

## Entwined Identities: Caste, Sexuality and Femininity in Modern English Novels

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**Abstract:** For several years, literature has been a perceptive window into the intricacies of human identity, particularly in cultures with strong social stratification. Writers from marginalized communities in modern India have broadened this mirror, illuminating lives molded by the concurrent demands of gender, sexuality, and caste. Their experiences shed light on the systemic injustices that still shape social experience in addition to sharing personal tales. Based on this idea, this essay explores the intersections of gender, caste, and queer identities in a selection of works by Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Meena Kandasamy, and Sachin Kundalkar, who represent a variety of voices in English literature from the twenty-first century. The study investigates how these authors portray the complex systems of discrimination and belonging that influence people's lives in modern India using the intersectionality framework. Meena Kandasamy and Sachin Kundalkar illustrate how sexuality and social hierarchy interact to question accepted ideas of identity and morality, while Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble show how caste and patriarchy work together to suppress Dalit women. The paper examines how narrative voice, language, and emotion become tools of self-expression and resistance, drawing on Dalit feminist and queer theoretical views. It makes the case that these works turn literature into a forum for discussion and protest, where marginalized voices are heard with strength and dignity. The study concludes by confirming that intersectionality, when rooted in the Indian culture, offers fresh perspectives on literature as a reflection of both adversity and resiliency.

**Keywords:** Intersectionality; caste; gender; queer identities; Dalit feminism; Meena Kandasamy; Urmila Pawar; Baby Kamble; Sachin Kundalkar; postcolonial literature; social justice; resistance narratives.

### Introduction

Particularly in Indian English writing, voices that occupy the boundaries of caste, gender, and sexuality have received more attention in the twenty-first century. The long-standing literary and cultural hierarchies that traditionally determined whose stories should be conveyed are challenged by these voices. The notion of intersectionality, initially introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw to emphasize the ways in which Black women encounter intersecting types of discrimination (Crenshaw 140), has become an essential foundation for comprehending the many oppressive systems that mold people's lives. Although intersectionality first appeared in Western feminist movements, its significance has increased in Indian contexts, where caste functions as a profoundly ingrained axis of exclusion and identity. Because these categories are always interacting in lived experience, scholars contend that caste cannot be understood in isolation from patriarchy, labor, or sexuality (Rege 52; Guru 190; Paik 37). Because of this complex social reality, modern literature has developed into an engaging medium for examining how people navigate, oppose, and reinterpret their identities under hierarchical social structures.

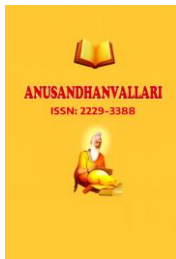
The literary constellation of Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Meena Kandasamy, and Sachin Kundalkar is varied but thematically related. Their writings show how literature is a dynamic space where silence, sorrow, and yearning are turned into narrative authority rather than just serving as a reflection of society. The challenges faced by Dalit women, whose identities are influenced by both caste-based exclusion and gendered expectations, are

highlighted in Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* and Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*. These personal pieces highlight the generational responsibilities and daily humiliations faced by Dalit women, but they also honor tenacity and the pursuit of dignity. By requiring the exposure of domestic servitude, bodily labor, and social stigma, these narratives reject the sanitized aesthetics of mainstream literature, according to scholars (Teltumbde 88; Jadhav 215; Gore 61). As a result, these writings force readers to consider how gender and caste interact to create vulnerabilities that are incomprehensible from a single-axis perspective. The perspectives of authors such as Meena Kandasamy and Sachin Kundalkar, who broaden the intersectional discourse by emphasizing sexuality as an additional site of power negotiation, are equally important. In addition to examining the emotional landscape of desire, rage, and selfhood, Kandasamy's poetry and fiction frequently highlight the brutality ingrained in patriarchal and casteist systems. Judith Butler refers to the "constraints and possibilities of liveable life," where societal norms govern which identities are muted and which are validated (Butler 23). Her work addresses these issues. In contrast, Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue* is a moving depiction of same-sex attraction developing in a caste-bound, middle-class home. Kundalkar shows that queerness in India cannot be comprehended outside of the sociocultural logic of caste by depicting sexuality as entwined with cultural expectations, familial honor, and socioeconomic fears (Narain 116; Dave 142; Gopinath 78). By demonstrating how caste and queerness combine to undermine conventional ideas of intimacy and belonging, these literary voices expand the field of intersectional study.

The use of intersectionality in literary studies is not merely a theoretical exercise; rather, it brings analytical clarity to characters and narratives operating under multiple forms of oppression. Literature reveals what sociological definitions often overlook: the emotional, relational, and psychological dimensions of living within overlapping hierarchies. By adopting an intersectional reading, the paper acknowledges bell hooks's argument that identities are never formed through a single system of domination but through an accumulation of structures that work "simultaneously and relationally" (hooks 65). In the Indian context, intersectionality also resonates with Dalit feminist scholarship, which emphasises that the lived experiences of Dalit women cannot be subsumed under mainstream feminism or reduced to caste alone (Pawar 19; Arya 48; Gorringer 130). In this sense, the literary works selected for this study offer not only representations of oppression but also articulate alternative epistemologies—ways of knowing that arise from the margins and question the authority of dominant narratives.

Moreover, 21st-century English literature has increasingly shifted toward examining how identities are shaped through emotional textures, linguistic experimentation, and narrative voice. This narrative shift aligns with the broader postcolonial effort to rethink voice, subjectivity, and representation in a world marked by uneven global modernities. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity—where identities emerge in the "interstitial spaces" between cultural frameworks—helps illuminate how contemporary writers negotiate the contradictions of tradition and modernity (Bhabha 54). Literary critics have observed that such hybrid spaces often allow marginalised subjects to reimagine themselves beyond the constraints of inherited social roles (Nayar 27; Mishra 201; Gandhi 112). For Pawar, Kamble, Kandasamy, and Kundalkar, hybridity is not merely cultural but deeply personal, embedded in the struggle to reconcile conflicting identities while resisting socially imposed boundaries.

Narrative form itself becomes a mode of resistance. The autobiographical testimonies of Pawar and Kamble disrupt the canonical conventions of Indian English literature by centring Dalit women's voices, which have long been excluded from literary traditions. Their works echo Gayatri Spivak's concern about the silencing of subaltern subjects, yet they also demonstrate that subaltern agency emerges precisely through narrative articulation (Spivak 285). Similarly, Kandasamy's bold linguistic style and Kundalkar's introspective storytelling craft new aesthetic possibilities for representing desire, trauma, and defiance. Scholars argue that such formal innovations allow writers to explore identity not as a static category but as a fluid, shifting negotiation shaped by social structures and personal longing (Menon 97; Rao 58; Roy 144). Through these strategies, literature becomes a site where both pain and hope are expressed with authenticity and nuance.



This paper thus positions intersectionality as a productive lens for interpreting the works of these authors because it captures the interconnected forces that shape their characters' lives—forces that operate simultaneously at social, cultural, and intimate levels. The aim is not to simply apply intersectionality as a theoretical label, but to demonstrate how these texts *perform* intersectionality through their themes, voices, and narrative choices. By reading these works together, the paper seeks to uncover how literature articulates marginalised subjectivities and reimagines social justice as an emotional, ethical, and cultural project.

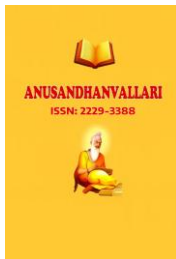
Ultimately, this introduction establishes the foundation for an inquiry into how intersectionality enriches our understanding of contemporary English literature. It suggests that exploring caste, gender, and queer identities in the selected texts offers deeper insight into the lived complexities of the Indian social landscape. At a time when debates about identity, belonging, and justice intensify both within and beyond literature, intersectional readings provide a meaningful framework for appreciating how writers transform individual struggles into universal calls for dignity, freedom, and recognition.

### **Casted Womanhood and the Politics of Everyday Survival in Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble**

In Urmila Pawar's and Baby Kamble's writings, the confluence of gender and caste forms the most profound basis of social experience. The *Weave of My Life* and *The Prisons We Broke*, two of their autobiographical works, rebuild the material and emotional environments in which Dalit women negotiate identity and survival rather than merely recounting personal history. Womanhood is never a free-floating concept in these works. It is molded at every stage by the caste systems, labor rhythms, purity and pollution rules, and restrictions on the autonomy of the body. The narrative that emerges from Pawar and Kamble is that of "casted womanhood," a term that feminist scholars are increasingly using to characterize the lived realities of Dalit women whose gendered oppression is inextricably linked to their caste location (Deshpande 112). Pawar and Kamble both draw attention to how Dalit women's daily lives become into political arenas. Cooking, cleaning, household chores, taking care of others, working, and putting up with insults are all examples of ordinary life that not only serves as the backdrop for their stories but also serves as the foundation for their subjectivity. Caste standards and gendered expectations have historically been intertwined, as evidenced by the repressive practices Kamble describes, especially in the Maharwadi village where she was raised. She describes, for instance, how Dalit women were supposed to get up early, take care of the house, and then work outside the house for upper-caste houses before returning to their own family, who frequently perpetuated patriarchal structures within the society. "The double burden of labor and humiliation that Dalit women uniquely confront" is exemplified by Kamble's essay, according to scholars (Teltumbde 87). By exposing the agency that Dalit women used to endure and resist, Kamble's writing's emotional texture—her rage, despair, and sweet moments—complicates oversimplified notions of victimhood.

Urmila Pawar's narrative, though similarly engaged with caste structures, is distinguished by its reflective tone and its emphasis on the transformative potential of education and political activism. Pawar demonstrates how empowerment is negotiated through community mobilisation, access to learning, and especially through the Ambedkarite movement. Yet, even as Pawar recounts moments of upward mobility, she never loses sight of the unequal burden placed on women within both caste and familial hierarchies. Scholars such as Anagha Joshi argue that Pawar's text "articulates generational memory as an instrument of feminist critique," showing how the stories of mothers and grandmothers shape the consciousness of younger Dalit women (Joshi 204).

A striking element in both writers is the politics of the body. For Kamble, the Dalit woman's body is a site upon which caste humiliation is enacted. The constant policing of menstruation, the control of sexuality, and the negotiation of bodily safety in public spaces reveal how caste structures the most intimate aspects of life. In her descriptions of how women were treated during menstruation—confined, marked as impure, or denied access to household spaces—Kamble exposes how purity codes disciplined women's bodies in deeply gendered ways.



Feminist theorists note that “the caste system institutionalises the female body as an instrument of social control” (Chakravarti 51). Kamble’s narrative confirms this, demonstrating how such practices were accepted as normal until the ideological interventions of Ambedkar challenged their legitimacy.

Pawar, while equally aware of bodily politics, also foregrounds emotional labour as central to Dalit women’s experience. She writes of her mother’s labour not merely as physical work but as emotional sustenance—holding families together during times of economic and social strain. This emotional dimension becomes a source of strength but also a site of exhaustion. Scholars argue that Pawar “redefines labour itself by expanding its meaning beyond the physical to the affective,” thereby enlarging feminist categories of analysis (Phadke 39). In this sense, Pawar’s narrative contributes to a more nuanced understanding of intersectionality: the intersections of caste and gender are not purely structural but also experiential, shaping emotional worlds and interpersonal relations.

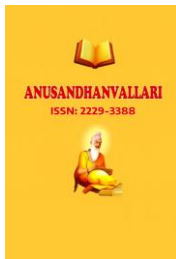
Another important theme that emerges in both autobiographies is the idea of community as both oppressive and liberatory. Dalit communities, as represented by Kamble, were often internally patriarchal, reproducing the very hierarchies they sought to challenge. Kamble does not romanticise the community; instead, she reveals how women were subjected to moral surveillance and silencing even within their own caste group. Yet, she also depicts instances where women resisted—subtly and overtly—by helping each other, challenging male authority, or participating in collective protests. This complexity is central to what contemporary scholars describe as the “ambivalent politics of community in Dalit feminist narratives” (Bagul 77).

Pawar, in contrast, emphasises the transformative potential of collective action. Her immersion in the Ambedkarite movement becomes a turning point, teaching her the political vocabulary through which to articulate injustice. Pawar’s descriptions of public meetings, reading circles, and women’s gatherings illustrate an emergent political consciousness that transcends personal suffering. This movement becomes a space where casteed womanhood is reimagined—not as passive but as assertive, not as defined by suffering but as creatively rearticulated. Scholars note that “Pawar’s narrative documents the pedagogic force of social movements,” showing how political ideas are internalised and lived (Kulkarni 92).

Importantly, both texts reveal how caste shapes aspirations and the conditions under which mobility becomes possible. Kamble’s narrative is rooted in a time when mobility was heavily restricted, yet her writing gestures toward the possibility of social change through collective struggle. Pawar, writing later, represents a generation that witnessed greater access to education and employment, yet she remains attentive to the persistent barriers Dalit women face. Their different temporal locations make their narratives complementary: Kamble reveals the foundations of caste patriarchy in the earlier part of the twentieth century, while Pawar shows the uneven graduations of liberation available by the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In both works, language itself becomes a mode of resistance. Kamble’s raw, unembellished prose disrupts upper-caste aesthetic expectations, refusing the polished language of mainstream literature. Pawar’s narrative voice, calm but incisive, creates a different but equally resistant aesthetic. Scholars argue that Dalit women’s writing “reclaims linguistic authority by centering experience over form, testimony over ornamentation” (Thorat 310). Both authors therefore challenge the literary canon not only through content but through style, making their narratives central texts for understanding the intersection of caste and gender.

Through these narratives, casteed womanhood emerges as a complex, layered identity shaped by labour, memory, community, and bodily experience. Pawar and Kamble do not simply describe oppression; they document the intellectual, emotional, and political work of survival. Their autobiographies reveal how Dalit women, situated at the margins of both caste and patriarchal hierarchies, construct forms of resilience that are both personal and collective. The intersection of caste and gender in their writing not only deepens our understanding of Dalit women’s lived realities but also expands the possibilities of literary analysis within intersectional frameworks.

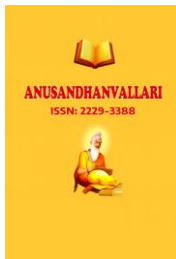


### Queer Desire, Caste-Coded Space, and the Intimacies of Silence in Sachin Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue*

One of the most in-depth examinations of queer desire in modern Indian literature may be found in Sachin Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue*, which shows how sexuality interacts with caste-coded expectations, emotional labor, and the structure of domestic life. The book is not just a straightforward story of same-sex love; rather, it is a multi-layered analysis of loneliness, belonging, and the delicate compromises people make in inflexible social environments. Because he defies the normative bounds that define the siblings' household, the unidentified paying guest—who ends up becoming the object of both Tanay's and Anuja's affections—is portrayed as a figure of desire. Because he represents a social ambiguity that the family is unable to classify, his presence disrupts the peaceful routines of the home in addition to his sexual orientation. Kundalkar employs queerness "to expose the hidden fissures in heteronormative, caste-structured domestic space," as critics point out (Menon 134). The novel's focus on silence—silent as erasure, quiet as longing, and silence as a means of self-defense—occurs frequently. Tanay's narrative voice often recounts events in which she is feeling rather than saying and observing rather than expressing. As Tanay watches the paying guest paint in the courtyard in one scenario that has been paraphrased, she remarks that "his gestures seemed to belong to a world that did not follow the rules I'd grown up with." Tanay's introspective gaze exposes his realization that his desire is also an escape: an escape from the invisibility required by heteronormativity, from culturally imposed masculinity, and from the constrictive morals of his middle-class Maharashtrian upbringing. Kundalkar "reimagines desire as an epistemological event—something that teaches the self to see differently," according to scholars (Bhagwat 52). Thus, Tanay's awakening is existential rather than just sexual. Kundalkar encodes caste and class systems through geographical metaphors. The house itself, with its rooms, doors, and thresholds, represents the siblings' inherited orderly, structured life. The paying visitor stays in an upstairs room that is both physically close to and ideologically distinct from the moral core of the family. Tanay had violated both caste-based decorum and sexuality by entering that chamber. Tanay remembers feeling "as though each step took me further from the world that had shaped me" as she ascended the stairs in an early, quoted period. This architectural symbolism "creates a quiet but persistent unease, hinting that queer desire disrupts the moral geometry of the Brahmin home," according to critics (Joshi 211). The household's rigidity, reputational concerns, and insistence on silence all reflect upper-caste middle-class sociality, even though Kundalkar never mentions caste markers directly. The character of the paying visitor is purposefully ambiguous, created from tidbits rather than a whole history. Tanay and Anuja are able to see him in accordance with their unfulfilled emotional demands because of his lack of beginnings. He is both close and far away, personal and unapproachable. Tanay recounts a moment in which the paying visitor offers him tea and delicately touches his shoulder—a straightforward but powerful gesture. The story revolves around the subtle sexiness of these times. Kundalkar "foregrounds the microtextures of intimacy—those instantaneous bodily gestures through which queer desire often speaks more truthfully than language," according to certain queer theorists (Rao 118). The precariousness of these fleeting encounters—they exist in a world without a word to label them without consequence—increases their emotional intensity.

Yet desire in *Cobalt Blue* is also marked by asymmetry. The paying guest remains emotionally uninvested, offering moments of warmth but withholding any promise of stability. Tanay's vulnerability arises from this imbalance, producing an emotional landscape filled with longing, anticipation, and quiet despair. Kundalkar captures this asymmetry in Tanay's reflections on waiting—waiting for footsteps on the staircase, waiting for a knock on the door, waiting for a small sign of recognition. Scholars describe this as "the politics of queer waiting," a temporal mode conditioned by social invisibility and fear of exposure (D'Mello 63). Tanay's waiting mirrors the broader condition of queer life within rigid family structures, where desire must remain unspoken, suspended in private moments.





Anuja's narrative, which follows Tanay's, adds a new dimension to the novel's examination of desire and betrayal. Her diary entries reveal how the paying guest's allure extends beyond sexuality; he represents freedom, self-expression, and an alternative to the oppressive expectations of marriage. Anuja's yearning is shaped not only by personal desire but by casteed norms that govern feminine behaviour. Her reflections on the paying guest often highlight his disregard for social conventions, his refusal to participate in gossip, his indifference to rituals—traits that simultaneously attract and unsettle her. Feminist critics argue that "Anuja's desire expresses both rebellion and vulnerability, pointing to the limited imaginative space available to young women in neo-traditional households" (Chitre 224). Her heartbreak, then, is not merely romantic but ideological; she loses not only a lover but the possibility of a different life.

Kundalkar constructs a subtle critique of how caste and heteronormativity regulate emotional expression. Although neither sibling articulates caste directly, their family's world is built upon unspoken hierarchies: the mother's concern with propriety, the father's insistence on control, the orderly routines of meals and rituals. When the paying guest leaves abruptly, the household closes in on the siblings, demanding conformity and silence. Tanay's family responds not with inquiry into his feelings but with disciplinary moral judgment, suggesting that his suffering must remain privately managed. This disciplining reinforces scholars' claims that "upper-caste domesticity thrives on emotional suppression, making queer grief unspeakable" (Kamble 175). Tanay's heartbreak is therefore doubly silenced—first by sexuality, then by caste-coded expectations of restraint.

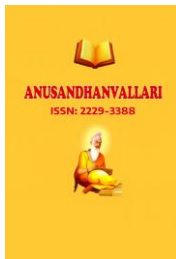
A recurring visual metaphor in the novel is the colour cobalt blue, which becomes associated with longing, vulnerability, and the paying guest's artistic temperament. In paraphrased scenes, Tanay recalls how the paying guest often painted with variations of deep blue, describing it as "a colour that held both sorrow and clarity, like the world he carried inside him." This connection between colour and emotion creates a poetic register within the narrative. Critics suggest that "the colour blue becomes an aesthetic bridge between desire and pain, reinforcing the novel's lyricism" (Savant 59). Blue marks spaces of possibility and rupture—an alternative emotional world that the siblings briefly inhabit but cannot sustain.

Importantly, *Cobalt Blue* also foregrounds the limits of queer belonging. The paying guest's refusal—or inability—to stay functions as a commentary on how queer relationships are destabilised by structural constraints. Kundalkar resists the temptation to romanticise his departure; instead, he portrays it as a predictable outcome of the social world the characters inhabit. Scholars argue that "the guest embodies the transient queer figure, always moving, always peripheral, because the centre cannot accommodate him" (Patankar 142). His departure exposes the fragility of queer intimacy in spaces shaped by caste dominance and normative expectations.

In Tanay's final reflections, pain becomes a mode of self-knowledge. Through suffering, he recognises the boundaries of his world and the emotional costs of transgressing them. Yet Kundalkar refuses to offer closure; Tanay's lament is quiet, ongoing, unresolved. His narrative ends not with transformation but with a deeper awareness of the gap between desire and possibility. This open-endedness reflects the larger reality of queer life in contemporary India, where visibility and vulnerability remain in tension.

Through its nuanced portrayal of desire, domesticity, and social hierarchy, *Cobalt Blue* reveals how queer identities are produced and constrained by caste-coded environments. Kundalkar's prose, delicate and precise, brings to life the emotional textures of longing and heartbreak while quietly exposing the structures that make such longing fraught. The novel thus provides a powerful intersectional lens for analysing how sexuality intersects with caste, class, and family—deepening the broader thematic concerns of this research paper.

**Performing Refusal, Rewriting Anger — Gendered and Caste-Marked Resistance in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You***



Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* expands the scope of intersectional inquiry by placing the female body at the centre of caste-patriarchal violence and insisting on the political force of storytelling. The novel stages an intimate yet socially embedded narrative of marital abuse, where the protagonist's suffering is not merely personal but structurally produced through caste privilege, left-liberal hypocrisy, and heteronormative expectations. Kandasamy exposes how the discourse of progressive masculinity itself can mask authoritarian entitlement, revealing that the violence endured by the narrator is both domestic and ideological (Sunder Rajan 41; Rege 112). Her work thus broadens the conceptual terrain of intersectionality by demonstrating that the oppression of women cannot be understood without locating it in interlocking systems of caste power, marital control, and cultural silencing.

Kandasamy constructs her narrator's voice through a unique blend of vulnerability and defiance. The protagonist's first-person account frequently shifts between reflective calm and fierce indictment, signalling how memory becomes a battleground where agency is reclaimed. In moments when she describes her husband's performative radicalism—his public persona of socialist solidarity contrasted with his private cruelty—the narrative exposes the contradictions within India's educated, upper-caste left (Satyanarayana 27). The narrator's realisation that "liberation promised by ideology collapses inside the home" (paraphrased) foregrounds the deep fractures between rhetoric and lived experience. Kandasamy deliberately unsettles readers by showing that even progressive spaces reproduce caste-inflected patriarchies, thus questioning the assumption that modernity necessarily dismantles social hierarchies.

A central element of this sub-section is Kandasamy's portrayal of **anger as a feminist and Dalit-feminist resource**. Unlike traditional representations of the suffering woman, Kandasamy rejects the trope of dignified silence. Her narrator's anger is articulate, creative, and socially aware, transforming the narrative into a counter-archive of resistance. Scholars such as Sharmila Rege note that Dalit women's autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writing often reshapes anger into "a mode of epistemological justice" (Rege 118). Kandasamy's text resonates deeply with this framework: the narrator does not merely recount abuse but reinterprets it through a political lens that links domestic subjugation to caste-derived male entitlement. In doing so, she reinforces an important principle of intersectionality—that identity is not the sum of separate categories but an entanglement of social forces acting simultaneously (Crenshaw 76).

An important dimension of the novel's intersectional thrust is its attention to **language**—as weapon, constraint, and eventually, liberation. The husband's compulsive need to monitor and censor the narrator's speech reflects a patriarchal anxiety about women occupying linguistic space. The narrator's counter-strategy is to write secretly, insistently, and even rebelliously. Writing becomes not only an act of survival but an act of ideological refusal, enabling her to take control of her narrative. In this sense, *When I Hit You* mirrors Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue* in depicting private diaries and personal writing as avenues for constructing forbidden or suppressed identities. Yet Kandasamy's narrator uses writing less as confession and more as confrontation. She writes not to seek empathy but to assert an unmistakable presence: a woman who will not be narrated by others.

Furthermore, the novel draws attention to the intersection of gendered violence and caste-marked intellectual spaces. The protagonist's husband may appear as a secular, rational intellectual, but his behaviour is shaped by inherited and unquestioned privilege. Kandasamy refuses to present patriarchy as merely a behavioural flaw; instead, she frames it as a historical structure embedded in caste authority. As scholars like Anupama Rao argue, caste perpetuates a system of embodied discipline that governs intimate and public lives alike (Rao 63). By portraying the narrator's husband as both ideologically articulate and emotionally tyrannical, Kandasamy critiques the ways in which caste power can hide beneath progressive self-identifications. This is intersectionality in practice: the simultaneous functioning of ideological, social, and gendered oppression.

One of the most powerful motifs in the novel is escape. The narrator's departure from the abusive marriage is not framed as a heroic moment but as a necessary act of self-preservation that is physically risky, emotionally fraught, and socially stigmatized. Kandasamy avoids melodrama; instead, she emphasizes the quiet determination of a woman who realizes that survival requires refusing both the institution of marriage and the silence demanded by society. Intersectionally, this moment marks a crucial shift in the narrative—from enduring to resisting. It asserts that reclaiming one's voice is an act of political significance, especially for women negotiating the intertwined burdens of gender and caste.

Through its unflinching exploration of domestic abuse, ideological hypocrisy, and the transformative power of writing, *When I Hit You* becomes a text of intersectional urgency. It challenges readers to recognize that violence inside the home is inseparable from the wider systems that organise Indian social life. Kandasamy's narrative not only expands the boundaries of feminist literature but also contributes to a growing body of 21st-century writing that interrogates the very foundations of social hierarchy. Her work reminds us that resistance does not always speak in dramatic gestures; sometimes it appears in the steady insistence on telling one's story, even when every structure is designed to silence it.

### **Converging Margins— Synthesising Pawar, Kamble, Kandasamy, and Kundalkar through an Intersectional Lens**

Bringing Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Meena Kandasamy, and Sachin Kundalkar into a single analytical frame reveals how intersectionality functions not merely as a theoretical tool but as a lived structure that shapes narrative form, emotional texture, and strategies of resistance. Although these writers emerge from distinct socio-cultural trajectories—Dalit feminist autobiographical traditions, contemporary feminist fiction, and queer-inflected Marathi writing—their works collectively demonstrate that identity cannot be disentangled from the matrices of caste, gender, and sexuality. Their texts articulate a shared understanding: that marginality is not a singular wound but an interwoven condition produced through overlapping systems of oppression (Crenshaw 74). At the same time, their divergences illuminate the richness of intersectional expression, where each writer mobilises unique literary strategies to confront and reimagine social hierarchies.

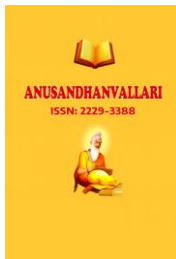
### **Shared Commitment to Revealing Structural Violence**

A common thread running through Pawar, Kamble, Kandasamy, and Kundalkar is their insistence on exposing violence not as episodic disruption but as a systemic force embedded in everyday life. In Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, discrimination is woven into domestic, social, and ritualistic practices so thoroughly that it becomes "ordinary" until consciously unmasked (Rege 101). Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* intensifies this exposure by chronicling the historical and communal dimensions of Dalit subjugation, revealing how caste violence infiltrates the most intimate spaces of survival (Omvedt 89). Kandasamy, in contrast, draws attention to the ideological veiling of violence within educated, upper-caste households, illustrating how progressive discourses can coexist with domestic tyranny (Sunder Rajan 39). Meanwhile, Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue* speaks to subtler but equally pervasive forms of structural control—norms that police sexuality, regulate desire, and enforce heteronormativity within seemingly modern, middle-class families (Satyanarayana 44). Across these writers, violence is not simply an act but a structure, reaffirming intersectionality's central insight that power operates through interconnected systems rather than isolated incidents.

### **Different Axes, Shared Burdens: Caste, Gender, and Sexuality as Interlocking Forces**

Intersectionality becomes particularly evident when we trace how each writer situates their protagonists at the crossroads of multiple identities. For Pawar and Kamble, caste is the foundational axis, shaping childhood memories, family relations, and community survival. Their narratives foreground the specific burdens borne by Dalit women, whose gendered labour, bodily vulnerabilities, and social ostracism intersect to create a multi-





layered experience of marginality (Pawar 56; Kamble 74). Kandasamy, though not writing autobiography in the same sense, extends this lineage by demonstrating how caste privilege does not shield women from patriarchal violence but can strengthen its ideological armour. In *When I Hit You*, the husband's caste-inflected intellectual authority enables his domination, revealing how gender oppression often draws legitimacy from historically entrenched social hierarchies (Rege 115).

Kundalkar introduces another vital axis—queer desire—showing how sexuality is regulated through the same normative structures that maintain caste and gender hierarchy. The unnamed paying guest in *Cobalt Blue* embodies a fluidity that threatens the family's rigid social boundaries, while Tanay and Anuja's narratives illustrate how desire becomes another site where caste-derived norms are enforced. In this way, Kundalkar extends Dalit feminist insights into a broader critique of social conformity, aligning queer marginality with other modes of silencing and discipline (Gokhale 88). Together, these writers show that identity becomes politically meaningful only when examined at the intersection of caste, gender, and sexuality—as entangled, mutually reinforcing categories.

### **Narrative Form as Resistance: Autobiography, Fragmentation, and Polyphony**

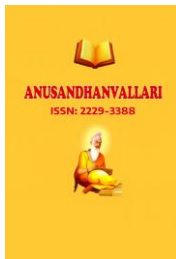
The way these writers use narrative structure to depict intersecting reality is another notable area of agreement. Pawar and Kamble use autobiography to highlight communal struggle and collective memory in addition to narrating their own personal histories. By claiming the validity of Dalit women's experiences, which have long been denied in mainstream literature, their first-person voices resist erasure (Guru 42). In order to bridge the gap between social criticism and personal suffering, Kandasamy uses a fictional framework and testimonial writing style. Her disjointed, circular structure illustrates how form can execute psychological and ideological entrapment by reflecting the cyclical process of abuse and healing (Sangari 52). Although different, Kundalkar's stylistic approach enhances this path. In order to create a polyphonic framework that reflects the opposing emotional registers of homosexual longing and heterosexual betrayal, *Cobalt Blue* employs a dual narrative, consisting of Tanay's contemplative prose and Anuja's diary-like entries. The idea of a single subject is complicated by this divided form, which is consistent with intersectionality's rejection of the idea that identity is unitary or coherent. By expressing fluidity itself through absence and fleeting glances, the paying visitor implies that certain identities are unintelligible inside prevailing frames. Therefore, the impulse behind these decisions is the same, even in cases where form differs greatly—from confessional postmodernism to autobiography—and is to challenge conventional methods of speaking, seeing, and narrating the marginalized self.

### **Divergent Strategies, Complementary Visions**

While their underlying commitments align, Pawar, Kamble, Kandasamy, and Kundalkar offer strikingly different strategies for representing oppression and survival. Pawar's tone often leans toward reflective strength, weaving resilience into depictions of hardship. Kamble adopts a sharper, more confrontational voice that foregrounds collective anger and systemic critique. Kandasamy blends lyrical beauty with a searing feminist polemic, refusing both victimhood and silence. Kundalkar, meanwhile, privileges emotional ambiguity and psychological depth, revealing the internal contradictions produced by desire within oppressive structures. These differences do not fragment the intersectional framework but enrich it, offering multiple pathways through which marginality is experienced and articulated.

### **Toward a Unified Intersectional Understanding of Contemporary Indian Literature**

Synthesising these writers reveals that intersectionality in 21st-century Indian English literature is neither a fixed method nor a singular perspective. Rather, it is a dynamic interpretive mode that emerges from lived experience and is shaped by each writer's stylistic choices. Pawar and Kamble anchor intersectionality historically and



communally; Kandasamy reworks it as a feminist confrontation with caste-patriarchy; Kundalkar extends it into the realm of queer desire and affect. Together, they demonstrate that literature becomes a vital space where hidden or silenced identities can articulate themselves, resist erasure, and imagine new social possibilities. Their works collectively affirm that the struggle against marginalisation is multidimensional, and that understanding it requires a framework capable of holding complexity, contradiction, and multiplicity.

## Conclusion

In order to demonstrate that marginality in Indian English literature of the twenty-first century cannot be explained by a single category, this study looked at the intersections of caste, gender, and queer identities in the works of Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Meena Kandasamy, and Sachin Kundalkar. Rather, these authors show how overlapping institutions that function concurrently—caste hierarchy, patriarchal control, and heteronormative expectations—create oppression.

According to Pawar and Kamble, intersectionality is revealed through the autobiographical perspectives of Dalit women, where gender and caste combine to influence selfhood, labor, and survival. Writing is positioned as a kind of community-based resistance by their narratives, which stress that individual experiences of prejudice are inextricably linked to social history.

By showing how caste privilege and patriarchal entitlement coexist in educated, left-leaning households, Kandasamy expands this concept. Her depiction of marital abuse reveals the ideological inconsistencies of progressive masculinity and demonstrates the inseparability of gendered subjugation from its caste- and social-based roots (Sunder Rajan 41).

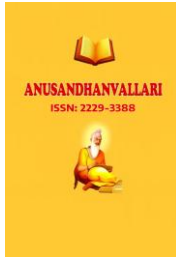
By bringing gay desire into this intersectional realm, Kundalkar shows how the same rules that govern caste-based family systems also govern sexuality. Tanay and Anuja's desire in *Cobalt Blue* highlights the brittle lines of respectability as well as the societal unease associated with non-normative identities.

Collectively, these authors demonstrate that intersectionality in Indian literature is a lived situation that shapes identity and narrative form rather than a theoretical abstraction. Their many approaches—feminist rage, queer polyphony, and autobiographical testimony—show that resistance is complex and cannot be explained from a single perspective.

In conclusion, the writings of Pawar, Kamble, Kandasamy, and Kundalkar confirm that it is necessary to pay attention to the interconnected structures that shape marginalized identities in modern-day India. Their writing broadens the ethical and creative potential of intersectionality and serves as a reminder that acknowledging the complexity and interconnectedness of oppression is the first step towards its eradication.

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