

The Pedagogical Potential of Dalit Life Writings

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Abstract

This paper explores the pedagogic potential of Dalit literature and life writings, especially by women and argues that the generic instabilities and the generic challenges posed by Dalit literature and life writings offer an epistemological pathway to its teaching and learning. Further, in its blurring of boundaries of the political and literary, it paves the way to a genuine interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary. Third, Dalit literature can involve and elicit many responses beyond the intellectual and as such, be read along the register of affect and invoke empathy and understanding. As such, it often collapses and reduces the distance between the writer/author(subject) and the object of knowledge, which is Dalit experience.

Keywords: life narratives, pedagogy, literary, translation, affect, aesthetics.

In proposing to explore the fracturing of identities and construction of subjectivities in contemporary India, through the medium of literature, and life writings by Dalits, historically one of the most oppressed caste groups in Indian society, I am following an oft-iterated line of enquiry. Dalit literature and life writings are often written by first generation learners, children of unschooled and illiterate parents, and are not easily assimilated into the Western theoretical and epistemological paradigms of life writing studies, which is still largely the dominant model (though often challenged). Further, the genre of autobiography or life writing is not common to Indian literature or culture nor do most Indian life narratives conform to the generic prescriptions of autobiography (Kumar, 2010), so many Indian theorists prefer the concept of 'memoir'