social transformation in favour of the Dalits. Though it has been in power only for a short period, the 'BahujanSamaj' Party under the leadership of Mayawati and Kanshi Ram has been able to instil a new sense of confidence among the Dalits. They no longer submit to brahminical ideology. The vertical ties of patron-client relations have also broken down, leading to a process of democratisation of civil society. The assertion of Dalit identity in politics is essentially the assertion of non-lettered but politically conscious Dalits.

### **1.6 The Folklore of Pride**

The Hindus wanted the Vedas and they sent for Vyasa who was not a caste Hindu.

The Hindus wanted an Epic and they sent for Valmiki who was an Untouchable.

The Hindus wanted a Constitution, and they sent for me.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (*Marathi* 25)

Ambedkar's startling claim, asserts the all-Indian culture. It is this belief in their lack of inferiority that has given rise to their own Dalit folk beliefs centred around three ideas. An important contemporary Dalit writer, Daya Pawar holds this opinion and quotes a Marathi proverb to show the acceptance of the idea of Mahar gifts (Pawar, 2):

In the Brahman house—writing

In the Kunbi house—grain

In the Mahar house—singing

Pawar mourns the loss of the great cultural treasure the Mahars could have had if the kind of music made by his father and those who visited his home, had not been considered 'debased' by other castes. Mahars seem to have been the chief musicians and actors in 'tamasha', the folk drama of Maharashtra. The Dalits nowadays also encourage cultural creativity.

The idea is that they were 'Lords of the Earth', the original inhabitants of their areas brushed aside by the Aryan raiders. Corollary with this is disbelief in hereditary pollution and purity is a lack of faith in karmic rebirth. Wherever there is a village, there is a maharwada. Some of the traditional duties of the Mahars also lend credence to this belief, especially their position as 'authorities in all boundary matters'.

The third idea is, that they were and are radical people. They are very proud of their military record which spans a history from the days of Shivaji. Partially, the folk ways of the past exist up to the present day. The current folklore of the Dalits, self-conscious and changed though it is, seems clearly related to much of the past, and seems to relate to a timeless need.

### **1.7 Dalits' Need of Autobiographical Form**

Georges Gusdorf, an early critic of autobiography, ascertains the importance of the 'self' in autobiographical writing and that it is constructed in the act of writing (not exactly as the original). The self as we know is bound by many cultural categories; but it is categorically different for women, minorities and those who do not belong to the presumed hegemonic Western culture. In conjunction with the above: "Autobiography offers an almost

unlimited opportunity for exploration of personality – not solely of the author’s but also of the people with whom he is intimately involved” (Pascal 162). It is this collective, multiple, dispersed and conflicted sense of identity that Dalit women seek to appropriate. For Feminist politics, by means of expression of common struggle, women became increasingly aware of their collective identity by highlighting the common aspects of women’s lives. The act of writing assumes a creative, form from the mundane chores thrust on them. With this powerful tool of expression, they can carve out a niche and space in the masculine territory.

“Writing is not simply writing, it is an act, and in man’s continual fight against evil, writing must be deliberately used as a continual weapon. It is necessary that he understands this” (as quoted in Dangle 316). They utilise this narrative form to politically assert and explore complex negotiations not only with generic social oppression but also within the community itself. This is precisely what has been done by one of the pioneering Dalit autobiography writer Baby Kamble in her ground breaking book ‘*The Prisons we Broke*’.

### 1.8 Analysing the Core Text

The ‘*Prisons we Broke*’ is written with a deep-rooted urge to engage with the history of the Mahar community’s oppression. This book is located in the tradition of direct self-assertion that developed during the times of coercive suffocation in the 1960s when Dalit sensibilities sought to give vent to their frustration and outrage. This was their mental status in an effort to align themselves with the radical movements such as the, the Naxalite movement, anti-Vietnam war protests, Left-struggles, Black Panther Party, anti-price rise movement and so on. They sought such measures to rebel against the established literary, linguistic, formal and cultural conventions and open up new horizons of creative articulation to engage with the ‘dis-ease’ and chaos in the world. It is this engagement with the Dalit oppression that she pens in her autobiography. For Baby Kamble, memory becomes a device to learn the urge for resistance in future generations.

This objectification in turn makes her assert the fact of being a Mahar as she vents that even if the term fleeces others tongues, she cherishes it with fervour in her arteries and that it always keeps her aware of the years of struggle and oppression. Her narrative is a memoir of Veergaon where she was born and also the Mahars that eked out a living on the outskirts of the village. She lived there in economic conditions that were a little above hand to mouth since her grandfather and his brothers sent home money that they earned as butlers in European households. The signifier of their well-off position was the luxury of sipping tea for breakfast as it was considered as a medicine of therapeutic value in other households and affordable only once in a blue moon. As children, anger and resentment builds up in their minds as they see things around them and that makes them feel they are agents of pollution - a negative self-image against which they have to struggle a lot in the growing stages. Kamble elucidates in detail the way the houses of the Mahars were built with nothing but stones arranged vertically with some mud coating and ‘decorated with poverty’. Above their grinding stone would hang a string called ‘walni’ (a string for drying the carcass of dead animals) which were their holy threads - markers of their birth as compared to the ‘janeu’ of the Brahmins. Even the leader of the Mahar community received the sixteenth share of whatever the community received from the village for the services rendered, in kind—for example ‘bhakris’. Even the food her family ate came as alms which consisted of rotting food. The people of the maharwada and mangwada would live in their dirty pits on the periphery of the village, “like discarded rags,” (Kamble 35) ignored by society and incessantly waiting for the buffalo fair year after year. In the meantime, there were only memories of the happier times that would help them survive their miserable and wretched lives. Another element that added to the grim condition of their lives was the unfathomable belief in superstition. The upper castes had never allowed their lowly castes to acquire knowledge and so their generations rotted and perished while desiring enlightenment.

She expounds the custom of keeping the women at home, behind the threshold. “The honour enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. When no one could see even a nail of the woman thus confined within four walls of the house, [and] then this ‘honour’ became the talk of the town...” (Kamble 5). The women had to cover themselves fully if they saw any man from the higher caste walking by and then bow down and say like a chant, “The humble Mahar women fall at your feet master” (Kamble 52). The Mahars were bound by the world in the shackles of slavery and thus, to pass on the buck, they tied the strings of subjugation around their daughters-in-law. The atrocities inflicted on her own mother made her rubbish morality. She began to believe that the world belonged to the man who was in possession of money. The women lay their lives at their husbands’ feet just for the sake of the “kumkum mark” as their husbands mean their world to them. The condition of the pregnant women was atrocious because they had to face labour pains, mishandling by the midwife, wounds, ever-gnawing hunger, hot coals and many more which made them prone to burning fever, tetanus or other ailments. While describing the pain, Kamble also praises the resilience of these women. The Mahar women have emerged victorious even after years of oppressions. She attributes the victory to the Hindu Code Bill introduced by Ambedkar.

Throughout her autobiography, Kamble rarely talks exclusively about her personal life. She asserts this due to a strong identification with the Mahar community as she explicates after much probing in her interview with Maya Pandit (137). Despite the menial conditions, the people maintain their own ethics. The so-called moral they derived out of their underprivileged existence is of denying a sense of inferiority and revelling in the present. In her words, “... so far we have been calling our huts, royal palaces; our poor husbands, kings; and the leftovers we got, rich dishes” (41). As a subterfuge they are also trying to emulate their elders who have a great

impression on their minds. They thrive with an undying faith in the essence of truth, morality and character although thousands of their generations had to perish at the altar of the society in the hope of betterment and dignity as sermonised by their saviour, Ambedkar. The Dalits have never believed in hoarding wealth. They owe complete allegiance to the Mother Earth and have strove towards making “generous mind” (116) that will be developed by education. They have the conviction that living in a distinguished environment does not lead one to be cultured and civilised. It is all a matter of kinship. Thus she ends her autobiography with a hope that today’s youth will keep alive the flame ignited in them by their mentors Buddha and Ambedkar.

### **1.9 Dalit Women: The Doubly Downtrodden**

Almost all the Dalit spokesmen (and most, in fact, are men) clearly recognize women to be the most oppressed of their group—the ‘Dalit’ among the Dalit or ‘downtrodden among the downtrodden’ as it is sometimes put. They cite Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to support this view. Dalits are made to accept a new self-understanding. A false image is infused into their very consciousness, which makes it impossible for them to even think in human terms. This mark must be removed. In other words, the real image, the real selfhood of Dalits must be revealed to them. Dalits have been the victims of systematic indoctrination by the oppressive culture-makers in traditional India. Brahminical culture’s refusal to integrate the Dalits religiously and culturally into itself posed a predicament for the Dalits in terms of a lost humanity, a dispossessed community, an oppressed psyche and a segregated condition. This made the status and position of the Dalit women in society to be thrice alienated. The four features of caste have a significant bearing on gender. Firstly, caste defines a social division of labour thus lending status to one kind of work and status loss to another kind of work. Secondly, it determines sexual intercourse through marriage alliances. Thirdly, it structures groups in hierarchical relations, thus labelling some castes as high and others as low and finally, the concepts of pollution and purity provide prescriptions and prohibitions about social interaction. The sexual purity of women is linked with the purity of the caste, suggesting that female sexuality presents a threat because of the danger in her introducing impure or low caste blood into the lineage. The belief is that it is through women (and not men) that the ‘purity’ of caste/community is ensured and preserved. The male seed they receive should be the best available. This argument can be carried further by adding the question of success to the notion of purity. Women were literally seen as points of entrance, as ‘gateways’ to the caste system. If men of ritually low status were to get sexual access to women of higher status, then not only the purity of the women but that of the entire group would be endangered. Since the main threat to the purity of these groups is deemed to come from female sexuality, it becomes vital to guard it. True to this belief, in Kamble’s autobiography we witness the women protagonists to be trapped indoors and prohibited exposure of any part of their body to the male gaze.

Within the patriarchal joint family, women are considered as part of man’s property in the same way as a piece of land belongs to the men of the family. Only the sons are valued and are inheritors of immovable property. The daughters are not valued and, therefore, taken as dowry in the form of ‘decorated’ goods to their marital family. The girls of Maharwada are elaborately rubbed and scrubbed only once in their lifetime and that is during their pre-nuptials. In this way, gender division reinforced the caste division and gender ideology legitimized not only the structure of patriarchy but also the organization of caste. Another crucial dimension of this ideology is that the lower caste Dalit women are considered inferior and also sexually ‘loose’. Society refuses to recognise their potential, hard work and contribution to the welfare of the society. In their vain attempt to identify with and be approved by the higher caste Hindus, Dalits tried to follow their practices forcing their women into subjugation. They have come to be recognised as the ‘Dalits among Dalits and the downtrodden among downtrodden.’ Ambedkar describes this stratification of the caste system, as a pyramid of earthen pots set one on top of the other. Not only are Brahmins and Kshatriyas at the top, shudras and the untouchables are at the bottom like crushed and wasted powder and at the very bottom are the Dalit women.

Dalit women work under the most exploitative, dehumanizing and unhealthy conditions for neither their work nor wages are regularized. Women have to do menial jobs to meet the survival needs of the families. They have been denied all the basic amenities and have to constantly face the insecurity of being evicted from their places where they manage their lives and livelihood. Due to their impoverished conditions the majority of Dalit women do not even know the ‘smell’ of education and schools. The attack and threat of rape, arson and other violence inflicted on them are on the increase. Even then women from lower class or castes are rarely to be found as subjects of study for research. On the whole, the oppression of the Dalit women in India echoes issues such as state violence, denial of land rights, social and legal discrimination, infringement of civil liberties, inferior status, dehumanizing living and working conditions, total impoverishment, malnourishment, bad health conditions, the adverse effects of various contraceptives and the newly invented family planning devices that violate their bodies, illiteracy and ignorance, social ostracism and untouchability. The oppression of Dalit women is of a serious nature in terms of the violation of human rights in India.

To conclude, I quote Gail Omvedt:

The downtrodden among the downtrodden are not simply passive victims of ignorant tradition. In fact, at every basis of Indian society among the downtrodden, the current mood seems to be not one of the mute acceptance of tradition but one of bitterness, anger and sadness, to look to possible action. When Dalit women are awakened to the contradictions that colour their lives of oppression, the possibility arises that perhaps there is

after all in India a rich and ancient cultural base for revolution particularly among the low castes, Dalits, Adivasis and women. (Interview 763-74)

### 1.10 Establishing a (Dalit women's) 'Difference' and a Feminist Standpoint Position

A notification of a pitfall is done in the work of Edward Said due to the exclusion of the contributions and interventions of women in the non-brahman movement. The invisibility of this lineage in the Indian context has led scholars to conceive the recent autonomous assertion by Dalit women—as 'a different voice'. Guru argues that, to understand the Dalit women's need to talk differently, it is necessary to delineate both internal and external factors that have a bearing on this phenomenon. He locates "their need to talk differently in a discourse of descent against the middle class women's movement by the [D]alit men and the moral economy of the peasant movements" (*Dalit Women Talk Differently* 14-21). According to him the difference lies in a note of dissent against their exclusion from both the political and cultural arena. It is further underlined that social location determines the perception of reality and therefore the representation of Dalit women's issues by non-Dalit women was less valid and less authentic. Though Guru's argument is well taken and we agree that Dalit women must name the difference, to privilege knowledge claims of authenticity may lead to a narrow identity politics. Such a narrow frame may in fact delimit the emancipatory potential of the Dalit women's organisations and also their epistemological standpoints. In concurrence to this, there is an existence of multiple patriarchies which result due to both brahminical conspiracy and the relation of the caste group to the means for production. There are, therefore, according to Kumkum Sangari, discrete as well as overlapping patriarchal arrangements. She argues that women who are sought to be united on the basis of systematic overlapping patriarchies are nevertheless divided on caste, class lines and by their consent to patriarchies and their compensatory structures. If feminists are to challenge these divisions, then the mode of organisation and struggles encompass all the social inequalities that patriarchies are related to, embedded in and structured by. The non-brahminical renderings of feminist politics have led to some self-reflexivity among the autonomous women's groups and their responses could be broadly categorised by Sharmila Rege as firstly, a non-dialectical position of those who grant that historically it is now important that Dalit women take the leadership but also that they do not revise non-brahminical feminist politics for themselves. Secondly, the left position that collapses caste into class and continues to question the distinct materiality of caste. Thirdly, a self-reflexive position of those autonomous women's groups who recognise the need to reformulate and revise feminist politics for the non-brahminical renderings are viewed as more emancipatory. The intellectual history of feminist standpoint theory may be traced to Marx, Engels and Lukacs' insights into the standpoint of the proletariat. A social history of standpoint theory focuses on what happens when marginalised peoples begin to gain public voice. The failure of dominant groups to critically and systematically interrogate their advantaged situation leaves their social situation scientifically and epistemologically a disadvantaged one for generating knowledge. Such accounts may end up legitimizing exploitative 'practical politics' even though they may have good intentions. A Dalit feminist standpoint is seen as emancipatory since the subject of its knowledge is embodied and visible. This position counters pluralism and relativism by which all knowledge-based and political claims are thought to be valid in their own way. It places emphasis on individual experiences within socially-constructed groups and focuses on the hierarchical, multiple, changing structural power relations of caste, class and ethnicity which construct this group. It is obvious that the subject or agent of Dalit women's standpoint is multiple and heterogeneous. This lack of homogeneity underlines the fact that the subject of Dalit feminist liberatory knowledge must also be the subject of every other liberatory project and this requires a sharp focus on the processes by which gender, race, class, caste, sexuality - all construct each other. Thus we agree that the Dalit feminist standpoint position itself is open to liberatory interrogations and revisions. Baby Kamble's autobiography, 'The Prisons we Broke' symbolic of various Dalit texts from the margins needs to be included as an essential part of the Indian Knowledge system at once, redefining the contours of Indian knowledge systems and subverting the pre-existing categorical inclusions.

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