

Reading Selected Texts: Locating Dalit Identity

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ABSTRACT

The Dalit identity is closely tied to the experience of oppression and discrimination that Dalits have faced for centuries in India. Despite laws and constitutional provisions aimed at eradicating caste-based discrimination, Dalits continue to face discrimination in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and access to public spaces. The Dalit identity is also closely linked to the struggle for social and political rights. Dalit activists and leaders have fought for greater representation in government and other institutions, as well as for greater social and economic empowerment. Dalit identity represents a complex and multifaceted experience of discrimination, struggle, and resilience. This article examines the selected writing to understand the weave of Dalit identities and the process of Dalit identity formation in the modern India.

Keywords- Dalit Life Narratives, Representation, Autobiography, Experience, and Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

Dalit identity is a complex and, multilayered which has been the subject of much discussion and debate in India and around the world. The term “Dalit” derives from the word ‘dal,’ which means crushed or broken (Murugakar, 1991).The term Dalit represents individuals considered to be at the bottom of the caste Hindu system, often referred to as “untouchables” (Guru, 2011; Rao, 2009).Dalits have historically faced discrimination, marginalisation, and violence at the hands of higher caste groups (Jangam, 2017; Jodhka,2012; Rao, 2009).The concept of Dalit identity emerged as a means of resistance against the oppressive caste system and its accompanying social hierarchy (Rawat, 2006; Rao, 2009; Omvedt, 2011).Dalit identity is based on the notion of shared experiences of oppression, discrimination, and exclusion and seeks to promote a sense of solidarity and community among those who have been historically marginalised (Omvedt, 2011; Valmiki, 2003).

Dalit identity is not limited to religion, language, or cultural tradition. Instead, it is a collective identity that transcends these categories and is based on shared experiences of oppression and resistance (Limbale, 2005; Valmiki,2003). The Dalit movement has gained significant momentum in recent years, with Dalit leaders and activists working to promote Dalit rights, challenge caste-based discrimination, and advocate for social justice. However, the concept of Dalit identity is still developing and is more often perceived as homogenous. It has been used to denote a community experiences an individual. There is indeed commonality among the Dalit experiences, but they are different. The difference between the Dalit experiences imparts diversity and plurality to Dalit identity.

This article reviews four important writings probing the dynamics of Dalit identity. The first work (Arnold and Blackburn, 2004) looks into the art of biography/autobiography/life history writing, which are also popular among the Dalits. The anthology also investigates a ‘Dalit life history’ (Parry, 2004; Racine and Racine, 2004) by looking at the life history of a Dalit man, Somvaru and a Dalit woman Viramma. It delves into the construction of the Dalit self and identity through the events and experiences of the life of Somvaru

and his family on the one hand, and examining the timelessness of Viramma's in her life narrative.

The second work (Gupta, 2012) probes the representation of Dalit women in the Hindi public sphere by reading a popular magazine from the 1930s. Moreover, it examines the role of representation in popular literature in constructing Dalit women's identity in particular, and Dalits, in general. The other two works (Punalekar, 2001; Rajkumar, 2010) engage with Dalit literature to examine the evolution and development of Dalit identity in Dalit life narratives, stories, and poems. The study uses critical textual analysis to examine the selected text and probes the multiple overtones of the Dalit socius and identity.

David, A., and Blackburn, S. eds.(2004) Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History. Bloomington: Indiana UP and Permanent Black

History could not be the summation of histories of all; history as a discipline ought to be selective. The process or processes of selection impart subjectivity to history. Most of the time, individual narratives and histories, especially from the margins, have failed to figure in the metanarratives of history. Usually, ordinary narratives have been sidelined to give way to extraordinary history.

This work is an effort to explore the individual voices through their writings or oral records (biography, autobiography, life history). The book explores a canvas of writings and oral records from different echelons of society in varied times and spaces. Scholars from diverse disciplines have contributed to the subjected theme, which has made this edited work academically more pluralistic and vibrant for further research.

Unlike Europe, life histories as a genre are less explored in South Asia. It has been argued that Asian societies are relatively more collectivistic. Finding individual voices is seemingly difficult, as in Asia, there are 'dividuals and not individuals'(pg.5). One may beg to differ with this Eurocentric presumption. Still, no one could deny the connection between individuals and society across the globe. How far the social encompasses the individual and to what extent an individual replicates the society is yet to be explored. In the Indian context, the caste dimension is vital before attempting such an analysis. The caste positioning of an individual imparts a different sensibility to his existence and subsequently to his narratives.

Life histories are alternative ways of knowing society's socius and basis. Life histories are the culturally specific notion of the person, but it is also about the emergence of the self and the modern self-consciousness beyond the collective. These voices are evidence of the emerging personal identity beyond the socio-cultural hegemonic spaces. It is their version of truth beyond the metanarratives of truth and claims of meta-history (pg.5). It is also an important tool to understand histories and versions of 'their' truths that have been lurking on the margins of society and subsequently of history (pg.6). This is one of the pioneering works that explore life histories beyond the obsession with positivist history. In its limited space, the book examines vivisection in Indian society across the divide of gender, religion, caste, region, time, and space. The book traces the genesis of biographical/autobiographical writing in India from the hagiographical literature called charits. These are usually exaggerated versions of the life achievements of kings or saints, which, despite bearing dates, present contexts than causation (pg.7). The book further traces the Central Asian and Persian court culture's influence on the craft of writing life histories. Ultimately it links the emergence of individual and subsequent life histories in India to the post-enlightenment and colonial period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. How far the emergence of the individual in the Indian context is correlated with the post-enlightenment and colonialism is yet to be explored. Still, unlike Europe, the emergence of an individual has referred back to the enlightenment.

The book has been divided into three sections: Confronting Modernity, Translating Traditions, and Spoken Lives. The division of sections and the corresponding essays create an interesting semblance thematically. The first section deals with the life histories of the people engaged in public lives and seemed modern in the early 20th century. The second section focuses on the people who lived relatively traditional lives at the

same time and space. The last section explores the oral narratives of the people in present times, especially from the margins of society. The essays address varied representational and self-representational techniques and try to understand the silence within the narrative or chosen reticence on specific issues.

The first section entails three essays: *The Self and The Cell: Indian Prison Narratives as Life Histories* by David Arnold, *The Reticent Autobiographer: Mahadevi Verma* by Francesca Orsini and *The Invention of Private Life: Reading of Sibanth Sastri's Autobiography* by Sudipta Kaviraj. David Arnold's essay explores life history in political prisoners' prison narratives. His choice of political prisoners is very idealistic (Gandhi and Nehru), which hardly offers anything new about them to an extent, as both were engaged widely in the criticism of the colonial rule even during their stay in jails. However, Nehru tried to locate the psychosis of the prison as it has been perceived as incarnated suffering. Still, the real fear is the fear of the unknown (pg.32). On the contrary, Gandhi invented most of his programs in jail, where he came across a different social reality, especially in South Africa. Unfortunately, as observed, none of them has penned the harsh realities and deplorable conditions of the prisons in India, which could have been used to improve the prisons in general.

The second essay by Francesca Orsini is an exciting attempt to read the personal out of the public writings. She explored the writings of one of the great Indian literati Mahadevi Verma who was the master of character sketches and many other literary genres in Hindi literature. Mahadevi's choice of subjects and characters in her literary works have been explored to understand the silence about herself in her works. She has chosen to be reticent on most of her issues, but through Mahadevi's work, Orsini tried to locate the missing persona. Orsini notes that Mahadevi wrote about other people who lived around her 'while leaving at the centre, obfuscated; the result is a scintillating circle around a hollow centre'(pg.55).

Similarly, Sudipta Kaviraj's essay on the auto biography of Sibanth Sastri explores the reasons for writing an autobiography along with the available repository and trends of autobiography/biography writings, especially in India. It seems only the lives of saints and great people are meant to be propagated and aspired for, but great souls could not boast of their feats. Therefore, the trend of writing biographies was probably more prevalent in India. Sibanth's autobiography *Atmcharit* is important because it contests the idea of traditional life narratives, which were usually biographical. And secondly, it was one of the earliest attempts to explore the idea of private life in the Indian context in the late 19th century.

Similarly, the autobiography has also refrained from confessional overtones of an individual (like Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* or Russo's *Confession*) but rather justify simpleton acts of an ordinary man to negotiate with great expectations. In the same vein, the Kaviraj also reflects upon the changes in the socio-economic rubrics of the village due to urbanisation in particular and colonialism in general. The essay has meekly observed issues of urbanisation and the dissolution of traditional family structures. Similarly, the advent of private life in the wake of urbanisation is another meaningful observation, as urbanisation offers different spaces for conjugal relationships to flourish in the absence of a traditional repository of friends and advisors. The concept of personal taste in materialistic pursuits, such as furnishing a house, took a new flight in the newly dwelled urban spaces. Kaviraj aptly explores how different rhythms of time in new spaces influence the materiality of individuals along with the evolution of 'private' and 'personal'.

The last section offers a couple more compelling essays on life narratives and the methodology. J Parry's essay, *Marital History of a 'Thumb- Impression Man*, explores the dynamics of industrialisation and modernisation by interviewing a Dalit family from Bhilai. Parry is concerned about the influences of modernisation/industrialisation on personal relationships; she tries to locate the shift in operations and perceptions of family relations, in general, and marital relationships, in particular. The essay revolves around the main protagonist, Somvaru, who worked in the Bhilai steel plant and lived a decent life materially. He has been married four times, and his relationship with his family and others frames this essay's core. In the same vein, Parry also tries to locate the shift in the matters of conjugality in two different generations, as

Somvaru's daughter Vinita, an educated working woman, has a different take on marital and personal relationships.

In comparison to Somvaru's generation, marital ties have become more complex. The legal aspect of marriage has transformed conjugal relationships as it has devoid them of flexibility. It is challenging to transgress marriage even if both or one of the partners is not happy. It seems Somvaru's time was relatively more flexible, and the happiness of both partners was of prime value. One of the essay's core concerns is how modernity, education and the rule of law are altering the sensibility of individuals across society.

Similarly, the methodology of recording life histories is fascinating. Parry has been involved with the family for over eight years and has seen many phases of Somvaru's life from a close quadrangle. It seems he has been visiting Somvaru's family frequently as he observed changes in his central protagonist's persona over time. Although he hasn't mentioned the number of her visits, how far the observed is comfortable with the observer is a critical point to notice. Parry mentions that in his later visits, Somvaru was less vocal. Reasons for his selective reticence have not been thoroughly explored, as Parry offers Somvaru's ailing body as the only reason.

Viramma is a Dalit woman who narrates the weave of her life without caring about the repetitions and chronology of events. Viramma's life narrative in Racine, J and Racine, J.L., *Beyond Silence: A Dalit Life-History in South India*, is again an effort to understand the silence and absence of people from the metanarratives of history. But it seems such life narratives, chronology hardly plays any role as the narrator is an integral part of the narrative, unlike autobiographies/biographies of the 'elites'.

Overall, the book is an inventive anthology of various contours of autobiographical/biographical writings in the Indian context, which dissects such narratives from multiple perspectives. Similarly, it also explored these narratives' ordinariness to understand further the extraordinary narratives of history in particular and social sciences in general.

Gupta, C. (2013) Representing Dalit Bodies in Colonial North India. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Occasional Paper, History and Society New Series, 1: 1-35.

The idea of representation is intricately interwoven with the idea of identity to an extent, as 'representation makes private feelings public' (p.1). Further, through this, public imagery identities are formed. Although one also needs to address the agency involved in 'making image public'. What kinds of imageries are making rounds, and why, is an important issue to address with special reference to the power structure and politics of the time. This essay deals with the representation of Dalit bodies in Colonial north India, especially the United Province (U.P.). The author has used the Foucauldian frame to understand representation as the tool of power to support dominant ideology. Moreover, it has also been employed to understand if 'representation has the scope of carving out more contingent, varied and flexible modes of resistance' (pg.2).

The essay studies three kinds of representation of Dalit bodies: firstly, in the popular middle-class didactic Hindi literature, primarily written for upper caste women; secondly, it explores the issue of conversion of Dalits and the cartoons addressing such conversions and thirdly, imagery of Dalit male bodies in army discourse, both by the colonisers and the Dalits themselves.

The first section of the essay deals with the construction/destruction and (mis) representation of Dalit women as dirty vamps (kutnis) and as 'Other' in Hindi didactic literature written for upper caste women. The negative image of Dalit women seems to have been constructed to highlight the antithesis of the upper caste 'obedient, virtuous and religious women. Similarly, the relative mobility and the freedom of Dalit women as a workforce, be it dhot in (washerwomen), chamar in (women from chamartanner caste) and all

other menial working women force have been looked down upon. Similarly, the concerned didactic literature has also engaged in character assassination of Dalit women and warned upper caste women against the potential danger of losing their husbands to these sexually promiscuous Dalit women. In spite of Dalit women being a large working force, their working identity has been mocked; Dalit women have been projected as having a non-woman 'unfeminine' identity.

On the contrary, the exclusive traits of virtuous upper-caste homemakers have been much celebrated. Similarly, the essay also locates the 'protest' of Dalit men folk against the popular perception about their women by controlling them better as the chamars of Moradabad imposed sanctions on the mobility of their women (pg.11).

There are certain questions which deserve further enquiry. For instance, the essay tries to locate the binary opposite of upper caste women, but why has the image of Dalit women been chosen to construct the Other of upper caste women? Why do they compare themselves to Dalit women barring all other middle castes women? Does 'upper caste' a homogenous category? Was there any challenge from the Dalit quarters as far as the Hindu social structure is concerned? Was the relative liberty of Dalit women threatening the image of ideal Hindu women?

Similarly, the so-called 'protest' of Dalit men by posing sanctions to the mobility of Dalit women seems a little irrelevant, as many of them did not always have the option to survive without the economic support of their women. The quest of emulating upper caste praxis and Sanskritisation could be one of the explanations, as offered by the author, but to what extent such social mimicry for upward mobility overpowers the quest for materialistic survival needs further research as the choice between upward social mobility by mimicking upper caste praxis and materialistic survival could not have been easy.

The second section of the essay deals with the issue of the conversion of the Dalits to Christianity and various perceptions of Hindu society regarding the converted Dalits. It seems that the issue of conversion was also associated with the socio-economic empowerment of the converted. The relative difference between the converted and unconverted Dalits became the focal point of many popular magazines then. Magazines like *Chand* and *Vayangchitravli* addressed the difference between converted and unconverted Dalits through various cartoons and caricatures. Popular literature took a resort to humorous satires to highlight the difference, but on the contrary, it highlighted the material and cultural empowerment of the converted Dalits.

Similarly, the anxiety of losing outcastes was also there among the Hindu reformers, as it might reduce the number of Hindus. This fear-psychosis of upper caste people gave an advantage to Dalits to negotiate with the Hindu reformers for a better life. Although negotiations were very much limited to bare necessities like better access to water reservoirs, they certainly gave some vantage points to Dalits (pg.17).

Could the wry humour on the issue of conversion and the fear of losing Hindu outcastes to the other religion go hand in hand? The author argues that these magazines mocking on the conversion by portraying two kinds of Dalit bodies; the converted, well-dressed, confident and the other unconverted, which was the binary opposite of the converted Dalit (pg.15). It further suggests that upper-caste Hindus could not be homogenous, as humour and fear seem diametrically opposite manifestations. One needs to establish distinctions among the upper caste groups. Similarly, conversion ensured the socio-economic empowerment of Dalits and had adverse economic implications for upper caste Hindus, as it might also siphon off their source of cheap labour. These financial implications have not been addressed in the essay.

In the last section, the author has discussed Dalit's enrollment in the police and army during the colonial period and its impact on the formation of Dalit identity, in general, and the discourse of Dalit 'manhood', in particular. She observed shifts in the enrollment pattern of the Dalits as the rate of enrollment was more in

pre mutiny phase. After the advent of martial race theory in the post-1857 phase, there was a decline in the enrollment pattern. Later, during the world wars, Dalit recruitment was limited to non-combative services in the army. Further, she explored how such employment had further contributed to the identity formation of Dalits as they did claim higher social status once they became part of the army or police. To an extent, both the military and police manifest a direct connection with power and chivalry, which gave Dalits the reason to claim higher social status. Dalit leaders motivated their people to take up these jobs as it improved their economic status and endowed them with the status of an able-bodied combatant community. The discourse of Dalit manhood through army and police services was subsequently constructed to contest the popular idea of Hindu society against the Dalit and Dalit bodies.

Overall, the essay covers important issues of Dalit representation and the politics of the body through a new approach towards the archive. The differential use of archives to approach the history of Dalits through popular upper-caste magazines is genuinely commendable.

Kumar, R. (2010) Dalit Literature a Perspective from Below. In: I. Ahmed and S.B. Upadhyay (Eds.) Dalit Assertion in Society Literature and History. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

The essay's objective is to discuss the emergence of a new genre of literature, Dalit literature. The essay tries to locate the genesis of the term Dalit from the Black Panther movement in the 1970s in Maharashtra. It also engages with the debates around Dalit literature and its practitioners. Dalit literature has been accused of being emotionalist and, to an extent, devoid of the general aesthetics of the literature (pg.129). The author suggests that Indian literary aesthetics is an upper-caste construct that acknowledges certain literary sensibilities.

On the contrary, Dalit literature contests this hegemonic design of literary aesthetics with their writings which are different from the norm. These writings are engrained in the lived experience of pain, discrimination, and suffering and are consequently different (pg.135). Moreover, some of the Dalit authors believe that only Dalits can write about the pains and agony of the Dalits. In contrast, others believe anybody who feels this marginalised community's pain could write about them. This debate is ongoing, and both sides seem to have some valid arguments (pg.133). It is certainly impossible to 'feel the same' as the sufferers, but one could empathise with them. On the contrary, the authenticity of such false experiences or consciousness could be further questioned.

The author also touches upon the emergence of women's writings in Dalit literature. Their struggle as a woman has often subsided under the more significant struggle of Dalits. How far woman Dalit writers can write their own experience as woman and Dalits need to be explored as a Dalit woman has been exploited at multiple levels.

The autobiographical writings of the Dalits have been noticed as a different and unique characteristic of Dalit literature as it bears 'confessional characteristics' (pg.137), which are engrained in pain and suffering. Writings of these memoirs of inhumanity and insult need unmeasurable courage, as one needs to relive those memories again while writing. Although such autobiographical writings have been criticised for being propagandistic and fake, archives or documents could hardly corroborate them. However, Dalit writers contest this critique as the Dalits themselves are the witness of these atrocities. They have a sociological and theoretical base, which has hardly been considered by the upper caste critics (pg.138). The author elaborates on the two chief aims of the Dalit literature: 'demolition and re-construction'. It seems the

The author addresses various issues and debates around Dalit literature, especially the emergence of a new consciousness among the Dalits through 'the literature of their own', further contesting the general sensibilities of literary aesthetics by their literature of protest.

Punalekar, S.P. (2001) Dalit Literature and Dalit Identity. In: G. Shah (ed.) Dalit Identity and Politics. New Delhi: Sage.

It seems that the quest for Dalit identity has been deepened in post-independent India, as there was an upsurge in literature with the rise of the Dalit Panther movement in 1970's in Maharashtra. Since then, there has been almost a continuous flow of Dalit writings, which tends to contest the hegemonic notions of the caste system on the one hand and try to re-invent the Dalit identity on the other. The process of constructing the identity of a heterogeneous community is undoubtedly difficult, as it faces varied challenges from within and outside the Dalit socius. In the Dalit context, their writings have also been employed as a weapon not only to contest the popular understanding of the caste system and exploitation but also to construct new identities. The essay discusses the notion of Dalit identity as projected through Dalit literature in Maharashtra (pg.214). It appears that social sensitivity and, at times, activism has been one of the top links among the writers across the Dalit literature in general and in Maharashtra in particular, as most of the Dalit writers are social activists as well. Most of their works testify to direct or indirect discrimination and exploitation. Although in the case of Maharashtrian Dalit writers economics of the production process and their positioning in the socio-cultural rubric of the society have been taken into consideration significantly. Structural inequalities are the basis and consequentially the custodian of caste-based exploitation (pg.215).

Most authors have traced the roots of the Dalit movement from the bhakti movement and saints like Namdev and Chokha Mela, who had protested against the caste system then through their writings. Early Dalit writers in Maharashtra were more often from the Mahar-neo-Buddhists, who were converted along with Ambedkar in 1956. The author suggests that other scheduled castes gradually joined the literary movement, but he has mentioned them. He also claims that the converted Dalit Christians or Muslims have joined hands with the other Dalit writers in the struggle, but again we hardly come across any such writer (pg.216). Dalit authors are also contesting the caste system through their experiences, which have propelled their consciousness and, subsequently, writings. Authors like Daya Pawar, Pantwane and Waman Nimbalkar have fiercely criticised the Brahmanical scriptures for creating and re-strengthening the divide in society.

Their writings bear the testimonies of Dalit vastis and vadasabode still suffering on the margins of society. Similarly, their writings also question the cultural stagnancy of Indian society in the recent past, as Brahmanical literature still acts as the repository of social divides. These authors also challenged the epics by questioning their narratives vis-a-vis lower caste actors like Shambuk and Eklavya, who had suffered then. Epical narratives have been revisited with new consciousness, where Brahmanical exploitative designs have been questioned (pg.219-220). Similarly, there is an outcry against the untouchability and dehumanisation of the Dalit socius, which is continuing in post-independent India in one form or the other.

Ambedkar is the source of inspiration for most writers, and they have written exhaustively in his praise. His struggle against caste-based exploitation is celebrated in almost all literary genres, whether short stories, poems or novels. As one of the folk songs 'Majha Bhimraya' goes, '...[H]e threw his light in the darkness; he never was the slave of anyone, he showed us the way of Buddha, he gave us salvation' (pg.225). Similarly, the socio-cultural rubrics of society, in general, have been criticised for sinister designs which breed inhuman conditions for Dalits. Along with untouchability, poverty and discrimination, the market system has been criticised explicitly for incapacitating the Dalits by writers like Baburao Bagul, Raosaheb Kasabe and Narayan Surve (pg.227). As the market only commoditifies the Dalit body in various forms of labour but hardly offers a window to improve the social positioning like a free market. Both urban and rural experiences have been employed to contest the saga of progressive modern Indian society, as Vijay Tendulkar notes in the introduction of Namdev Dahsal's *Golpitha*, which describes the urban Dalit lives in the city Bombay. "Dahsal's *Golpitha* where leprous women are paid the price and fucked on the road, where children cry nearby, ...from where one cannot run to save his life, or if he runs, he comes back—that

Golpitha”(pg.228).

On the one hand, this literature endeavours to expose promises of the modern state, and on the other, it strives to engender community consciousness to protest against the hegemonic structure. And through this, protest attempts to cultivate a new identity of the Dalit, who does not succumb to the age-old hegemonic structure but rises in protest. This literature tries to project ‘protest’ as the benchmark for the new identity; the struggle becomes the new identity. As Trymbak Sapakale’s poem ‘Mother India’ expresses, ‘don’t despair. This day will depart too. Now this day is pregnant with day...’(pg.239).

DISCUSSION

The Dalit identity is a complex and evolving subject that has been the focus of contemporary discourses in India for several decades. Dalits are historically oppressed and marginalised communities in India who have been subjected to various forms of discrimination and violence based on their caste (Ambedkar, 1944; Rawat and Narayan, 2016).The aforementioned texts are important as they highlight the plurality and complex nature of Dalit identity by underlining the multiple experiences within the Dalit socius. However, the commonality of Dalit experience of caste discrimination across time and space is appalling.

Arnold and Blackburn’s (2004) anthology not only underlines the distinctions among the different walks of life within India but also carves out the difference between caste and class. The life narratives of caste Hindus and Dalits are starkly different, which speaks volumes about the caste distinction and discrimination in modern contemporary India. Moreover, it also touches upon the issue of intersectionality within the Dalit discourse by addressing the double-indentured identity of Dalit women, which deserves further research (Ambedkar and Rege, 2013; Paik, 2016).

Gupta’s (2013) essay is a critical vantage point to understand the role of media and public discourse in constructing identities. The essay probes the representation of Dalit women as kutn is vamps in the caste Hindu Hindi public discourse. Gupta (2013) highlights a different process of identity formation through the popular public sphere compared to Arnold and Blackburn’s (2004).It brings attention to the systemic dissemination of certain representations through public discourse, consequently shaping the image of communities and individuals. These constructed images indeed influence the cultivation of identities.

Punalekar (2001) and Kumar (2010) focus on Dalit writing and their writing as a tool for assertion (Hunt, 2014; Orsini, 2002).They draw attention to identity formation by sharing their experience and sufferings, which strikes a common bond among the Dalit lives across India. Dalit ‘confessions’ of caste nemesis and discrimination proffer a sense of belonging through Dalit literature and writings. It gives a sense of an ‘imagined community’, borrowing a phrase from Benedict Anderson (2006).These selected readings showcase the complex and liminal nature of Dalit identity and the process of identity formation, along with their association with the discourses of power.

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