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A Study of Identity Issues in Select Dalit Autobiographies in Cultural Studies

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Abstract

Navigating the Margins: A Study of Identity Issues in Dalit Autobiographies

This research delves into the complex and multifaceted identity issues articulated within two seminal Dalit autobiographies: Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (1978) and Shantabai Kamble's *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (My Birth's Story, 1983). Situated within the framework of cultural studies, this study aims to explore how these narratives function as powerful sites for the articulation of Dalit subjectivity, challenging dominant socio-cultural paradigms and reclaiming agency within a historically oppressive context. Dalit literature, particularly autobiography, has emerged as a crucial genre for understanding the lived experiences of marginalized communities in India. These narratives serve not merely as personal testimonies but as potent socio-political interventions that expose the deep-seated caste-based discrimination and violence embedded within Indian society. *Baluta* and *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* are pivotal texts in this literary tradition, offering raw and unflinching accounts of the authors' struggles against systemic oppression.

This study employs a multi-pronged approach, drawing

upon key concepts from cultural studies, including.

- **Subaltern Studies:** Examining how Dalit voices disrupt hegemonic narratives and challenge the representation of marginalized communities within dominant discourses.
- **Postcolonial Theory:** Analyzing the enduring legacies of caste-based oppression as a form of internal colonialism, highlighting the power dynamics and resistance strategies employed by Dalit individuals.
- **Feminist Theory:** Paying particular attention to the intersection of caste and gender, especially in Kamble's work, where the complexities of Dalit womanhood are poignantly articulated.
- **Memory and Trauma Studies:** Exploring how these autobiographies function as sites of collective memory, bearing witness to historical injustices and the enduring psychological impact of trauma.
- **Identity Construction:** Investigating how Dalit individuals negotiate and construct their identities in the face of social stigma, exclusion, and violence movement.

Keywords: Dalit Autobiography, Identity, Caste, Resistance: Analyzing *Baluta* and *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* through Cultural Studies, Focusing on Gender, Memory, and Subaltern Agency

Introduction

Literature represents human's life so we simply say it is a mirror of society. Literature means a kind of written work. In English literature there are different types of literature such as American, British, Australia, African, Canadian, Indian literature. In literature there are different branches that include Novels, dramas, poems, and other minor forms of literature. Through this all branches of literature we can express ideas, emotions, and experiences through words. It helps us to understand human feelings and cultures, traditions, rituals, by telling stories or sharing thoughts in creative ways. Literature is very important in our life because it helps us to understand ourselves and the world around us. It also gives information about the past, present and future. It allows us to explore different cultures, ideas, and emotions. When we see the growth of the literature it is not suddenly developed. It developed gradually. Specifically when we talk about Indian literature we will get information about Indian literature which is also very old literature. It has its past. Indian literature has a rich and diverse kind of history which spans thousands of years, reflecting the cultural, social, and political changes in the Indian subcontinent. The

development of literature can be seen in several periods. Which is characterised by unique linguistic, thematic and stylistic features.

When we study ancient literature we get the information that the earliest form of Indian literature emerged with the Vedas, which are sacred texts composed in Sanskrit around 1500–1200 BCE. The second important work is Mahabharata and Ramayana also originated during this period, with their codification occurring towards the end of the second millennium BCE.

As time progressed into the medieval period, literature began to diversify further with regional languages gaining prominence alongside Sanskrit. Languages such as Tamil developed their own classical traditions independent of Sanskrit influence. The Sangam literature in Tamil (c. 300 BCE - 300 CE) is notable for its emotional depth and exploration of human relationships. During this time, other languages like Prakrit and Pali emerged as literary mediums for Buddhism and Jainism respectively. The Bhakti movement in medieval Hinduism led to an explosion of devotional poetry across various regions in India from the 6th century onwards.

In the 19th Century -Mid 20 th century The British colonial rule significantly impacted Indian literature starting in the 19th century. Western literary models influenced Indian writers who began adopting new forms such as novels and short stories while exploring themes related to social issues and psychological depth.

Writers like Rabindranath Tagore emerged during this period; he became India's first Nobel laureate in literature in 1913 for his work "Gitanjali."

After India gained independence in 1947, there was a resurgence of literary activity across various languages spoken in India. Writers began addressing contemporary issues such as identity crises, post-colonial realities, gender roles, and socio-political challenges through their works. After independence also the face of India can not change till there are several problems in the society which are facing some specific communities. This all kinds of problems and issues are talked in Dalit literature. There are several writers who has given their contribution into dalit literature such as Mahasweta Devi, Arjun Dangle, Sachi Rautray, Rabi Singh, Babytai Kamble, Meena Kandasamy, Urmila Pawar, Dr. Ambedkar, Daya Pawar, Gogu Shyamala, Kumud Pawed, Namdeo Dhasal, Baburao Bagul, Jyotirao Phule, Karukka, this are the most all known for the dalit writers. Who gave their contribution into dalit literature. For present reasearch researcher focused on dalit autobiographies.

First autobiography is Baluta by Daya Pawar. Second autobiography is The Stragglers by Dadasaheb More. Present autobigraphy Daya Pawar talked about cast their issues, identities, violence social justice etc.

Aims and objectives of the Study

The present research proposes to work for the fulfilment of the present issue in the select dalit autobiographies.

Objectives

1. To analyze the autobiographical elements in selected works.
2. To make a comparative study of various elements of the autobiographies with the reference to selected works.
3. To analyze the portrayal of identity issues in selected autobiographies.

4. To explore the processes of identity formation and negotiations as depicted in these narratives.
5. To examine the psychological and social dimensions of Dalits identity as articulated in these narratives.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to explore the complex tapestry of identity issues within Daya Pawar's *Baluta* and Shantabai Kamble's *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*. The study aims to delve deeply into the textual narratives, contextualizing them within the broader socio-cultural landscape of Dalit experiences in India. The methodology is designed to be flexible and responsive, allowing for the emergence of nuanced insights through close reading and critical analysis.

1. Qualitative Research Paradigm:

This study is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm, which prioritizes understanding the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals within their socio-cultural contexts ^[1]. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring the complexities of identity, which are deeply intertwined with lived experiences, social structures, and cultural narratives. The focus is on in-depth analysis of the texts rather than quantitative data, allowing for a rich and nuanced understanding of the authors' perspectives ^[2].

2. Textual Analysis and Close Reading:

The core of this research methodology lies in a rigorous textual analysis and close reading of *Baluta* and *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*. This involves a meticulous examination of the authors' language, narrative structure, imagery, and rhetorical devices. The aim is to identify and analyze the ways in which they construct their identities, articulate their experiences of oppression, and assert their agency.

- **Identifying Key Themes:** The analysis will focus on identifying recurring themes related to identity, such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, social exclusion, memory, trauma, and resistance.
- **Analyzing Narrative Structure:** The study will examine how the authors structure their narratives, paying attention to the chronology of events, the use of flashbacks, and the development of characters.
- **Examining Language and Imagery:** The analysis will explore the authors' use of language and imagery, paying attention to the ways in which they convey their experiences and emotions. This includes the use of vernacular language and how that effects the work.
- **Contextualizing the Texts:** The analysis will contextualize the texts within the broader socio-historical context of Dalit experiences in India, drawing upon relevant secondary sources to provide a deeper understanding of the authors' perspectives.

3. Theoretical Framework and Interpretive Analysis:

This research will be guided by a multi-faceted theoretical framework, drawing upon key concepts from cultural studies, subaltern studies, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, and memory and trauma studies. These theoretical perspectives will serve as lenses through which to interpret the textual narratives and understand the complex interplay of power, identity, and representation.

- **Subaltern Studies:** This approach will be used to analyze how Pawar and Kamble challenge hegemonic

narratives and disrupt the representation of marginalized communities. It will focus on how the authors assert their agency and reclaim their voices.

- **Postcolonial Theory:** This lens will be used to understand the enduring legacies of caste-based oppression as a form of internal colonialism. It will examine the power dynamics and resistance strategies employed by Dalit individuals.
- **Feminist Theory:** This perspective will be used to analyze the intersection of caste and gender, particularly in Kamble's work. It will examine the unique challenges faced by Dalit women and the ways in which they assert their agency.
- **Memory and Trauma Studies:** These fields will be used to explore how the autobiographies function as sites of collective memory, bearing witness to historical injustices and the enduring psychological impact of trauma. It will look at how memory is used as a form of resistance.
- **Cultural Studies:** This field will be used to analyze the texts, and how they function within the wider cultural context of India.

4. Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of *Baluta* and *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* will be conducted to identify similarities and differences in the authors' experiences and perspectives. This will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of Dalit identity and the diverse ways in which it is articulated.

- **Identifying Common Themes:** The analysis will focus on identifying common themes and experiences shared by the authors, such as caste discrimination, social exclusion, and the struggle for recognition.
- **Highlighting Differences:** The analysis will also highlight differences in the authors' experiences and perspectives, particularly in relation to gender and social context.
- **Examining Intersections:** The study will examine the intersections of caste and gender, to see how they impact the authors.

5. Ethical Considerations:

This research will adhere to ethical principles of academic inquiry, ensuring that the authors' voices are represented with respect and sensitivity. It will acknowledge the potential for misinterpretation and strive to avoid essentializing or generalizing the experiences of Dalit individuals.

- **Respect for Authors' Voices:** The research will prioritize the authors' perspectives and avoid imposing external interpretations.
- **Sensitivity to Trauma:** The analysis will be sensitive to the traumatic experiences described in the autobiographies.
- **Avoiding Essentialism:** The research will avoid essentializing or generalizing the experiences of Dalit individuals.
- **Proper Citation:** All sources will be properly cited to avoid plagiarism.

6. Limitations:

This study is limited by its focus on two specific autobiographies. While these texts offer valuable insights

into Dalit experiences, they do not represent the full diversity of Dalit perspectives. The study is also limited by its reliance on textual analysis, which may not capture all aspects of the authors' lived experiences.

7. Data Collection and Organization:

The primary data for this research will be the texts of *Baluta* and *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*. Secondary data will include scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on Dalit literature, cultural studies, and related fields. Data will be collected and organized using a systematic approach, including note-taking, coding, and thematic analysis.

8. Reflexivity:

The researcher will maintain a reflexive stance throughout the research process, acknowledging their own biases and assumptions. This involves critically examining their own positionality and how it may influence the interpretation of the texts.

By employing this comprehensive and rigorous methodology, this research aims to provide a nuanced and insightful analysis of the identity issues articulated within Daya Pawar's *Baluta* and Shantabai Kamble's *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*, contributing to a deeper understanding of Dalit literature and the ongoing struggle for social justice.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the present research is to find out the following points.

1. The self assertion of pain as a means of life.
2. To study the condition of Dalits.
3. To study Dalit autobiographies under the influence of baluta by daya pawar, Shantabai kamble majya jalmachi chittarkath etc.
4. Caste -based oppression as a central theme.

Data Analysis

Unveiling the Subaltern Self in Dalit Autobiographies

This analysis delves into the intricate tapestry of identity and resistance woven within Daya Pawar's *Baluta* and Shantabai Kamble's *Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*, utilizing a framework grounded in cultural studies and critical theory. By moving beyond a purely descriptive approach, we aim to illuminate the profound theoretical implications of these narratives, demonstrating their significance as crucial interventions in the discourse surrounding caste, gender, and power.

I. The Fragmented Self: Subalternity and the Architecture of Internalized Oppression

- **Subalternity as a State of Being:**
 - Pawar's narrative is a visceral portrayal of subalternity, not merely as a social location, but as a lived experience that permeates every facet of existence. The relentless exposure to caste-based humiliation creates a fragmented sense of self, a constant negotiation between imposed identities and the yearning for autonomy.
 - Kamble's work expands this understanding, showcasing the "subaltern within the subaltern." Her experiences reveal the layered nature of oppression, where gender and caste intersect to create a unique form of marginalization.

- **Internalized Hegemony and the Psychological Toll:**
 - The authors' struggles with internalized shame and self-doubt demonstrate the insidious power of hegemony. As Gramsci argued, hegemony operates not only through force but also through consent, shaping the consciousness of the oppressed.
 - Pawar's descriptions of internalized prejudice shows how the oppressor's ideology is internalised by the oppressed. The psychological effect of this, is shown clearly in his writing.
 - Kamble shows how the patriarchal system is internalized by the women in her community, and how they perpetuate the system.
 - **Strategic Essentialism and the Reclaiming of Identity:**
 - In the face of systemic erasure, both authors engage in acts of "strategic essentialism," reclaiming aspects of their cultural heritage as a form of resistance. This is not a naive embrace of fixed identities, but a tactical maneuver to create space for self-definition.
 - This reclamation is seen in the use of vernacular language, and the telling of cultural stories.
- II. The Body as a Battleground: Biopower, Embodied Knowledge, and Resistance**
- **Foucauldian Biopower and the Regulation of the Dalit Body:**
 - Pawar's descriptions of physical violence and humiliation exemplify Foucault's concept of biopower, where the body becomes a site of control and discipline. The Dalit body is marked, regulated, and subjected to constant surveillance, serving as a reminder of its subordinate status.
 - The body becomes a tool of the caste system, used to show the power of the upper castes.
 - **Embodied Knowledge and the Power of Testimony:**
 - The act of writing, particularly the detailed descriptions of physical labor and suffering, becomes a form of "embodied knowledge." The authors transform lived experiences into a form of resistance, challenging the erasure of Dalit bodies from historical narratives.
 - The act of writing, becomes a way to reclaim the body, and to reclaim agency.
 - **The Gendered Body and the Intersection of Oppressions:**
 - Kamble's portrayal of sexual violence highlights the intersection of biopower and patriarchal control, demonstrating how women's bodies are doubly subjugated.
 - The female body is used to show the extra burden that Dalit women have to bear.
- III. Memory as a Weapon: Postcolonial Trauma, Collective Memory, and Counter-Histories**
- **Postcolonial Trauma and the Haunting Past:**
 - The narratives function as repositories of collective trauma, bearing witness to the enduring legacies of caste-based oppression. This aligns with postcolonial theories that emphasize the ongoing impact of historical violence.
 - The trauma is not just personal, but is shared by the whole community.
 - **Challenging Master Narratives and Constructing Counter-Histories:**
 - Through their use of memory, the authors construct "counter-histories" that challenge the dominant narratives of Indian history. This aligns with subaltern studies' emphasis on recovering marginalized voices.
 - The act of remembering, and writing down those memories, is a way to create a new historical record.
 - **Memory as a Site of Resistance:**
 - The act of remembering, becomes a form of resistance, against the attempt to erase the Dalit experience.
- IV. Gender, Intersectionality, and the Politics of Dalit Womanhood**
- **Intersectionality and the Complexities of Oppression:**
 - Kamble's work provides a compelling example of intersectionality, demonstrating how caste and gender intersect to create unique forms of oppression.
 - Her narrative exposes the limitations of single-axis analyses of oppression, highlighting the need to consider the complex interplay of social categories.
 - **Patriarchy within the Dalit Community:**
 - Kamble's narrative shows how patriarchal structures operate within both Dalit and upper-caste communities, creating a complex web of oppression for Dalit women.
 - This shows that even within an oppressed group, there are still power structures at play.
 - **Agency and Resistance in the Face of Double Oppression:**
 - Kamble shows that even when faced with both caste, and gender based oppression, Dalit women still have agency, and still resist.
- V. Representation, Agency, and the Power of Narrative**
- **Deconstructing Stereotypes and Reclaiming the Narrative:**
 - The authors' use of narrative to challenge dominant representations of Dalits aligns with poststructuralist critiques of essentialism and representation.
 - By writing their own stories, they deconstruct the stereotypes imposed upon them by the caste system.
 - **Narrative as a Tool for Agency and Empowerment:**
 - The act of writing becomes a form of agency, allowing the authors to reclaim control over their own narratives and challenge the power of dominant discourses.
 - The telling of their own stories, becomes a way to empower themselves, and their community.
 - **Vernacular Language and the Authenticity of Experience:**

- The use of vernacular language, allows the authors to portray the reality of their lives, in a way that is true to their experience.

VI. Cultural Resistance as a Political Act: Challenging Hegemony and Reclaiming Cultural Space

- **Challenging Cultural Hegemony through Literature:**
 - The act of creating Dalit literature, and the autobiographies themselves, are political acts that challenge the cultural hegemony of upper-caste narratives.
 - The use of literature, to create a counter culture, is a way to create political change.
- **Reclaiming Cultural Space and Asserting Dalit Identity:**
 - The authors, through their writing, are reclaiming cultural space, and creating a space for the Dalit voice.
 - The publishing of these works, allows the Dalit voice to be heard, and creates a space for future Dalit authors.
- **The Power of Storytelling as a Form of Resistance:**
 - The act of storytelling, becomes a way to preserve culture, and to resist oppression.

Through this analysis, it becomes clear that *Baluta* and *Mazy Jalmachi Chittarkatha* are not merely personal narratives, but powerful interventions in the discourse surrounding caste, gender, and power. They serve as crucial testimonies to the enduring struggle for social justice and offer invaluable insights into the complexities of subaltern subjectivity.

The Interplay of Power, Language, and Liberation

Building upon the established framework, we can further dissect the intricate mechanisms of power and resistance within *Baluta* and *Mazy Jalmachi Chittarkatha*. This expansion will focus on the nuanced deployment of language, the exploration of spatial dynamics, the role of education as a tool for liberation, and the complex relationship between individual and collective agency.

VII. The Politics of Language: Vernacularity, Resistance, and the Construction of Reality

- **Vernacular as a Weapon of Resistance:**
 - The authors' strategic use of vernacular language is not merely a stylistic choice; it's a political act. It challenges the dominance of standardized, upper-caste language, asserting the validity and power of Dalit linguistic expression.
 - The use of colloquialisms, regional dialects, and specific Dalit idioms creates a sense of authenticity and immediacy, grounding the narratives in the lived experiences of the community.
 - This vernacularity disrupts the sanitized, often euphemistic language used to discuss caste, forcing readers to confront the raw reality of discrimination.
 - This also allows the authors to connect with their own communities, and to create a feeling of solidarity.

- **Language as a Tool for Reclaiming Reality:**
 - By naming their experiences and articulating their perspectives, the authors reclaim the power to define their own reality. They challenge the dominant narratives that have historically distorted and misrepresented Dalit lives.
 - The act of writing, in their own language, becomes a way to create a new reality, where the Dalit voice is heard.
 - The use of language to describe the violence, and the injustice, is a way to make it real, and to make it visible.
- **Language and the Construction of Dalit Subjectivity:**
 - The authors' use of language contributes to the construction of a distinct Dalit subjectivity. It allows them to articulate their emotions, thoughts, and experiences in a way that resonates with their community and challenges the dominant cultural norms.
 - The use of stories, and folklore, is a way to connect with the past, and to create a sense of community.

VIII. Spatial Dynamics: Mapping the Terrain of Oppression and Resistance

- **Spatial Segregation and the Geography of Caste:**
 - The narratives reveal how spatial segregation reinforces caste-based discrimination. Dalits are often confined to specific areas, denied access to public spaces, and subjected to constant surveillance.
 - The descriptions of the Dalit settlements, and the contrast with the upper caste areas, shows the physical manifestation of the caste system.
 - The control of space, is a way to control the Dalit community.
- **Reclaiming Space through Narrative:**
 - Through their narratives, the authors reclaim the power to represent and reinterpret their spatial experiences. They challenge the dominant cartography of caste, creating alternative maps of resistance and liberation.
 - The act of writing, becomes a way to create a new space, where the Dalit voice is dominant.
 - The descriptions of journeys, and movement, becomes a way to show the desire for freedom.
- **Domestic Space as a Site of Gendered Oppression:**
 - Kamble's narrative highlights the gendered dimensions of spatial oppression, revealing how domestic spaces can become sites of confinement and control for Dalit women.
 - The home, which is meant to be a place of safety, becomes a place of oppression for the Dalit woman.

IX. Education as a Catalyst for Liberation: Challenging the Structures of Knowledge

- **Education as a Tool for Empowerment:**
 - Both Pawar and Kamble recognize the transformative power of education. It becomes a

- crucial tool for challenging the structures of knowledge and breaking the cycle of oppression.
- Education becomes a way to gain agency, and to escape the limitations of the caste system.
- The struggle for education, is a struggle for liberation.
- **Challenging the Hegemony of Upper-Caste Education:**
 - The authors' experiences reveal the ways in which the education system can perpetuate caste-based discrimination. They challenge the hegemony of upper-caste knowledge and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable approach to education.
 - The curriculum, and the teachers, are often biased against Dalit students.
 - The act of gaining an education, becomes a way to challenge these biases.
- **Education as a Means of Cultural Transmission:**
 - Education is not only a tool for individual advancement but also a means of cultural transmission. It allows Dalits to reclaim their history, preserve their traditions, and pass on their knowledge to future generations.
 - Education becomes a way to preserve the Dalit culture, and to ensure that it is not lost.

X. Individual and Collective Agency: Navigating the Complexities of Resistance

- **The Interplay of Individual and Collective Struggle:**
 - The narratives reveal the complex interplay of individual and collective agency. The authors' personal struggles are inextricably linked to the broader struggle for Dalit liberation.
 - The individual stories, become a part of the collective story.
 - The act of writing, becomes a way to contribute to the collective struggle.
- **Forms of Everyday Resistance:**
 - The authors' narratives highlight the importance of everyday acts of resistance, such as challenging discriminatory practices, asserting their right to dignity, and reclaiming their cultural heritage.
 - These seemingly small acts, are a way to resist the power of the caste system.
 - The act of simply surviving, becomes a form of resistance.
- **The Power of Collective Action:**
 - The narratives also underscore the importance of collective action in the struggle for social justice. The authors' experiences demonstrate the power of community solidarity and the need for organized resistance.
 - The community support, is shown to be crucial for survival.
 - The act of coming together, becomes a way to create change.

XI. The Role of Literature in Social Transformation:

- **Literature as a Site of Witness and Testimony:**
 - Dalit autobiographies function as vital sites of witness and testimony, documenting the lived

experiences of marginalized communities and challenging the dominant narratives of history.

- The act of writing, becomes a way to create a historical record, that is true to the Dalit experience.
- **Literature as a Tool for Raising Awareness and Promoting Empathy:**
 - By sharing their stories, the authors raise awareness of the realities of caste-based discrimination and promote empathy among readers.
 - The act of reading these stories, can create a sense of understanding, and empathy, for the Dalit community.
- **Literature as a Catalyst for Social Change:**
 - Dalit literature has played a crucial role in shaping the cultural and political landscape of India, contributing to the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality.
 - These works, help to create a dialogue about the caste system, and to push for change.

By exploring these additional dimensions, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of power, language, and liberation in Dalit autobiographies. These narratives are not merely personal stories; they are powerful tools for social transformation, challenging the status quo and paving the way for a more just and equitable society.

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