

The Binary of Culture and Politics in Premanand Gajvee's *The Strength of Our Wrists*

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Abstract

The Strength of Our Wrists (2013) explores the Marathi play on the Dalit community and navigates its readers to the socio-political milieu of the post-1950s Dalit community. Premanand Gajvee's three plays, *A Sip of Water*, *Kirwant* and *Gandhi-Ambedkar* portray the condition of Dalits and their suppression in Indian society. This paper examines the relationship between culture and politics in all three of Gajvee's plays. Gajvee never disintegrates the cultural Hindu notion from the political milieu. This paper argues that Gajvee deliberately portrays the Dalits as an organised group to highlight the inefficiency of laws regarding their upbringing and safety. The paper concludes by mentioning the lack of female characters in all three plays and the double marginalisation of Dalit women.

Keywords: Dalit; Socio-political; Suppression; Culture; Hindu

Introduction

Dalit literature saw emergence after India's independence in 1947 in English as well as the other regional languages of India. The focus of this new genre of literature was to develop a "Dalit Consciousness", as Pramod Nayar observes, in order to re-establish Dalit identity and human dignity. The term 'Dalit literature' was first used in 1958 in a conference on Dalit literature. Since then, this genre has seen a rising trend in both readers and writers. 'Dalit' is a Sanskrit word that means 'broken' or 'scattered'. 'Dalit' is a representation of a spectrum of names like 'low class', 'depressed class', 'untouchables', 'harijan', etc. While the Indian government uses the term 'Scheduled Caste' to represent the Dalits but is not inclusive of all Dalit communities in India, Dalit literature is a canon that deals with all writings by Dalit writers from across India.

In Marathi literature, Dalit writings gain prominence among its readers, with various sub-genres emerging out of it, for instance, Dalit autobiographies, plays and poetry. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, a prominent Dalit figure in India, is a Marathi-based Dalit activist known worldwide for his role in fighting for Dalit human rights. Marathi literature has acknowledged and worked efficiently for Dalit communities and has created a political movement, even before India's independence, to fight for Dalit rights. But it was only after the 1950s that many Dalit writers collectively worked for Dalit movements in India, probably because of the legal rights provided to the community.

Premanand Gajvee was one such prominent figure who wrote extensively on Dalit plays and directed them to reach a vast Marathi audience. He wrote in Marathi deliberately because he wanted to enlighten and educate the native Marathi population first before reaching a vast audience of English readers. *The Strength of Our Wrists*, translated by Shanta Gokhale and M.D. Hatkanangalekar, is a collection of three plays written in different time periods of Gajvee's life. These three plays, titled *A Sip of Water*, *Kirwant*, and *Gandhi-Ambedkar* depict the socio-political position of Dalits in pre- as well as post-independent India. Apart from the tropes of marginalisation and discrimination, Gajvee locates his characters in a space that is deficient in identity, rights, and psychological feelings. In Gajvee's plays, characters oscillate between culture, politics, and their psychological selves. This paper explores the binary of culture and politics in all three plays.

Caste and Reality

Caste has been an integral part of India. It has guided the lives of Hindu people in all aspects. The untouchables, or Dalits, were not allowed to drink water from public wells and lakes. Gajvee's first play, *A Sip of Water*, deals with this social problem where only two unnamed characters guide the flow of the play. The notion that a Dalit person consumes water from a public well or lake and the subsequent pollution is a major plot that drives the play. Death is the answer to the 'sin' of polluting the water. The pollution is dealt with by Ambedkar in his *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) where he offers a few instances of it:

“Under the rule of the Peshwas in the Maratha country, the Untouchables was not allowed to use the public streets if a Hindu was coming along, lest he should pollute the Hindu by his shadow...In Poona, the capital of the Peshwa, the Untouchable was required to carry, strung from his waist, a broom to sweep away from behind himself the dust he trod on, lest a Hindu walking on the same dust should be polluted. In Poona, the Untouchable was required to carry an earthen pot hung around his neck wherever he went- for holding his spit, lest his spit falling on the earth should pollute a Hindu who might unknowingly happen to tread on it.” (Ambedkar 35)

In the play, the two characters play the role of an upper caste Brahmin and a Dalit man.

“One: Get away, bastard! You've polluted the river, your lowborn corpse-burner.

Two: Just one sip of water, master. Not a drop in my mouth since morning. My mouth is dry, my life's in my throat.

One: Then I'll slit your throat for you, bastard...

Two: Barren without Purushartha

This civilization

Lives in the famine of tradition

The earth too is cracked, mouth gaping

Soil won't let soil have

A sip of water!" (Gajvee 11)

The action of lacking access to water is culturally mentioned in the form of six poetic verses, a somewhat uncommon feature in Marathi literature. While ancient classical texts have references to poetic verse monologues like *Abhijnanashakuntalam* (The Recognition of Shakuntala), Gajvee reintroduces this cultural tradition to establish the long struggle of the Dalit community in India. The two unnamed characters represent all Dalits and Brahmins of India. Through the attempt of not naming his characters, Gajvee is able to represent the whole community of people in a cultural space of drama, which will be watched by hundreds of Marathi people. Also, the lack of proper names among the characters deprived them of a sociological and political identity.

Further, the play provides the views of politicians on the Dalit community. The year 1977, when the play was open to the public, Dalits were still hegemonically perceived as marginalised and weak figures in Indian society. Welfare politics was not much effective in India and this can be interpreted from the following instance from the play:

“Two: The building of the dam will irrigate dot-dot-dot acres of land, produce dot-dot-dot thousand kilowatts of power, and turn night into dazzling day. Water will be supplied to dot-dot-dot thousand villages and many dot-dot-dots will be achieved on the road to progress.

One: Minister, what is this business of dots?

Two: Business? No no. It's a riddle to cover India's welfare, like a riddle cover the Indian Penal Code.

One: I don't get it.

Two: The entire existence of the project is contained in these dots.” (14)

The deliberate marginalisation of the Dalits, even after they have legal rights, reduces them to a small figure in society. In the next play in the book, *Kirwant*, Gajvee portrays the Dalit atrocities and deliberate mocking of a Dalit person. Kirwants are people who perform cremation rites and, as per the Vedas, attain heaven. But Kirwant's very act of performing rites on carcasses makes them untouchable and low-caste.

Gajvee remarkably integrates culture and religion in portraying the ruin of a Kirwant in the play. Siddheshwar, the Kirawnt who performs rites, calls his duties “ancestral heritage” and never felt worried about his social status. The play opens with Siddheshwar performing rites, and this action is persistent throughout the play. His brother, Vasudeo, is opposite to him in ideologies and actions. He refuses to learn the “art” of performing cremation rites, discards Brahmanical codes and joins the “All Hindus are One” political movement. People around him want Vasudeo to marry a Kirwant girl and ‘settle down’, but Vasudeo refuses to marry a Kirwant girl because he wants to break the caste hierarchy. Gajvee has carefully blended the character of Vasudeo with the emerging anti-Brahmin movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Vasudeo is a radical character who, although he accepts his caste as Brahmin, is ready to revolt against Brahmin ideologies.

Vasudeo can be considered a symbol of Ambedkar. Throughout the play, Vasudeo critiques the Brahmanical structure, similar to how Ambedkar fought for Dalit rights by questioning the very existence of the Hindu religion:

“Vasudeo: You think that you perform sandhya according to the brahmin dharma? But people know you as a brahmin meant to perform last rites. Brahmin by birth but profession a lowly and despicable kirwant. Your presence is unwelcome on auspicious occasions, just like the presence of untouchables.” (3)

Further,

“What salvation and heaven do you speak of? There are people dying all over- not all of them make an offering. Do the Christians do it? Do the Muslims? These are strange practices started by the priestly class so that they could make a comfortable living without working for it: in order for your forefathers to attain heaven, you must present footwear and umbrellas to brahmins. Who uses them? Do your forefathers use them? If the crow touches it, or a pig, what difference does it make?” (5)

Gajvee's symbolical representation of Ambedkar in the character of Vasudeo is to revive the views of Ambedkar's political ideas. The reference to the Hindu movement, Dalit unions, and Vasudeo's request to join the Dalit community all point towards Ambedkar's idea that Dalits should dissociate themselves from the Hindu community. In his *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar justify through factual argument the redundancy of Hindu community:

“... This division of labour is not spontaneous; it is not based on natural aptitudes. Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the caste system, in so far as it involves an attempt to appoint tasks to individuals in advance-selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents.” (Ambedkar, 47)

Further,

“As an economic organisation caste is therefore a harmful institution, inasmuch as it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.” (Ambedkar, 48)

While Ambedkar argues from a political angle, Vasudeo attempts to take step against the social construct and break the hegemony, for instance, marrying a non-kirwant girl. Yet Vasudeo ideologies are very similar to Ambedkar's ideas, and he never fails to bring these ideologies in the play.

Protest and Progress

Kirwant is also a play of protest and progress. The play commences with Devrao and Khemrao, two brothers whose father's cremation was happening, started fighting with each other for a “gold bracelet”, which an ironic on the Brahmin class.¹ Both the brothers are fighting for a materialistic thing, which shows their narrow thinking. Similarly, the play simultaneously portrays the fight over ideologies between Vasudeo and Siddheshwar, the Kirwant brothers, whose main conflict lies in the structure of the Indian caste system. Siddheshwar feels that his duty as a kirwant is his moral and religious obligation towards the Brahmin legacy he has inherited. For him, his kirwant duties are not only sacred but also an active way to live a respectable life. Vasudeo, on the other hand, is aware of the social milieu of the Kirwant community in the Brahminical social structure of India. According to him, kirwants are subaltern figures who hold social respect equal to that of the Dalits, the untouchables. That is the reason he joined the political association of a collective Hindu group. Both the brothers have oral fights on the ideology of whether to live as a kirwant, socially disrespected among Brahmins, or leave the profession and join a new benevolent social opportunity. The binary of two conflicting ideologies portrayed by Gajvee serves as a textual resistance aimed at critiquing

¹ Brahmins are in the top position of Hindu caste hierarchy.

Brahmin readers. Like Ambedkar, Gajvee is not accepting of the minority status of the Dalits and readily accuses the high castes of malpractice against them. Vasudeo's comment, "God helps only those who are strong," (Gajvee, 3) brings the very title of the play to a complete resolution. He is present in the strength of our wrists" (Gajvee, 3), bringing the very title of the play to a complete resolution. Vasudeo is ready to be violent in order to rebel against the upper-caste Brahmins. Gajvee vividly portrays the dehumanisation of Dalits, who are subjected to systemic violence and humiliation. Rituals that should symbolise peace and closure after death become instruments of caste hegemony, reinforcing the oppression of marginalised communities.

The trope of food and water is very prominent in the Dalit literature. The inability to access water and food by the Dalits and the subsequent marginalisation reduces the Dalits to subalterns. But Gajvee incorporates this idea into the Brahmin structure in *Kirwant*. Digambarshastri purposefully withheld the prasada (food offering) from Siddheshwar during a prayer, citing the kirwants as "corpse collectors" and therefore impure. Siddheshwar accepted his humiliation and silently returned home without mentioning this incident. The internal imbalance and fight among the Brahmin community is brought to the surface by Gajvee and is openly shown in the theatre, which may create a situation of violence among the play's audience but nonetheless delves into the deeper analysis of caste politics.

The third play in *The Strength of Our Wrists*, titled *Gandhi-Ambedkar*, translated by Shanta Gokhale, depicts the protest from a political lens. Unlike the other two plays by Gajvee, *Gandhi-Ambedkar* is a farcical depiction of the political divide between the ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar. The play has only three characters: Gandhi, Ambedkar and a clown. The play attempts to rebuild the history of 1930s colonial India by portraying the discussions between Gandhi and Ambedkar and their disputes. Gandhi, according to Gajvee, never made an attempt to assimilate the Dalits into the mainstream society. The efforts to adopt radical policies for the Dalits were just a political attempt to create his own personality.

Gandhi in this play is portrayed as a weak figure. He dominated repeatedly by Ambedkar and the Clown. The language used by the clown for Gandhi is liberal and not political:

"Before you knew it, he put you in a fix, didn't he? Has anybody dared question you till today? He's turned all your greatness to mud. He called you an illusion. You had been

concerned about the fifth varna from even before Ambedkar was born. Did all that thinking amount to a mere illusion" (Gajvee, 99)

"Is it for inner cleansing or a cover-up for your political failure? You behave in such incomprehensible ways sometimes." (102)

"...Isn't that why this towel-clad Gandhiji pulled out the weapon of fast unto death and brought Ambedkar down to the ground so that his political sun would continue to blaze?" (106)

"Gandhiji also quarrelled with Kasturba and in the heat of anger was ready to throw her out of the house. I don't understand how these men who fight to win justice for the world quarrel like common men with their near and dear ones. Man remains basically common, very common, full of weaknesses, however knowledgeable he might become with learning and reading." (111)

The reason behind the casual language used by the clown for Gandhi is that the clown represents the intellectual class of the 1900s, who questioned Gandhi's decisions and put forward their opinions. The clown can probably be the intellectual Dalit class of pre-colonial India, who is aware of the social and political milieu of the Dalits. In Gajvee's play, Gandhi must repeatedly answer the questions posed by both the radical Ambedkar and the Clown, who challenge his efforts. The concept of 'fast unto death' of Gandhi is observed in the play as a "political weapon" used against Ambedkar and the Dalit community. This politicisation of Dalits is the main theme Gajvee brings out in the play, and Gandhi forms a weak background figure. While Ambedkar fights with his intellect, Gandhi readily adopts the fast-unto-death mechanism to go forward with his ideologies. Gajvee's Gandhi is an integration of Congress ideas and a colonial mindset.

Ambedkar in *Gandhi-Ambedkar* is an extension of the collective voice of the early twentieth-century Dalits. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar is portrayed as strong and assertive, although at various instances in the play, Ambedkar's wishes are not fulfilled by Gandhi. Gajvee's Ambedkar and the Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* have similar notions of society – he protests and critiques the Brahmin class. Gajvee's portrayal of Ambedkar is powerful, emphasising his role as a relentless advocate for the rights of Dalits and a visionary thinker dedicated to dismantling the caste system. Through sharp and impassioned dialogues, Ambedkar critiques Gandhi's approach to caste reform, arguing that Gandhi's methods are superficial and fail to address the structural oppression ingrained in the caste hierarchy:

“Untouchability is not a blot on the Hindu faith. It is a blot on our bodies and we ourselves must wash it away. To understand the pain of untouchability, you had once said, ‘God should give me birth in a family of untouchables in my next life.’” (Gajvee, 98)

“I find the four varna system revolting. There is no other social system in the world that is as base and abhorrent. Every Hindu will have the very words brahmin, kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. All the scriptures which uphold the supremacy of brahmins will have to be destroyed. That is why, if you remember, I publicly burned the *Manusmriti* in Mahad a few years ago².” (118)

Unlike Gandhi, who sought to reform the caste system through the concept of trusteeship and the upliftment of "Harijans" (a term Ambedkar rejected), Ambedkar calls for its complete annihilation, asserting that no true equality can exist within a system that inherently dehumanises a section of society. Gajvee portrays Ambedkar as deeply analytical and unyielding, emphasising his demand for Dalit agency and independence rather than relying on the goodwill of the upper castes. The play situates Ambedkar as a voice of radical transformation, challenging the paternalistic attitudes of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, which he believed were insufficient to address the systemic marginalisation of Dalits. By dramatizing these ideological confrontations, Gajvee not only highlights Ambedkar's steadfast commitment to social justice but also raises critical questions about the nature of reform, revolution, and the intersection of politics and morality in shaping India's future.

Transgression and Education

The very act of writing is transgressive in context to the Dalit writers. Even after the 1950s, when India became a republic and untouchability was abolished, not many Dalit writers published their writings because Dalit readers were a minority, the majority being illiterate. Gajvee wrote for the post-1970s Marathi Dalits, who were literate in their regional Marathi language, and those who were not could watch the plays and understand the context. It can be said that Dalit writings were more widely accessible, and even with fewer readers, they were able to establish themselves, unlike English, which Meenakshi Malhotra observes in her *The Perishable Empire*:

² 25 December 1927.

“Indian novels in English, a body of writing that has gained international visibility today, went unnoticed in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and not necessarily because of numerical paucity or quality inferiority.” (Mukherjee, 12)

Dalit writings serve as a powerful act of transgression, challenging centuries of oppression, exclusion, and silencing within the dominant social and literary traditions. These writings, rooted in the lived experiences of Dalits, reject the hegemonic narratives of caste-based oppression perpetuated by upper-caste elites, instead offering a subversive voice that reclaims agency and identity. By openly addressing the brutal realities of caste discrimination, untouchability, and systemic injustice, Dalit literature disrupts the sanitised portrayals of Indian society often found in mainstream literature. This act of writing becomes a radical form of resistance, defying the traditional boundaries of caste that sought to render Dalits invisible or voiceless. Dalit authors, poets, and activists use literature as a tool to articulate pain, anger, and resilience, as well as to envision a more just and equitable society. Their works expose the deeply ingrained inequalities in social, political, and cultural systems, thereby unsettling the complacency of privileged audiences. Furthermore, Dalit writings dismantle the aesthetic conventions of "high" literature by prioritising authenticity and raw emotion over elitist notions of beauty or subtlety. As an act of transgression, Dalit literature not only reclaims the right to self-representation but also confronts and dismantles the oppressive frameworks of caste, offering an alternative vision of humanity and social justice.

In Gajvee's play *Kirwant*, we meet Madhu, son of Siddheshwar, who in scene two is reading a Sanskrit text. Sanskrit texts can only be read by Brahmins, but for Madhu, it is a privilege because as a son of a Kirwant, he cannot read 'privileged' literary texts. But this privilege is only short-lived, because by the time the play ends, Madhu is forced to read the texts which kirwants are supposed to read, the cremation mantras, "Sobbing, Madhu starts reading the Garud Puran, and Vasudeo watches helplessly." (88) Madhu cannot resist this new life as Kirwant because now he has lost his father, and now he is supposed to carry forward his ancestors' legacy. Madhu's transgression was only limited by his elite English education and reading Sanskrit writings. Madhu moves to de-escalation, from transgression to aligning with the hegemony. This scenario is very rare in a Dalit text where a character moves against transgression. Usually, Dalit writers create texts that consider transgression a crucial factor and conclude with a successful act of transgression. But Gajvee reverses this process and allows a Brahmin Kirwant child to leave his transgressive act and move to a conventional way of living his life as a Kirwant. The reason is probably that Gajvee wanted to show the brutality of the

society that cannot allow the repressed class to gain access to the privileged things, which are mostly assets of the upper class. Madhu is also the future Siddheshwar and Vasudeo. He will have to accept the fate and perform kirwant duties even if he resists. Vasudeo, who actively revolted against the society, finally “watches helplessly”, and his silence can be attributed to his subjugation to the system. He no longer revolts and rebels against the powerful Brahmins.

Siddheshwar’s transgression was futile – he could not break away from his Kirwant social status. When he attempted to move away from his social position and ‘stay at home’ as Vasudeo had commanded, the Brahmins ostracised him and replaced him with another kirwant to perform cremation duties. Ultimately, Siddheshwar was left with only one option: to submit his defeat and return to his duties. His short-lived transgression is nothing but a futile attempt to radically rebel against the system, and his ultimate submission is his movement from Kirwant to a Dalit, which can be interpreted from Digambar’s treatment of Siddheshwar: “Digambar...clears his throat and comes near the steps to spit; he tries to spit on Siddheshwar, but he has moved away, and Digambar now spits in another direction.” (74) Further, Digambar ordered Siddheshwar to kill Vasudeo as a sacred act to safeguard the Hindu religion and his Kirwant identity and legacy. Of course, as readers know, Siddheshwar never actually kills his brother, but he repeatedly thinks about Digambar’s words instructing him to kill Vasudeo. This action of killing a Kirwant by a Kirwant is to weaken the voices of the already suppressed Kirwant community.

Siddheshwar almost goes insane by the end of the play. He cannot think properly, contemplate situations and act accordingly:

“Under extreme psychological pressure, Digambarshastri’s words whirl about his mind” (83)

“The acute pain in Siddheshwar’s head grows, and he feels a shooting pain in his chest. He holds his chest tightly and collapses.” (87)

The movement from sanity to insanity of Siddheshwar points to the fact that he becomes a culprit of the dominating suppressive forces of upper-caste Brahmins. Here Foucault’s cultural madness does not align with the madness of Siddheshwar. It is probably because Siddheshwar’s madness, or insanity, is caused by the societal force and friction which he repeatedly encounters, and the culture factor is no longer an association. Siddheshwar, though deemed “mad,” is portrayed as a character who challenges the hypocrisy, inhumanity, and

contradictions embedded in the traditions and practices of the Brahminical caste system. His so-called insanity emerges not as a mental defect but as a profound, symbolic rejection of a system that prioritises ritual over humanity. Siddheshwar's insanity is deeply rooted in his traumatic experiences and the moral dilemmas he faces as a Kirwant, someone who performs last rites but remains alienated and morally confined by his caste-bound duties. His behaviour and language, often disjointed and chaotic, reflect a fractured psyche torn apart by the oppressive structures around him. At the same time, this "madness" functions as a form of rebellion, exposing the absurdity of a society that dehumanises individuals in the name of religion and purity. Gajvee uses Siddheshwar's descent into madness as a lens to critique the suffocating rigidity of traditionalism, where deviation from the norm is punished by being labelled insane. Siddheshwar's character becomes a tragic yet poignant representation of those who cannot reconcile the disparity between the idealism of faith and the cruelty of its application, making his madness not just personal but a metaphorical commentary on societal decay.

Agency and Narrative

It is quite common for the critics and the readers to notice that there is only one woman character, Revati, in the play *Kirwant*, and no other women characters are there in the other two plays by Gajvee. Dalit literature usually accommodates women characters because many Dalit writings in India have provided a voice to Dalit women. Critics have accused Gajvee of making all three plays 'political' without providing a nuanced social scenario. Gajvee's sole woman character, Revati, is neither submissive nor rebellious.

Revati, in Premanand Gajvee's *Kirwant*, is a deeply layered character who epitomises the plight of women trapped in the oppressive structures of caste, religion, and patriarchy. As the wife of Siddheshwar, the protagonist, Revati represents a voice of suppressed humanity and reason in a world governed by rigid traditions. Her life is shaped and constrained by the expectations placed upon her as a Brahmin woman, but her character resists and questions these roles, embodying a quiet defiance against societal norms. Revati's predicament reflects the struggles of women who are simultaneously silenced and burdened by religious orthodoxy, with her identity reduced to her caste and her obligations. Despite her suffering, she demonstrates immense resilience, compassion, and an innate sense of justice, often acting as a counterpoint to the madness and disillusionment of her father. Her attempts to reconcile her love for her family with her desire for freedom and individuality highlight the internal conflict faced by women forced to navigate the suffocating expectations of a patriarchal society.

Through Revati, Gajvee critiques the gendered inequities of traditional systems, showing how women bear the brunt of maintaining oppressive religious and cultural practices. Revati's character becomes a symbol of both endurance and rebellion, making her an integral part of the play's exploration of human suffering and resistance within a deeply flawed social order.

The lack of agency of Revati and the subsequent death of her husband, Siddheshwar, leaves her completely ruined and vulnerable. She barely protests in the play but seizes every opportunity to voice her opinion; she prefers living with untouchables to living with Kirwants. She is aware of her position in the house and society. Also, Revati is not very active in the play. Her scenes are very few and restricted to domestic space only; furthermore, she has no female friends to talk to and discuss her issues with. The problem is that Revati is double marginalised; being a Dalit and, second, being a woman in a patriarchal society reduces her to a lack of personal identity as well, along with the lack of agency. Revati does not own anything as a character, and no male character is ready to listen to her – Siddheshwar loses her control over her, Vasudeo refuses to marry a Kirwant girl at Revati's request, and Madhu is not accepting of the fact that he should stop visiting his friend's house just for the sake that they had treated him badly. Revati is a portrayal of Dalit women who find it very hard to create their own spaces, identities, and opinions.

Next, the narrative of all three plays by Gajvee revolves around the political milieu of pre- and post-independent India. While *A Sip of Water* is a harsh criticism of the social treatments the Dalit receive, *Kirwant* is an irony on the treatment of one Brahmin group by another. The narrative structures of both these plays are very different yet connected. In *A Sip of Water* only two unnamed characters present the play and keep on shuffling their characters according to the play's story. The play, unlike *Kirwant*, does not have any parts. It is only a flow of action with breaks in between. One incident in the play, where a Dalit man is beaten because he drew water from a public water well, is followed in *Kirwant*, where Siddheshwar dies because of the rigidity of the Hindu caste structure.

The narrative's structure, while linear on the surface, reveals a sophisticated layering of thematic depth, enabling the play to convey not just a story but the suffocating weight of inherited trauma, resistance, and social entrapment. The play unfolds in a manner that mirrors the cyclical and inescapable nature of caste oppression. The narrative begins with a seemingly ordinary scene but quickly plunges into the brutal reality of its protagonist's life, setting the

tone for an emotionally charged journey. The progression of events—marked by moments of intense conflict, humiliation, and fleeting hope—does not adhere to a traditional linear resolution. Instead, Gajvee's structure leaves the audience with a sense of unease and incompleteness, echoing the endless struggles of the oppressed. This unresolved quality is deliberate, forcing the audience to confront the systemic inertia of caste prejudice rather than finding solace in a neat conclusion.

What makes the narrative structure particularly effective is its use of fragmentation to reflect the inner turmoil of the protagonist. The dialogue, rich in raw emotional intensity, shifts seamlessly between the external struggles of physical labour and social ostracism and the internal disintegration of the protagonist's psyche. This fragmentation mirrors the duality of existence under systemic oppression—the physical endurance required for survival and the psychological scars that deepen over time. Gajvee's decision to weave the protagonist's memories and present interactions into the fabric of the narrative amplifies this sense of disorientation, making the audience feel the weight of the protagonist's fractured reality.

Furthermore, the play employs the metaphor of the wrist—a site of strength, vulnerability, and ultimately, rebellion—as a structural motif. The wrist symbolises the protagonist's labour and identity but also the site of pain and exploitation. Gajvee repeatedly draws attention to this motif through key moments in the narrative, using it as a structural anchor that binds the themes of physical endurance, societal violence, and the possibility of defiance. This recurring motif lends the narrative a symbolic coherence, even as the events themselves resist tidy categorisation.

The climax, far from offering catharsis, reinforces the cyclical structure of the narrative. The protagonist's ultimate act of rebellion is not framed as a resolution but as a painful assertion of agency in a system that allows little room for change. Gajvee's refusal to provide a clear resolution is an indictment of societal complacency and forces the audience to grapple with the unresolved nature of caste oppression. By resisting traditional storytelling conventions and embracing fragmentation, cyclicity, and thematic recurrence, Gajvee constructs a narrative that not only reflects the lived reality of his characters but also confronts the audience with the systemic and enduring nature of caste-based injustice. The result is a powerful, unsettling piece of theatre that demands both emotional and intellectual engagement.

Conclusion

The Strength of Our Wrists (2013) is a crucial piece of Dalit literature that analyses the binary of culture and politics among Dalits. The three plays are not homogenous. All three plays are unique, and they create a common Dalit identity of marginalisation and suppression. Gajvee's main theme is to show the political structure of post-independent India and how this structure suppressed or rather eradicated the Dalit identity. Gajvee's play is an attempt to bring culture and politics together.

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