**Dalit Literature as a Tool for Critical Pedagogy: A Theoretical Perspective on Reimagining Social Inclusion in Higher Education**

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**Abstract**

This paper discusses the potential of Dalit literature as a revolutionary pedagogical tool to address caste-based discrimination and overcome social exclusion in higher education in India. Based on the experiences of historically disadvantaged Dalits, Dalit literary works and texts provide compelling stories of resistance against the caste system and social hierarchies that provoke conscious reconsideration. This paper embraces the Critical Pedagogy theoretical approach, informed by the beliefs of overflowing empowerment, communication, and defiance of oppressive systems as propagated by Paulo Freire, to examine how the incorporation of Dalit literature in university education can facilitate critical thought and inclusive learning. The subject of Dalit underrepresentation in university curricula and ongoing caste marginalization in institutional and pedagogical practices are introduced at the outset of the research endeavour. It highlights conflicts between accumulating upper-caste epistemologies and the need to give Dalit perspectives on the democratization of knowledge production priority through a qualitative methodology that includes textual inspection and analysis of the existing literature. The analysis points out some of the obstacles it faces, such as faculty unpreparedness to address caste issues and institutional resistance to change, but it maintains that curriculum revision and a critical, perceptive reading of Dalit texts can remove these obstacles. To bring the full integration of Dalit literature and develop a new vision of social inclusion, the article concludes by endorsing the reform of higher education regulations and instructional methodologies, adopting the idea as one of the main goals. In this sense, Dalit literature is useful in critical pedagogy and transformative education since higher education may be a pivotal setting for challenging caste hierarchies and promoting equity.

**Keywords:** Dalit Literature, Critical Pedagogy, Social Inclusion, Higher Education

1. **Introduction**

Dalit literature has evolved as a very important genre of social criticism and reform based on the life experiences and struggles of communities historically marginalised in India. It must be included in higher education to develop critical pedagogy and enable actual social inclusion. Nevertheless, regardless of this significance, Dalit voices are still marginalised in the majority of academic institutions. The Dalit literature development is an important cultural and political drift in India and a very crucial realisation of Dalit consciousness and a strong weapon of social justice. Having historical foundations in the oppression of the Dalit community, this literary genre not only presents the life experiences of writers but also overlaps with the wider political agenda promoting equality and social reforms (Vashisth, 2016). Dalit literature, which was highly shaped by the ideologies of B.R. Ambedkar, has, over time since the 1970s, become a multicoloured genre consisting of autobiographies, poetry and critical essays. The Dalit literature is also central to the reorganisation of the educational discourse, inclusivity, and amplification of the voices of the marginalised groups in the academic fora, as well as the challenges of the caste hierarchies (Mandavkar, 2016). In the sphere of higher education, the involvement of Dalit students serves as a new source of alternative references, which questions the overall educational discourse and the practice, thus democratising the learning space. This type of engagement fosters the culture of critical discourse and social saliency, the two essential components of the development of inclusive learning communities (Pant and Syal, 2022).

Dalit literature is in the process of creating awareness and empowering the people in the society, hence, making it an important aspect in redefining education that recognises and respects the cultural diversity (Chauhan, 2023). However, despite the constitutional efforts to incorporate them, Dalit students prefer to experience systematic discrimination and marginalisation in the academic context, which brings about the problems of social inclusion. In this research proposal, the issue of Dalit literature and critical pedagogy will be discussed in the context of how they connect with the necessity to acknowledge the educational changes that will address the voices of the marginalised people with a sense of urgency (Hathiram & Laxmi, 2023). The main goal of this research is to contribute to the development of a discussion on inclusiveness in education and the revolutionary role of literature as a change agent through examining the role of Dalit literature in building social awareness and resistance (Mishra et al., 2024).

The Dalit literature is a significant cultural and political movement in India and a very significant expression of Dalit consciousness and a very powerful tool of social justice. Based on the historical oppression that the Dalit community has experienced, the expression of this literary form is a lived experience of the writers, although it is consistent with broader-based political activities, suggesting equality and social transformation. As it currently exists, Dalit literature is a genre comprising autobiographies, poems, and critical essays, and has emerged since the 1970s under the influence of the ideologies of B.R. Ambedkar (Nayar, n.d.).

Contemplating the radical caste systems, Dalit literature became the centre of democratic reorganisation of the discourse of education and theories, enabling it to become more comprehensive and empower the voices that were previously not seen in the academic world. It is the struggle against structural discrimination and the advocacy of rights and dignity to the discriminated groups (Vashisth, 2016). With Dalit students in higher education, it creates alternative meanings and understanding of the available space of education and practices to liberalise the learning ambience, therefore democratising the learning space (Gopani, 2024). This engagement breeds a culture of critical thinking and social responsiveness, an important element to the cultivation of inclusive academic environments.

Despite the inclusion provisions in the constitution, Dalit students experience high levels of discrimination and exclusion in the academic institutions, and this brings in complex social inclusion. The paper has examined how Dalit literature and critical pedagogy interrelate in relation to the pressing necessity of reforming the educational process to ensure true consideration of demands between the voices of the marginalised groups. Investigation into the role of Dalit literature in the development of social awareness and resistance aims to fill the gap in the current discussion of inclusion in education and the change-making power of literature as a means of social change (Chahal & Kumar, 2022).

## **1.1 Objective of the Paper**

# To explore how the integration of Dalit literature into university curricula can foster critical consciousness, empathy, and social justice values in students, and to explore the challenges and transformative possibilities of such curricular integration to the reimagining of social inclusion, this paper will critically evaluate the role of Dalit literature in the establishment of critical pedagogy through foregrounding lived experiences and resistance of marginalised Dalit communities, and in support of making academic practise genuinely inclusive, with reference to established theoretical perspectives, particularly Freirean critical pedagogy and Ambedkarite thought.

## **1.2 Research Question**

1. How does Dalit literature, as reflected in secondary academic sources, embody the principles of critical pedagogy and promote critical consciousness in the context of higher education?
2. In what ways can the integration of Dalit literary works into university curricula challenge caste-based exclusion and reimagine social inclusion, based on the analysis of existing research and theoretical perspectives?
3. What are the key barriers and opportunities identified in the scholarly literature for using Dalit literature as an instrument of curricular reform and social justice within Indian higher education?

## **1.3 Research Methodology**

This paper relies on the application of secondary data as the research methodology. The descriptive and qualitative design uses a broad pool of published literature to critically examine how Dalit literature has contributed to critical pedagogy and social inclusion in higher education. Scholarly articles, academic books, research papers, theses, published interviews, government and institutional reports and reputable websites on Dalit literature, critical pedagogy, and educational inclusion will be used as sources of data. Systematic searches of digital academic databases, university library catalogues, and open access repositories guided the collection of secondary data, with priority given to those works that explore Dalit literary movements, the theoretical basis of critical pedagogy, and curriculum studies in terms of social justice in education. Relevance, credibility, and academic rigour were applied as the selected literature was screened. Theoretical analysis led to the reveal of key themes and findings in which data obtained from different sources and authors were compared, synthesised and interpreted in the context of the selected theoretical perspective. Summarised data and comparative insights based on the concerned literature have been used to construct tables.

# **Literature Review**

Dalit literature is an important branch of Indian literature, and it is a powerful instrument of resistance to centuries-old caste-based oppression. This body of literature is based on the experiences of the Dalits, historically oppressed groups under the Hindu varna system and includes poetry, novels, autobiographies, and short stories that express the theme of oppression, identity, and liberation. The term Dalit, as a Sanskrit preposition, broken or oppressed, was adopted in the 20th century to mean agency and struggle, rather than victimhood. This literature review examines how Dalit literature has evolved and what it is actually significant in challenging the social classes and ensuring inclusiveness through the works of scholars to highlight how it has evolved over the years and how it is significant.

## **2.1 Emergence of Dalit Literature**

Dalit literature can be traced back to the ancient and medieval resistance movements, and its modern form was established in the middle of the 20th century, when the social-political upheaval took place in India. Some of the earliest antecedents can be found in Buddhist literature and the Bhakti movement of the 14th century, with poets like Kabir, and medieval Dalit leaders like Madara Chennaiah in the devotional poetry setting caste hierarchies in derogation and emphasising equality and humanity. However, a modern Dalit literary movement found momentum in the 19th century with reformists like Jyotirao Phule, who in his works like Gulamgiri (1873), addressed the Dalit as a word used to connote the oppressed masses under the sway of Brahminical authority. The work of Phule provided the foundation of a literature of protest, which inspired subsequent leaders such as B.R. Ambedkar, whose works and the 1956 mass conversion to Buddhism shook Dalits into consciousness.

Its systematic rise as a separate genre emerged in the 1960s in Maharashtra, especially in the Marathi language, as a continuation of the anti-caste activism triggered by the legacy of Ambedkar. Nevertheless, it was in 1958 at the Dalit Literary Conference in Mumbai that the term Dalit literature was coined and marked a transition in secluded writing to that of organised expression. The period also witnessed the emergence of the so-called Little Magazine movement, where Dalit voices could be heard through low-cost, grass-roots publications that went around mainstream publishing gatekeepers. Prose works were pioneered by the short story collection Jevha Mi Jat Chorli by Baburao Bagul in 1963, the first to capture the naked pain of Dalit life, and which mixed personal stories with social criticism. This movement grew stronger in 1972 as the Dalit Panthers were established as a radical faction of young authors and activists based on the Black Panthers in the United States, whose weapon in fighting caste violence and economic exploitation was the use of literature. Dalit literature written in Marathi spread out to other languages, e.g., Bama (1992), Karukku, written in Tamil, by organisations such as the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh, founded in the 1960s. This development was further enhanced by post-independence urbanisation and education among Dalits, which turned the occasional protests into an organised literary rebellion against the silence of mainstream Indian literature on caste atrocities.

According to scholars, this was a result of a wider postcolonial writing of Dalit writers who decided to place their work within a subaltern counter-narrative as a rejection of the romantic depiction of Indian society presented in upper-caste writing. This was a critical growth point in the 1970s when the Dalit autobiographies and poetry were documented, and the lived experience of untouchability, poverty and discrimination was documented and thereby institutionalising the genre within the linguistic diversity of India (Chahal & Kumar, 2022).

## **2.2 Significance of Dalit Literature**

As a means of social liberation, cultural recuperation, and political mobilisation, Dalit literature is of paramount importance, transforming radically the situation in the world of Indian letters by making the marginalised central. In its most basic form, it is a literature of revolt, revealing the ugly truths of caste repression, including violence, economic disadvantage, and erasure of epistemic knowledge, which are historically overlooked or mythologized by mainstream discourse. Through realistic, sometimes colloquialism, autobiographical forms, Dalit writings institutionalise the dominant aesthetics, presenting a kind of materialistic aesthetics of painful truths, instead of abstract beauty, and democratises literary expression.

The importance of the genre extends to identity-making and empowerment, particularly to Dalit women who face the cross-cutting injustices of caste and gender as observed in publications like Bama Sangati (1994), which not only criticise the intra-community patriarchy but also external discrimination too. Dalit literature also promotes social justice, such as equality, liberty and human dignity, that are in line with the ideologies of Ambedkarites and Marxists to mobilise the people. It has influenced the Indian university curricula reforms, which have made the views of the Dalits mainstream and curbed the epistemic violence of the Dalit students. Since the 1990s, translations into English worldwide have incorporated Dalit literature into world literary conversations, making comparisons to African American and Latin American resistance literatures, and emphasising themes of marginalisation.

According to critics, Dalit literature runs the risk of stereotyping by its negative emphasis on suffering, but its potential as a revolution is in its transformation of passive victimhood into active resistance, which can be linked to larger anti-caste movements. In modern India, it is still a source of social change, giving voice to the continuous discrimination and creating a start of a fair society.

In short, the rise of Dalit literature since the 19th-century reformist antecedents to its institutionalisation in the 1960s is a history of struggle against oppression, and its relevance continues to render subaltern experience and effect social change. To gain a complete appreciation of its continuing influence, future scholarship must examine its shifting position in the digital and transnational to increase its influence over time.

***Table 1: Important Reviews***

| **Theme** | **Key Points** | **References** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Dalit Literature and Critical Pedagogy** | Dalit literature leads to Dalit consciousness, which gives prominence to identity and dignity, as well as defiance against the oppressive system. It is a device of critical pedagogy, as it criticises dominant discourses and reinforces alternative viewpoints with the help of different genres such as autobiographies and poems. It promotes critical participation and political consciousness in students through the appeal to oral traditions and the critique of iniquities in society, which is critical in inclusive spaces of learning. | Nayar (n.d.), Misrahi-Barak et al. (2019), Shahida (2020) |
| **Social Inclusion in Higher Education** | The presence of Dalit students in universities brings additional experiences that challenge the hegemonic educational practises that democratise learning spaces. This is supported by Dalit literature which legitimises Dalit history and identity which encourages a culture of questioning and exquisite social engagement. It reinvents the process of education to encompass the voices of a variety of people that make the academic space more inclusive. | Gopani (2024), Das & Adhikary (2023) |
| **Social Resistance and Empowerment** | Emerging in the 1970s and influenced by B.R. Ambedkar’s ideas, Dalit literature serves as a medium for social protest and empowerment. It articulates lived experiences of caste discrimination, advocating for social justice and aligning with critical pedagogy’s emphasis on cultural diversity and equity. It empowers marginalized communities by amplifying their voices against systemic oppression. | Shahida (2020), Pant & Syal (2022), Ponce-Naranjo & Roa (2023) |
| **Challenges in Higher Education** | Despite constitutional provisions for inclusion, Dalit students face pervasive discrimination in higher education, highlighting the complexities of social inclusion and exclusion. The interplay between Dalit literature and critical pedagogy underscores the urgent need for educational reforms to address disparities and empower marginalized voices. | Neelakandan & Patil (2012) |

*Sources are Mentioned at the Relevant Places*

# **Promoting Social Inclusion in Higher Education Through Dalit Literature and Critical Pedagogy**

Dalit literature, or literature by and about the Dalit community, historically marginalised as a result of caste-based oppression, is an influential source of expression of discrimination, resistance, and identity (Pavithran & Thenmozhi, 2024). According to the outline of Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy is the educative approach in which education is seen as a dialogue, encouraging conscientization, questioning power regimes, and social change instead of passive knowledge transfer (Saji and Raj, 2025). Dalit literature taught with the help of critical pedagogy in higher education can be highly inclusive, as it can legitimise the voices of the marginalised, disrupt caste hierarchies and establish inclusive learning spaces. This would not just empower Dalit students but would also inform non-Dalit students about the inequalities in the system, which would help them develop a sense of empathy and take action in favour of equity.

The use of this integration to foster social inclusion is one of the main aspects through which it challenges the dominant, upper-caste accounts in curricula and fosters critical thinking about caste processes. Older forms of higher education in India tend to reproduce Brahminical hegemony and marginalise the Dalit voices and play a role in the exclusion of Scheduled Caste (SC) students, who experience lower enrolment rates and increased drop-out rates as a result of institutional bias (Sawaiker, 2019). With the inclusion of Dalit texts like the Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki or My Father Baliah by Y. B. Satyanarayana, teachers can use the problem-posing technique by Freire, as it encourages students to interpret caste as reality, instead of an idea (Saji & Raj, 2025; Pavithran and Thenmozhi, 2024). As an example, when speaking about the autobiography of Valmiki, one could see that education itself may turn into a humiliating experience of Dalits, as they were assigned trivial roles in schools, which raised awareness of the concept of pedagogy of humiliation and motivated changes to the policies to become inclusive (Saji and Raj, 2025). This intense interaction makes non-Dalit students face their privileges; it makes the Dalit students feel less alienated and creates a classroom culture wherein students respect each other.

Moreover, when Dalit literature is taught using critical pedagogy, it allows Dalit and Bahujan students to feel their experiences are not invalid, and this agency is important in retention and achievement in higher education. Dalit students have been exposed to epistemic violence wherein systems of knowledge are undermined, which makes them feel worthless and even resort to suicide, as was the case with Rohith Vemula (Sawaiker, 2019). Dalit Bahujan political thought or utopia classes, based on the work of Ambedkar, Phule and present-day Dalit authors, enable students to relate their personal experience to the wider anti-caste movements, encouraging self-determination and "educate, agitate, organise" as means of liberation (Sukumar, 2023; Pavithran and Thenmozhi, 2024). The practice has been demonstrated to democratise knowledge production in the classroom, such as when marginalised student feedback is used to show how such pedagogy contrasts with dominant curricula, allowing marginalised students to imagine other possible futures and voice their rejection of caste-based exclusion (Sukumar, 2023). By putting Dalit voices in the centre, the educators make the students feel visible and competent, improving their academic self-confidence and socialisation.

The notion of social inclusion is also developed with the help of further encouragement of intercultural dialogue and empathy among the student groups of different diversities. Critical pedagogy fosters cooperative discourse about themes of resistance and resilience in the literature of the Dalit community and overcomes barriers between castes, creating discussions on privilege, gender, and intersectionality (Saxena and Angadi, 2025). In Indian academia, in which Dalit literature is usually kept on the periphery, as an alternative subject, such as in the literature or social sciences, it can turn pedagogy into a space of opposition to dominant discourses (Dash, 2025). This makes everyone feel that they belong because non-Dalit students can think critically about caste disparities, and Dalit students feel a sense of solidarity that leads to a fair campus culture (Sawaiker, 2019). Faculty resistance and resource shortage are some of the challenges which can be addressed through specific training and revising the curriculum (Saxena & Angadi, 2025). Finally, critical pedagogical teaching of Dalit literature in higher education is destabilising caste-based marginality, empowering oppressed groups, and creating inclusive discourses, which are consistent with Ambedkarite ideals of education as emancipation. This not only deals with short-term obstacles such as discrimination but also creates long-term equity in society. Such practices are only achievable with the institutional commitment to anti-caste systems, which would make higher education a real place of inclusion.

# **Theoretical Frameworks: Caste, Pedagogy, and Social Justice**

#### The theoretical frameworks present critical instruments of analysis to consider the interaction between caste, pedagogy, and social justice, specifically, when Indian higher education and Dalit experience are involved. This set of frameworks builds on postcolonial, critical, and justice-oriented theory to break down the ways caste systems serve to perpetuate exclusion and how transformative pedagogies can support equity. This discussion will examine some of the most prominent frameworks on caste as a form of oppression, critical pedagogy as a form of liberation and social justice theories applied to the Indian socio-political context with an emphasis on their intersection in the context of fostering inclusion by using the Dalit literature.

## **4.1 Caste as a Theoretical Construct**

#### Caste in India is not just a social group, but a strongly rooted hierarchical system that plays off class, gender and religion and is a form of domination and marginalisation. As a theoretical approach to the analysis of caste, social dominance theory (SDT) developed by Sidanius and Pratto (1999) can be considered as a legitimising ideology that reinforces group-based inequalities by using psychological orientations, including social dominance orientation (SDO) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA). SDT, in the Indian case, explains the way the beliefs in karma and hierarchical traditions support caste supremacy by making upper-caste hegemony seem to be dictated by Gods and making lower-caste resistance pathological (Cotterill et al., n.d.). This framework highlights the influence of caste in educational institutions where Dalit students meet with symbolic violence in terms of curricula which promote narratives of Brahmanical normalcy, which results in epistemic marginalisation.

#### Building on the critical race theory (CRT) and retheorizing caste as an endemic, transnational mode of oppression, CasteCrit, in turn, is a more subtle and India-focused theory of social, economic, and cultural life. Nikalje (2022) defines CasteCrit as an approach centred on the experiences of caste-oppressed people, including how it intersects with race (as in the Indian diaspora) and the role of policies and policies in the reinforcement of caste hierarchies (such as selective immigration policies that favour upper castes). CasteCrit has criticised mainstream theories of caste, which overlook the religious and historical origins of caste, including the alignment of Hindu supremacy with white supremacy, and recommends quantifying the internalisation and institutionalisation of casteism with such tools as the Caste Beliefs Scale. This paradigm is applied in the context of education in the form of epistemic caste violence to undermine the Dalit-knowing systems and maintain exclusion within higher education (Wadekar, 2024).

## **4.2 Pedagogy and Transformative Education**

#### Theoretical domain of pedagogy as rote learning transforms into emancipatory pedagogy when characterised as critical pedagogy, which, according to Paulo Freire (1970), is a problem-posing pedagogy that leads to conscientization and critical awareness of oppression to free the marginalised. In India, critical pedagogy localises to the caste processes by confronting the banking model of education that recreates hierarchies, but encourages conversation and contemplation of experienced disparities (Sawaiker, 2019). Sawaiker emphasises the application of a Phule-Ambedkarite feminist pedagogy to caste blindness in higher education, as manifested in low enrollment and retention rates of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in higher education, which can contribute to the achievement of a sustainable higher education system with equal outcomes for all. This is a strategy that promotes faculty and student resistance to Brahminical hegemony by humanising marginalised voices to alleviate alienation, such as in the case of Dalit student suicides, such as that of Rohith Vemula.

#### Developing upon this, there is also Critical Dalit Pedagogy, a specialised model, which focuses on the intersections of caste, class, gender, and sexuality with Dalit women in mind. Relying on the article by Shailaja Paik, Wadekar (2024) asserts that this pedagogy connects social institutions, such as universities, to the realm of the family and marriage to reveal the impact of caste stigma on the holistic experience of Dalit students. Thayyil (2022) uses critical pedagogy to impart social justice and democracy in rural Indian settings, emphasising hands-on and collaborative learning to address such factors as the unwillingness to talk about caste inequalities in the community and the lack of exposure to abstract ideas in learners. These pedagogies turn the classrooms into spaces of resistance, and Dalit literature can be viewed as a method of conscientization, which allows the students to criticise and reorganise the caste structures.

## **4.3 Social Justice Theories in the Caste Context**

#### The frameworks of social justice offer normative values to redistribute resources and break the inequalities, which are especially relevant in the context of caste in India. John Rawls' theory of fairness justice (1971) and its difference principle- that inequalities should only be permitted when they give a benefit to the least well off- can provide a liberal distributive theory. Nevertheless, Rawls is not a good fit in the Indian caste system because he does not pay enough attention to social and cultural humiliations of caste, presupposing the veil of ignorance, which sidelines the history of oppressions (Darnal, 2023).

#### B.R. Ambedkar, on the other hand, believes his model of social justice places more emphasis on annihilation of caste by constitutional means such as reservations, and on the principles of fraternity, liberty, and equality to eliminate artificial hierarchies which are based on Hinduism. In the comparison, Darnal (2023) mentions that Ambedkar is more radical, focusing on caste not only in religious aspects but also in social terms through education and political empowerment of the Dalits to realise a caste-free society, where Rawls is more abstract with his economic approach. This emancipation-oriented, social justice-oriented Ambedkarite lens fits into affirmative action policies and criticises neoliberal meritocracy, which hides caste privilege.

## **4.4 Intersections and Implications for Dalit Literature in Education**

# These frameworks overlap to explain how caste (through SDT and CasteCrit) is used to inform pedagogical practices (critical and Dalit pedagogies) to social justice (Rawlsian distribution and Ambedkarite emancipation). Critical pedagogy teaching Dalit literature in higher education breaks the reproduction of caste by legitimising the subaltern voice, provoking compassion in white students, and giving the Dalits agency (Sawaiker, 2019; Thayyil, 2022). This unification encourages inclusivity, which agrees with the vision of education as an instrument of social change expressed by Ambedkar (Darnal, 2023). There are such challenges as institutional opposition, yet these theories promote the changes of the curriculum to instil anti-caste views, which eventually lead to progressive societies.

# **Representation of Dalit Literature in Academic Curricula**

## **Historical Context and Emergence**

## Dalit literature, a literary genre that expresses the struggles, experiences, and resistance of Dalit people against caste oppression, is founded on the work of early figures such as Madara Chennaiah (11th century) and Chokhamela (14th century) (Gupta, 2016). It took its modern form in the mid-20th century due to the influence of such thinkers as Jyotirao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, and the Dalit Panthers movement in the 1970s, especially in Maharashtra (Dangle, 1992). The literature, such as Annihilation of Caste by Ambedkar, autobiographies, such as Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki, and Karukku by Bama, have become seminal in highlighting identity, dignity and social justice (Valmiki, 2003; Bama, 2000). These writings confront the historical repression or sympathetic confinement of Dalit voices within mainstream Indian literature, which is, in most cases, dominated by upper-caste voices, like in Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand or in Deliverance by Premchand (Anand, 1935; Premchand, 1931).

## **5.1 Inclusion in Academic Curricula**

Dalit literature has gradually entered academic curricula, particularly in Indian universities, though its integration varies:

* **Disciplinary Context**: Dalit literature is represented in Comparative Literature, English Studies, Cultural Studies, and interdisciplinary courses, such as Dalit Studies. An example is Dalit Studies as an interdiscipline, examining the traditional curriculum framework as discussed in a contribution to the University of Hyderabad, urging the adoption of new methods of Comparative Literature in India (Satyanarayana & Tharu, 2011).
* **Key Institutions**: Such institutions as Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia, and the University of Delhi have established courses or modules in Dalit literature, usually based on works in the Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, and English translations (Kumar, 2017). However, these are not uniformly adopted, and many smaller institutions lack dedicated courses.
* **Specific Texts**: Autobiographies such as Karukku (Bama, 2000), Joothan (Valmiki, 2003), and The Weave of My Life (Pawar, 2008) are also often cited; they present intersectional understanding of caste, class and gender. The students are introduced to the Marathi Dalit literature through the anthologies such as Poisoned Bread (Dangle, 1992)..
* **Global Reach**: The Dalit narratives have been addressed in conferences such as the one at Nottingham Trent University (2014) in conjunction with global subaltern literatures, such as African-American writing or Latin American testimonios (Zelliot & Mokashi-Punekar, 2014).

## **5.3 Challenges in Representation**

Despite progress, several challenges hinder full integration:

* **Limited Scope**: Dalit literature is frequently relegated to a course or specialisation at the expense of the framing of the literature as a niche-subject, as opposed to an essential part of Indian literary studies (Limbale, 2004).
* **Aesthetic Debates**: There is an argument as to whether to evaluate Dalit literature through universal literary norms or through a Dalit aesthetic emphasising lived experience. Sharankumar Limbale believes that when Dalit texts are misread by non-Dalit critics, the inappropriateness of standards used in misinterpretation is the cause of misrepresentation in the academy (Limbale, 2004).
* **Regional Disparities**: Concentration on the literature on Marathi and Hindi Dalits neglects the literature in other languages, such as Tamil, Telugu, or Bengali. The Bengali academia, as an example, has been historically indifferent towards Dalit literature because of the socio-political background in the region (Basu, 2019).
* **Non-Dalit Representation**: There are ongoing debates about whether the Dalit experience can be accurately reflected by non-Dalit writers, which has affected the inclusion of texts of upper-caste writers such as Anand with texts by Dalit writers. (Anand, 1935; Rege, 2006).
* **Institutional Barriers**: Dalit representation in the academic and publishing leadership is deficient, and it curtails the promotion of Dalit literature. This is enhanced by what is referred to by some people as a Gandhian Harijan-making politics that erodes Dalit autonomy in the mainstream sphere of academic discourse (Ilaiah, 1996).

**Table 2: Findings of the Paper**

| **Research Question** | **Findings** | **Key References** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1. How does Dalit literature embody critical pedagogy and promote critical consciousness in higher education?** | Dalit literature fosters "Dalit consciousness" by articulating experiences of oppression and resistance, aligning with critical pedagogy’s goal of challenging hegemony. Texts like Karukku (Bama, 1992) and Jevha Mi Jat Chorli (Bagul, 1963) use raw narratives to expose caste realities, encouraging students to question systemic inequalities. By drawing on oral traditions and subaltern counter-narratives, it democratizes knowledge, fostering dialogue and critical inquiry. This enables engagement with alternative epistemologies, promoting solidarity with marginalized communities and bridging personal narratives with socio-political critiques. | Bama (1992), Dangle (1992), Misrahi-Barak et al. (2019), Nayar (n.d.), Shahida (2020), Gopani (2024) |
| **2. In what ways can Dalit literature in university curricula challenge caste-based exclusion and Reimagine social inclusion?** | Dalit literature counters exclusion by exposing untouchability, poverty, and epistemic erasure, disrupting romanticised upper-caste narratives. Texts like Sangati (Bama, 1994) highlight intersectional caste-gender issues, fostering inclusive discussions. It validates Dalit students’ experiences, countering epistemic violence and promoting identity and empowerment. Grounded in Ambedkarite and Marxist ideologies, it inspires collective action for social justice. Global parallels with resistance literature enhance inclusive frameworks, though ongoing discrimination underscores the need for such interventions. | Bama (1994), Dangle (1992), Shahida (2020), Pant & Syal (2022), Gopani (2024), Misrahi-Barak et al. (2019), Neelakandan & Patil (2012) |
| **3. What are the barriers and opportunities for using Dalit literature for curricular reform and social justice?** | **Barriers**: Limited integration in core curricula, institutional resistance rooted in Brahmanical hegemony, and focus on Marathi/Hindi texts over other languages (e.g., Tamil, Kannada) restrict impact. **Opportunities**: Growing Dalit student presence drives reform by introducing alternative perspectives. Interdisciplinary programs like Dalit Studies foster critical engagement. Global integration via translations supports transnational dialogues. Mainstreaming texts, diversifying faculty, and broadening access via translations can advance social justice and inclusive reform. | Misrahi-Barak et al. (2019), Nayar (n.d.), Pant & Syal (2022), Gopani (2024), Das & Adhikary (2023), Ponce-Naranjo & Roa (2023) |

## *Sources are mentioned at the relevant places*

# **Recommendations for Enhanced Representation**

To strengthen Dalit literature’s presence:

* **Mainstream Integration**: Integrate Dalit literature into standard literature classes to give them equal status with the canonical literature (Satyanarayana & Tharu, 2011).
* **Diverse Linguistic Representation**: Provide works in languages that are underrepresented, such as Telugu, Kannada, or Bengali, to cater to the pan-Indian nature of Dalit literature (Basu, 2019).
* **Faculty Diversity**: Increase the Dalit representation in the faculty and curriculum writers to have authentic voices. (Ilaiah, 1996).
* **Interdisciplinary Approaches**: Introduce Dalit literature in history, sociology and political science in the curricula to highlight the socio-political position. (Kumar, 2017).
* **Public Engagement**: Make Dalit literature more accessible to non-academic audiences by encouraging translations and open-access resources to help grow into a broader cultural movement (Rege, 2006).

# **Conclusion**

The paradigm shift in Indian higher education is Dalit literature as it is a significant tool of critical pedagogy that creates a sense of Dalit consciousness and promotes a critical attitude to the system of caste-based oppression (Nayar, n.d.; Shahida, 2020). It challenges the dominant narratives in all its manifestations, such as autobiographies and poetry and democratises the knowledge production and makes students challenge the injustice of society, which aligns with the emancipatory goals of critical pedagogy (Misrahi-Barak et al., 2019). Dalit literature, such as Karukku by Bama (1992) and Sangati (1994), is incorporated into the curriculum and therefore, challenges epistemic violence using the literature of Dalit to affirm the experience of the Dalit students, thereby promoting a sense of identity, dignity and social inclusion (Gopani, 2024; Pant and Syal, 2022). Despite the numerous hindrances that still hold these reforms back, such as institutional resistance, lack of curricular integration, and local inequity in representation, there remain numerous chances to reform. The increasing number of Dalit students, interdisciplinary courses, and worldwide links via translations provide ways to centralise Dalit views and reconstruct equal education environments (Das and Adhikary, 2023; Ponce-Naranjo and Roa, 2023). Nevertheless, the prevalence of discrimination against Dalit students highlights the necessity of the long-term agenda of integrating Dalit literature into the mainstream curricula and diversifying academic leadership (Neelakandan and Patil, 2012). Finally, the cross-section of Dalit literature with critical pedagogy not only enriches higher education but also triggers more extensive social justice campaigns, giving marginalised voices a stronger voice and creating a more open and fairer academic environment.

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