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Findings

This dissertation explored and uncovered the textuality of Dalit culture, both material and discursive, enabling an explanation of the underlying caste and gender intersectional ideologies, whereby norms detrimental to the well-being of Dalit women are established and maintained. By foregrounding the conflict between the self and the community, the sophism of glorification of the productive culture of Dalit families as egalitarian, which was projected in the post-Ambedkar phase of Dalit movement as part of identity politics, gets exposed. The fallacy of homogenising the identities of Dalit women into an essentialised monolithic image of a passive victim, predicated on powerlessness and subordination, gets debunked and their agency in its full complexity is established, that abrogates the differential rhetoric premised on binaries such as truth-untruth, male-female, victim-oppressor and DalitSavarna. Instead of a top-down model of oppression, an ambivalent and symbiotic relationship between the hegemonic and the subaltern, within the subject's psyche, is glimpsed. The 'narrated I' in these narratives, presents a multi-layered self-perception. The norms about productive labour

and religious customs indicate a non-brahmanical core, upon which one gleans an overlay of interpellated brahmanical gender ideology in adherence with notions like shame, modesty and wifely fidelity. This is overlaid by modern discourse conspicuously in an attempt to negotiate space for self-fashioning, revealing a conflicted and protean subjectivity, grappling with cultural categories that discursively construct, condition and discipline it. It also elucidates how reading Dalit autobiographical/personal narratives as socio-biographies pivoted on identity politics, or ‘testimonies’ with legalistic connotations, is deeply problematic. Extrapolating these observations can enable revisionary contrapuntal readings of autobiographical literary representations of Dalit women in canonised Dalit texts, uncovering the masculinist, patriarchal and brahmanical propensities, that impede Dalit women’s agency in the literary realm. The suggested notion of treating ‘literary text as absolute local space’, holds the potential to reorient currently prevalent normative, socially deterministic approaches to the relationship between Dalit literature and politics, by bringing the focus to politics posited in narration, as a point of convergence of language and discourse. This would enable Dalit critics and ideologues to avoid policing the representational territory, through ‘possessive exclusivism’, based on emphasising testimony, truth and authenticity to enunciate a collective identity. It would also enable Dalits to leverage the ‘reflective solidarity’ from Savarna activists, who sincerely work to further the Dalit cause. Further, the contributions of the translators, the editors, the ethnographers and the social researchers, as allies in the Dalit literary movement, can also be accounted for or interrogated, as in some cases, especially in translated or/and collaborative texts, they do play a considerable role in ‘co-creating agency’ of Dalit voices in the literary realm.