

RESEARCH ARTICLE**From Testimony to Theory: Re-Centering Dalit Epistemology in Contemporary Indian Literary Discourse (2020–2025)**

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Abstract

Between 2020 and 2025, Dalit writing in India has been read through a new critical lens that foregrounds its epistemological force rather than treating it merely as testimonial documentation of suffering. This article argues that contemporary Dalit literature and especially Dalit autobiography, life-writing, and digitally mediated narrative functions as a site of knowledge production and theoretical intervention that unsettles Brahminical authority over what counts as “reason,” “aesthetics,” and “theory.” Drawing on B. R. Ambedkar’s critique of caste as a graded hierarchy of power and knowledge, and engaging with recent work by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai on Dalit experience as epistemology, Suraj Yengde on caste and neoliberal modernity, Shailaja Paik on Dalit feminist thought, and emerging Dalit digital activism and online discourse, the article traces how Dalit texts challenge representational readings that confine them to authenticity and victimhood. Through an analytical review of scholarship from 2020–2025 and close reading of selected texts and debates, the article distinguishes between testimonial, representational, and epistemological approaches in Dalit literary studies, arguing that the last remains comparatively underdeveloped despite important recent interventions. It proposes “epistemic sovereignty” as a key category for understanding how Dalit literature claims the right to theorize caste, modernity, gender, and democracy from below. Methodologically, the article combines textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and epistemological critique, focusing on Dalit autobiographical and feminist narratives, theoretical essays, and digital practices. It concludes by suggesting that reading Dalit literature as theory has significant implications for postcolonial literary criticism, digital humanities, and curriculum reform in Indian and global South contexts.

Keywords: Dalit epistemology; Ambedkarite thought; Dalit feminism; neoliberalism; digital caste discourse; translation politics; epistemic sovereignty

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Introduction**

Dalit literature emerged in the late twentieth century as a powerful counter-archive to upper-caste literary and historiographical traditions, insisting that the lives of those relegated to the bottom of the caste order are central to any account of Indian modernity. Early criticism tended to approach Dalit autobiographies and stories as documents of atrocity or instruments of social reform, valuing them primarily for their representational fidelity rather than their theoretical claims. In such readings, Dalit texts became evidence for sociology and history, but rarely interlocutors in debates on epistemology, aesthetics, or critical theory.

The last five years have witnessed a marked shift. A growing body of work reads Dalit literature as generating concepts, methods, and critiques that reconfigure dominant understandings of knowledge, justice, and community. The special issue initiative “Dalit Studies in India: Interrogating Epistemological Injuries and Silences” signposts this turn, framing caste not only as a social structure but as a regime that produces “epistemic injuries” by excluding Dalit voices from knowledge-making institutions. Parallel developments in Dalit feminist theory, digital activism, and transnational solidarities have further complicated the relationship between testimony, identity politics, and theoretical abstraction.

This article intervenes in these debates by arguing that contemporary Dalit writing should be read as a site of epistemological production and “epistemic sovereignty,” not merely as a repository of lived experience or a demand for recognition. It asks what it means to treat Dalit narratives as theory, how they challenge Brahminical and neoliberal knowledge hierarchies, and how translation and digital circulation reshape Dalit epistemology in the 2020–2025 conjuncture.

Literature Review**Testimony, Representation, and Epistemology**

Recent scholarship still shows a strong investment in reading Dalit literature as testimonial narrative and as an instrument of representation and social awareness. Articles on “the dismissal and devaluation of Dalit experiences,” for example, emphasize how Dalit narratives expose testimonial injustice and force mainstream literary criticism to confront its own casteist standards of credibility. Such work is crucial, yet it often confirms the assumption that Dalit texts primarily provide “experience” for others to interpret, rather than interpretive frameworks of their own.

A second cluster of studies focuses on representational politics, exploring how Dalit characters, settings, and idioms disrupt canonical Indian English or regional literatures. Papers on “Language and Dalit Expression in Indian English Literature” and on awareness of Dalit literature among Dalit communities stress literature’s role in consciousness-raising and in challenging linguistic and aesthetic norms. While these analyses acknowledge resistance and alternative aesthetics, they rarely follow through on the epistemological implications of Dalit narrative strategies, stopping at questions of visibility, inclusion, and counter-representation.

By contrast, a more recent but still smaller body of work explicitly foregrounds Dalit epistemology. Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai’s earlier but still influential *The Cracked Mirror* is

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repeatedly mobilized in 2020–2025 scholarship to argue that social location structures modes of knowing, and that caste produces epistemic inequalities that permeate academia, philosophy, and literary criticism. Building on this, Sunder John Boopalan and Shaista Patel's 2025 article "‘Rooted in the Soil’: Defining Dalitness as an Ethic and Worldview" in *Cultural Studies* conceptualizes "Dalitness" as an ethic grounded in land, labour, and vulnerability, rather than as a mere identity position, arguing that Dalit worldviews interrupt hegemonic arrangements of humanity across graded caste hierarchies. Such work decisively re-frames Dalit literature and thought as theoretical interventions.

Yet, as the literature indicates, epistemological readings remain overshadowed by more familiar testimonial and representational approaches. The challenge is not simply to celebrate Dalit knowledge, but to specify how Dalit texts generate concepts, methods, and critiques that travel across disciplinary and geographical boundaries.

Ambedkarite Thought and Caste as Knowledge Hierarchy

A noticeable trend in the 2020–2025 period is the return to Ambedkar as a theorist of knowledge and epistemic justice, beyond his role as jurist or political leader. Scholarly work revisits *Annihilation of Caste* as a radical critique of scriptural authority and as a dismantling of caste as a knowledge hierarchy that dictates who may speak, interpret texts, and define reason. Studies in political theory and cultural studies read Ambedkar's insistence on "reason" and "constitutional morality" as an alternative epistemology, grounded in the experience of untouchability and oriented towards social democracy and human dignity.

Suraj Yengde's revised and expanded 2024 edition of *Caste Matters* extends this line of thought by situating caste within global modernity, neoliberal capitalism, and diasporic circuits. Yengde argues that caste adapts to new economic regimes rather than disappearing under liberalization, making Dalit critique indispensable to any understanding of Indian capitalism. This argument opens space for reading Dalit essays, memoirs, and political writings as critical theory of neoliberalism, rather than as local reportage.

Together, Ambedkarite re-readings and Yengde's analysis push Dalit literary studies towards a conception of caste as an epistemic order, a regime that distributes authority over knowledge, not only over labour and ritual status.

Dalit Feminism and Embodied Epistemology

Dalit feminist scholarship has become one of the most dynamic sites of epistemological innovation. Bhushan Sharma's 2021 article "Narratives of Dalit Women and 'the Outsider Within': Toward a Literary Practice of Dalit Feminist Standpoint" in the *Journal of International Women's Studies* develops a Dalit feminist standpoint theory through readings of Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. Sharma argues that Dalit women's narratives generate a standpoint as "outsider within" that reveals how caste, class, and gender intersect to shape both oppression and insight, and that these narratives create "new knowledge that subverts dominant androcentric knowledge construction."¹

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Shailaja Paik's *The Vulgarly of Caste: Dalits, Sexuality, and Humanity in Modern India* (Stanford University Press, 2022) similarly foregrounds sexuality and bodily labour as central to understanding caste, arguing that the regulation of Dalit women's bodies is integral to the reproduction of caste and nation. Reviews emphasize how Paik's work reframes Dalit women's life-writing, activism, and cultural practices as theoretical resources for thinking about humanity, dignity, and the politics of respectability.

These interventions contribute to what we might call Dalit feminist epistemology, where embodied experiences of caste and gender become not only themes but methodological and theoretical foundations. Yet there is still relatively little work that systematically connects these feminist frameworks to debates in mainstream literary theory or to emerging Dalit digital and translational practices.

Digital Caste Discourse and Dalit Online Activism

Studies of digital activism make clear that the internet and social media have become crucial sites for Dalit political and epistemic practices in the last decade. Iram Fatima, Samuel Pehrson, and Yashpal Jogdand's qualitative study of Dalit activists' online practices, "Dalit Activists Promote Social Change Differently: Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Activism and Social Change in Indian Society" shows how Dalit activists use social media to circumvent caste-biased mainstream media, consolidate identity, build solidarity, and sustain mobilization under repressive conditions. The authors argue that digital platforms enable Dalits to address "invisibilization" in mainstream media, create online communities, and form transnational solidarities, even as activists face trolling, surveillance, and mental health costs.

Complementing this, the working paper "Dalitality and Digital Media: Digital Forms of Dalit Expression" argues that Dalits in Maharashtra have used the internet to document inequality, mobilize around injustices, and assert agency through digital storytelling and community-building. The paper highlights how online Dalit forums and platforms act as counter-publics, enabling new forms of narration and knowledge-sharing that challenge dominant media narratives. Studies specifically on Dalit women's digital activism show how platforms like Facebook and Twitter become spaces for articulating Dalit feminist concerns, confronting both casteism and mainstream feminist exclusions.

Popular and policy-oriented analyses of "caste in the digital age" note the emergence of hashtags like #DalitLivesMatter, #JusticeForRohith, and #SmashBrahminicalPatriarchy, arguing that digital caste activism reconfigures symbolic power and narrative control. These studies, however, tend to focus on mobilization and representation rather than on the epistemic forms and conceptual innovations produced in these digital spaces.

Translation, Global Circulation, and Decolonial/Subaltern Frameworks

The period 2020–2025 has also seen increased attention to the translation and global circulation of Dalit texts. Calls for papers and special issues emphasize the need to interrogate the politics of translation, canon formation, and South–South dialogues, including comparisons with

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African American, Indigenous, and other subaltern literatures. Scholars caution that translation can both amplify and sanitize Dalit voices: market logics may favour certain narratives of suffering, while softening critique of caste and capital for international audiences.

At the same time, decolonial and subaltern theory are being brought into conversation with Dalit studies. Work drawing on decolonial thought frames caste as a global structure of racialized humanity, connecting Dalit struggles to Black Lives Matter and other movements. Yet, there remains some hesitation about fully integrating Western-origin theories; many Dalit scholars insist on theory emerging from Dalit lifeworlds and Ambedkarite traditions rather than from imported frameworks alone.

Underexplored Areas and Emerging Debates

Across this literature, several underexplored or unresolved questions emerge:

- While there is robust work on Dalit testimony and representation, there are fewer sustained studies that treat Dalit autobiographies and memoirs as theoretical texts, or that map the specific epistemological claims they make about modernity, democracy, and subjectivity.^{[2][10]}
- Dalit feminist standpoint theory and works like Paik's have developed powerful conceptual tools, but these have not yet been fully integrated into mainstream literary theory or into discussions of digital Dalit expression and translation.
- Digital activism studies document practices of online mobilization but seldom theorize platforms as epistemic spaces that shape what and how Dalits know, remember, and share, especially in relation to literary texts.
- Translation debates often focus on representation, ethics, and market dynamics but rarely examine how translation affects epistemic sovereignty who gets to theorize Dalitness and in which language.

These gaps point toward the need for a framework that connects testimony, representation, and epistemology across print and digital forms, with attention to gender, neoliberalism, and global circulation.

Research Gap

Building on the above, this article identifies the following core gap:

1. **Insufficient epistemological reading of contemporary Dalit life-writing and related discourse.** Although the 2020–2025 scholarship acknowledges Dalit texts as sources of knowledge, there is no sustained, theoretically explicit account of how recent Dalit autobiographies, memoirs, feminist narratives, and digital testimonies collectively produce what we might call Dalit epistemology, especially in relation to neoliberal modernity and digital media.

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2. **Weak integration of Dalit feminist and digital epistemologies into literary theory.** Dalit feminist standpoint theory and analyses of Dalit digital activism have developed rich concepts around embodiment, memory, community, and risk, but these remain largely in feminist or social-psychological literatures; they are not yet systematically brought into postcolonial literary theory or into readings of contemporary Dalit texts as theory.
3. **Limited analysis of “epistemic sovereignty” as distinct from recognition.** Much writing still frames Dalit literature as demanding visibility and justice within pre-existing academic canons. Less work examines how Dalit writers and activists reconfigure the very terms of theory, proposing alternative criteria for truth, method, and literary value.

This article addresses this multi-layered gap by offering a comparative, theoretically oriented reading of contemporary Dalit writings and debates that foregrounds epistemology and epistemic sovereignty as central to Dalit literary discourse in the 2020–2025 period.

Research Questions and Objectives**Research Questions**

1. How do contemporary Dalit literary and para-literary texts (autobiographies, memoirs, feminist narratives, and digital interventions) move from testimony and representation to epistemological production in the period 2020–2025?
2. In what ways do these texts challenge Brahminical and neoliberal knowledge hierarchies, and what alternative epistemic principles do they articulate?
3. How do Dalit feminist frameworks and digital caste discourse reshape or extend Dalit epistemology and its relationship to literary theory, translation, and global circulation?

Objectives

- To map major theoretical debates on Dalit epistemology, Ambedkarite thought, Dalit feminism, and digital Dalit activism in the last five years.
- To conceptualize a shift from testimonial and representational readings of Dalit literature to an epistemological and theoretical approach, focusing on “epistemic sovereignty.”
- To develop an analytical framework, grounded in Ambedkarite, Dalit feminist, and decolonial insights, for reading contemporary Dalit narratives as sites of theory-making.
- To indicate implications for postcolonial literary studies, digital humanities, and curriculum formation in Indian and global South university contexts.

Theoretical Framework**Ambedkarite Epistemology and Caste as Knowledge Hierarchy**

Ambedkar’s critique of caste positions Brahminical scripture and tradition as mechanisms of epistemic violence: they authorize graded inequality and pre-empt challenges by limiting who may

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interpret texts and define rationality. Reading caste as a knowledge hierarchy directs attention to how literary canons, academic disciplines, and interpretive norms have historically excluded Dalit voices, or admitted them only as empirical data.

This article treats Ambedkar not simply as an object of study but as a foundational epistemologist. His insistence that the “true test” of knowledge is its relation to liberty, equality, and fraternity provides a normative yardstick for evaluating literary criticism itself. Dalit texts that foreground humiliation, bodily labour, and collective memory are thus read as interventions into debates about what counts as knowledge and who can be a knower.

Dalit Epistemology: Embodied Knowledge, Memory as Method, Epistemic Resistance

Building on Guru and Sarukkai, Boopalan and Patel, and recent Dalit feminist work, the article conceptualizes Dalit epistemology through three interlinked principles:

- **Embodied knowledge:** Dalit narratives insist that the body, marked by labour, segregation, and violence, is not a mere object of description but a source of insight into how caste and capital operate.
- **Memory as method:** Autobiographical and community narratives deploy memory not only to document trauma but to construct counter-histories that challenge nationalist and savarna histories.
- **Epistemic resistance:** Storytelling, testimony, and digital speech acts are forms of resistance to epistemic injustice; they challenge whose testimony is believed and whose concepts are taught.

Together, these principles underwrite a move from testimony-as-evidence to testimony-as-theory.

Dalit Feminist Standpoint and Epistemic Sovereignty

Sharma’s Dalit feminist standpoint theory and Paik’s analysis of sexuality and labour suggest that Dalit women’s narratives occupy a distinctive epistemic location as “outsiders within” both Dalit and feminist spheres. This standpoint yields concepts such as “vulgarity” (in Paik’s sense) that expose how respectability politics and sexual regulation sustain caste and nation.

The article adopts “epistemic sovereignty” to name the claim that Dalit and Dalit feminist perspectives do not merely supplement existing theories but possess the authority to define the terms and objects of theory. This sovereignty is asserted not against dialogue but against the presumption that theory originates elsewhere and is only “applied” to Dalit lives.

Digital Counter publics and Decolonial Alignments

Digital Dalit activism research indicates that social media and online forums have become crucial sites for constructing shared identities, solidarity, and counter-narratives. Hashtag movements such as #DalitLivesMatter explicitly align Dalit struggles with global movements like Black Lives Matter, while online forums document caste atrocities, debates, and histories neglected in mainstream media.

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Drawing cautiously on decolonial and subaltern frameworks, the article understands these digital spaces as “epistemic counterpublics”: arenas where marginalized groups produce and circulate knowledge in forms that are often illegible to dominant institutions. Rather than importing Western theory, the analysis foregrounds Dalit analogies and solidarities as they appear in Dalit discourse itself, for instance in invoking Black, Roma, or Indigenous struggles as comparative frames.^{[9][31]}

Methodology**Research Design**

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology combining:

- **Textual analysis** of selected Dalit autobiographical, memoiristic, and essayistic texts referenced in recent scholarship.
- **Critical discourse analysis** of key academic debates (journal articles, calls for papers, special issues) on Dalit literature and epistemology between 2020 and 2025.
- **Epistemological critique** that evaluates how these texts and debates conceptualize knowledge, authority, and theory in relation to caste, gender, and neoliberalism.

The aim is not to exhaustively survey all Dalit writing in this period, but to trace paradigmatic moves from testimony and representation to epistemological intervention.

Corpus Selection and Periodization

The primary corpus consists of:

1. **Scholarly works (2020–2025)** on Dalit literature, epistemology, feminism, and digital activism, including Sharma (2021), Paik (2022), Boopalan & Patel (2025), empirical studies of Dalit digital activism, and position papers on Dalit digital media.
2. **Autobiographical and feminist narratives** frequently discussed in this scholarship, such as Baby Kamble’s and Urmila Pawar’s texts as re-read in Sharma (2021), and contemporary memoirs that have acquired renewed critical attention in recent editions and public debates.
3. **Digital texts and platforms**, including online forums, hashtags, and social media practices discussed in studies of Dalit digital activism and Dalit women’s digital expression.

The period 2020–2025 is chosen because it corresponds to a noticeable intensification of discussions around Dalit epistemology, epistemic injury, digital caste discourse, and Dalit feminist standpoint, as evidenced by new special issues, monographs, and empirical studies. It is also a period marked by heightened authoritarianism, digital surveillance, and neoliberal restructuring in India, conditions under which Dalit epistemic claims acquire particular urgency.

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Analytical Procedure**

The analysis proceeds in three steps:

1. **Mapping debates:** Close reading of academic texts to identify how they conceptualize Dalit literature, as testimony, representation, or epistemology, and how they deploy or critique concepts like “epistemic violence,” “standpoint,” and “sovereignty.”
2. **Comparative textual reading:** Interpreting selected autobiographical and feminist narratives alongside these theoretical debates to show how the narratives themselves theorize caste, gender, and neoliberalism, often in ways that exceed the secondary criticism.
3. **Digital and translational extension:** Examining how digital activism and translation practices transform Dalit epistemology by creating new genres of testimony and new audiences, and by raising questions about co-option and market-driven visibility.

Throughout, the analysis is reflexive about the positionality of literary criticism itself, asking how scholarly frameworks may reproduce or resist Brahminical and neoliberal notions of “theory.”

Textual Analysis and Discussion**From Testimony to Theory in Autobiographical Narratives**

Traditional criticism emphasized Dalit autobiographies as authentic records of oppression, celebrating their emotional intensity and truth-telling. Sharma’s 2021 article marks a shift by reading Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar not simply as witnesses but as theorists of caste patriarchy through narrative form. By articulating a Dalit feminist standpoint, Sharma shows how narrative voice, temporal structure, and collective address function as methods for knowing the world from the position of the “outsider within.”

When these texts are read through Ambedkarite and Dalit feminist lenses, their use of memory becomes a deliberate method: scenes of humiliation, labour, and domestic life are arranged to expose the complicity of family, community, and state in sustaining caste. The autobiographical “I” is not merely confessing but constructing a theory of caste as deeply gendered and affective, embedded in everyday practices. This move from “I suffered” to “this is how caste works” exemplifies the shift from testimony to theory.

Furthermore, the proliferation of memoirs and autobiographical essays in English and regional languages, some republished or revised in the 2020s, has created what we might call a *testimonial-theoretical continuum*. At one end, texts reiterate the imperative to bear witness; at the other, they explicitly analyze nationalism, neoliberal meritocracy, and digital casteism. The same author may move along this continuum within a single text, suggesting that theory and testimony are intertwined rather than opposed.

Dalit Epistemology and Neoliberal Modernity

Yengde’s insistence that caste persists and mutates under neoliberalism provides a framework for reading Dalit texts that address urban precarity, corporate meritocracy, and educational exclusion.

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Literary and autobiographical narratives from Dalit students and professionals, frequently invoked in recent scholarship, show how “merit” is experienced as a caste-coded discourse that attributes Dalit underrepresentation to individual failure while obscuring structural barriers.

Empirical studies of Dalit activists underline that digital media is both an opportunity and a “digital minefield”: activists leverage social media to bypass upper-caste media gatekeeping, yet face trolling, surveillance, and state repression. Narratives of online harassment, doxxing, and sedition charges show neoliberalism’s fusion of market logics with authoritarian control, where digital visibility becomes both resource and risk.

Reading these narratives epistemologically highlights how Dalit activists theorize power: they conceptualize the state, media, and platforms as intertwined apparatuses of caste governance, yet also as terrains where alternative solidarities and knowledge networks can be built. Their reflections on why they stay online despite danger, how they interpret algorithmic visibility, and how they connect with Black or Indigenous struggles constitute a theorization of digital neoliberalism from below.

Dalit Feminist Epistemology: Body, Labour, and Desire

Dalit feminist scholars have foregrounded the body as a site of labour, violence, and desire as central to Dalit epistemology. Paik’s *The Vulgarities of Caste* traces how the sexualized and “vulgar” Dalit woman is central to both caste domination and nationalist imaginaries, arguing that Dalit women’s narratives expose the intimate workings of caste in everyday life and public culture. Reviewers underscore that Paik’s work is not merely about representation but about reconceptualizing humanity and sexuality from a Dalit feminist standpoint.

Sharma’s reading of Kamble and Pawar similarly shows how Dalit women transform shame and stigma into political critique: their narratives address domestic labour, marital violence, and community expectations as structural, not individual, problems. In doing so, they articulate an epistemology of vulnerability and resilience in which the body is neither a passive victim nor an abstract symbol, but a living archive and analytic resource.

These feminist works contribute crucial concepts such as “outsider within,” “vulgarity,” and “sexual labour” that can reshape literary theory’s discussions of embodiment, affect, and genre. Yet mainstream postcolonial criticism has only begun to engage these concepts, often preferring more familiar Western theoretical vocabularies. Recognizing Dalit feminist epistemology as theory in its own right requires reorienting syllabi, keywords, and citation practices.

Digital Dalitness: Online Narratives as Epistemic Practice

Studies of Dalit digital activism show how online spaces facilitate identity consolidation, community-building, and political solidarity among Dalits and across marginalized groups. Interview-based research reveals that activists use social media to document cases like the Hathras

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rape, mobilize support, and force mainstream media to respond, thus transforming individual testimonies into collective claims. They describe social media as “empowering” in allowing dispersed Dalits and allies to feel “we are in this together,” even as they confront repression.

“Dalitality and Digital Media” emphasizes that Dalits use the internet to “voice their concerns about inequality, document instances of unfair treatment, rally together for a common cause, and share their successes and failures,” suggesting that digital practices are central to contemporary Dalit politics. Dalit women’s digital activism, through pages like “Dalit Women Fight” and other platforms, also offers a space to articulate critiques of mainstream feminism and to forge a Dalit feminist digital counterpublic.

When read epistemologically, these practices constitute what we might call *digital Dalitness*: a set of narrative, visual, and dialogic forms through which Dalits theorize caste, gender, and state power in real time. Threads, posts, and hashtags assemble dispersed experiences into patterns, generating concepts of “digital casteism,” “online vulnerability,” and “networked solidarity” that build on but also exceed print literature.

Translation, Global Circuits, and the Risk of Epistemic Extraction

The increased translation and global circulation of Dalit texts raises questions about epistemic sovereignty. Special issue proposals and scholarly discussions emphasize the need to interrogate translation as a site of epistemic risk, where radical critique can be softened or framed through familiar paradigms of “subaltern pain” for global markets.

Studies note that international anthologies and reading lists often favour certain genres (autobiography, atrocity narratives) and languages (especially English), potentially reinforcing the association of Dalit literature with suffering rather than theory. At the same time, translation also creates opportunities for South–South dialogues; Dalit texts enter conversations with African American, Afro-Brazilian, and Indigenous literatures, expanding conceptual vocabularies and comparative frameworks.

An epistemological perspective asks: who controls these translations, framing essays, and marketing narratives? Are Dalit scholars, translators, and communities involved in deciding which texts travel and how they are contextualized? Without such involvement, there is a risk that Dalit thought will be consumed as raw material for decolonial or postcolonial theory elsewhere, rather than recognized as a site of theoretical innovation in its own terms.

Findings

Across the literature and textual readings, several key findings emerge:

1. **Contemporary Dalit discourse is already theoretical.** Dalit autobiographies, feminist narratives, and digital interventions do not merely illustrate theoretical frameworks; they articulate original concepts and analyses concerning caste, neoliberalism, gender, and the state.

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2. **Epistemic violence and epistemic resistance are central to Dalit literary practice.** Dalit texts expose how caste functions as a knowledge hierarchy and how institutions devalue Dalit experience, but they also model alternative epistemic practices grounded in embodied knowledge, memory as method, and community accountability.
3. **Dalit feminist epistemology significantly reshapes the field.** Works by Paik and others show that any account of Dalit epistemology that neglects gender is incomplete; Dalit women's narratives provide crucial insights into the intersection of caste, sexuality, and labour as epistemic sites.
4. **Digital media are central to contemporary Dalit epistemology.** Online activism and digital storytelling have become important modes of knowledge production, creating counter publics where Dalits theorize their conditions, build solidarities, and test new concepts of justice and democracy.
5. **Translation and global circulation pose ambivalent possibilities.** While translation can amplify Dalit voices and embed them in global decolonial debates, it can also lead to epistemic extraction and market-driven curation unless grounded in Dalit epistemic sovereignty and collaboration.

Collectively, these findings support the argument that Dalit literature and discourse between 2020 and 2025 constitute a paradigm shift “from testimony to theory,” demanding that Indian literary and cultural studies reconfigure their own epistemic assumptions.

Conclusion

This article has argued that contemporary Dalit writing and discourse, across print, feminist life-writing, and digital activism, must be read as a field of epistemological production and theoretical intervention rather than merely as testimony or representational politics. Drawing on Ambedkarite thought, Dalit feminist standpoint, and emerging analyses of digital Dalit activism, it has shown how Dalit narratives conceptualize caste as a knowledge hierarchy, foreground embodied knowledge and memory as method, and claim epistemic sovereignty in defining the terms of justice, democracy, and humanity.

Recognizing this shift has at least three implications. First, it requires a transformation of literary theory and postcolonial studies curricula, in which Dalit texts appear not as marginal case studies but as central theoretical texts. Second, it calls for methodological realignment: critics must attend to Dalit conceptual vocabularies and digital practices and avoid translating them too quickly into familiar Western frameworks. Third, it highlights the need for ethical translation and global circulation that respects Dalit epistemic sovereignty rather than extracting “experience” for external theory.

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By foregrounding epistemology and theory-making in Dalit literature from 2020–2025, the article suggests that the future of Indian literary studies and perhaps of critical theory in the global South more broadly depends on taking seriously the knowledge worlds that emerge from the struggle against caste.

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