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ARTICLE

Epistemic Exclusion: Theorizing Dalit Feminism

Swati Arora[1], Katrina Hutchison[2] and Wendy Rogers[3]

[1]School of Humanities, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, [2]School of Humanities, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia and [3]School of Humanities, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia
Corresponding author: Swati Arora; Email: swati.arora@hdr.mq.edu.au

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Abstract
Conceptual innovation is highly prized in Western Anglophone philosophy. Yet it often stems from a relatively narrow tradition that takes little account of contributions from other cultures and philosophical practices. We illustrate this point using the example of work done by Dalit feminists on identifying and addressing hermeneutical injustice. Despite their relevance, Dalit feminist contributions are virtually unknown and remain unrecognized in Anglophone philosophical discussions of hermeneutical injustice. This article aims to investigate the reasons for this neglect. One potential reason is the generally low status accorded to experiential knowledge in epistemology, which is pivotal to Dalit feminist accounts. Another reason concerns systematic bias against non-Western philosophy, which may reflect prejudicial stereotypes and the privileging of existing disciplinary norms. We argue that these reasons may explain the exclusion of Dalit feminists' scholarship. In light of this, we offer two modest suggestions. First, philosophers should cultivate greater openness to citing texts by non-philosophers where these texts are relevant to the topic at hand. Second, we argue that a more embedded and extensive practice of cross-cultural philosophy or comparative philosophy is needed. These two suggestions may reduce neglect of philosophically rich traditions such as Dalit feminism.

> We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low.
>
> Bama 2000

If philosophy consists in systematic attempts to address fundamental questions about the nature of reality, the nature and methods of knowledge, the basis of moral aesthetic values and judgments, the self, and the meaning and goal of religion, then there is abundant philosophy in Indian, Chinese, and Islamic

> thought. (I cannot speak of African philosophy because of my own ignorance, but I would presume that it too embodies systematic reflection about the nature of things).
>
> Prabhu 2002

1. Introduction

Bama Faustina Soosairaj's autobiographical text *Karukku* illustrates various aspects of oppression that the Dalit community, especially Dalit women, faces within India's caste-based hierarchy (Bama 2000). Having a subaltern identity herself as a Tamil Dalit Christian woman, Bama's work explores the connections between intersecting structures of oppression and the mechanisms of social systems that produce and sustain them. She notes that structural oppressions are perpetuated and upheld through both asymmetrical relations of power and patriarchal domination. Bama uses her writing as a political protest against caste-, class-, and gender-based oppression, and makes an appeal for change and self-empowerment through education and political engagement.

Historically, social movements[1] in India have primarily focused on advocating for the rights and identities of either the Dalit community or upper-caste women. While these movements have played a crucial role in addressing caste- and gender-based oppression, they have often overlooked the intersectional experiences of discrimination Dalit women face (Chakravarti 2018 [2003]; Guru 1995; Paik 2014; Rege 2003). For example, the Dalit panther movement of the 1970s fought for the rights of the Dalit community by critiquing the dominant Brahmanical caste system through protests and literature (Gokhale-Turner 1979). Meanwhile, the Indian feminist movement addressed issues such as Sati, widow remarriage, and property rights which were primarily relevant to upper-caste Hindu women. Although these movements made significant strides in challenging caste- and gender-based oppression, their failure to address intersectionality led to "a universalisation of what was in reality the middle class, upper caste women's experiences or the dalit male experience" (Rege 1998, WS-42).

This situation started to change during the 1970s and 1980s. With increased access to education and technology, Dalit women began publishing autobiographies and novels in their native languages such as Tamil, Hindi, and Telugu.[2] These autobiographies are literal *testimonios*[3] or narrative witnessing (Rege 2020, 132) in which Dalit women provide first-hand accounts of the oppression and injustices they as individuals and communities face due to their caste and gender identities. Additionally, from the early 1990s, Dalit feminist scholars and activists actively documented and recounted the history of Dalit women's experiences in their academic writings, thereby providing the vocabulary and conceptual resources for Dalit women to understand and describe the harms they experienced (Guru 1995; Paik 2014; Omvedt 1993, 1994; Rege 1998, 2003). This work by both Dalit women and Dalit scholars and activists has been crucial in identifying, articulating, and addressing the hermeneutical deficits that had historically reinforced Dalit women's marginal social position.

Almost 25 years after these publications by Dalit feminists[4], the term "hermeneutical injustice" was coined and defined by Miranda Fricker in her book *Epistemic injustice* (2007). Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as the phenomenon that occurs when the interpretative and expressive capacities of marginalized subjects are unfairly undermined, or, as she puts it, "when a gap in collective interpretative resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences"

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(2007, 1). Her articulation of the concept makes no mention of the significant historical contributions of Dalit feminists whose corpus of work identified and articulated hermeneutical deficits, and responded to these deficits by creating hermeneutical tools and resources. Although Dalit scholars do not develop a theory of hermeneutical injustice, they nevertheless demonstrate awareness of the hermeneutical injustices their work addresses, and the need for conceptual resources to mitigate these injustices.[5] As such, this work is a precursor to Fricker's theorization of the concept hermeneutical injustice. Their work is not the only precursor to Fricker's analysis; likewise, in the West, women of color made significant contributions to the identification of hermeneutical injustices and the deliberate development of new hermeneutical resources long before the concept was labeled as such (Davis 1983; Lorde et al., 1993; Richardson 1987; Collins 1986). While we acknowledge the important contribution of Fricker's work for conceptualizing and popularizing the distinctive term "hermeneutical injustice," in this paper, our first aim is to highlight the significant work of Dalit feminists who have identified injustices with respect to inadequate conceptual resources, unfair credibility ascriptions, and systematically biased epistemological systems, and subsequently, developed conceptual resources to address them. Their work has been neglected in Western philosophical work on hermeneutical injustice, and deserves greater attention within feminist philosophy. A further aim is to investigate the reasons for this neglect. We argue that the exclusion of Dalit feminist literature from Western feminist philosophies is part of a larger problem of exclusions within philosophy.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we describe two key sources of hermeneutical injustice that are a focus of Dalit feminist scholarship and sites for the development of new hermeneutical resources: (1) "Brahmanical patriarchy" and "Dalit patriarchy"; and (2) the "Devadasi tradition". In sections 3 and 4, we explore the reasons for the neglect of Dalit feminist scholarship. In section 3, we argue that experiential knowledge has low status in philosophical knowledge hierarchies for sometimes illegitimate reasons. Given the role of *testimonios* in Dalit feminist scholarship and concept development, disregarding experiential knowledge problematically excludes potentially valuable sources of philosophical insight. Rather, the intellectual contributions of Dalit feminists' merit substantive recognition within the philosophical canon, particularly in scholarship on hermeneutical injustice, as their lived experiences of intersectional oppression identifies and analyzes manifestations of hermeneutical injustice that both complement and extend current philosophical understandings of the concept. In section 4, we investigate the exclusion of non-Western philosophy from dominant Anglophone philosophical discourse. We suggest that non-Western philosophies have been epistemically excluded for reasons related to both systemic biases and disciplinary norms. We argue that explicitly embracing comparative philosophy might help to overcome biases and revise norms in ways that will enrich philosophy.

2. Resisting hermeneutical marginalization: Dalit feminists' work as conceptual tools

The caste system in India is an ancient institution derived from the dominant religious scriptures of the Hindus, such as the *Manusmriti*.[6]. The term "caste" in English is used to refer to both the *varna* (meaning color) and the *Jati* systems (Deshpande 2002, 2011). The *varna* system refers to an ancient division of Hindus into four hereditary, mutually exclusive categories, each associated with specific occupations: Brahmins (clergymen),

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Kshatriyas (warriors and royalty), Vaishyas (traders, merchants, and businessmen), and Shudras (servants and laborers). Over time, a fifth category, the Atishudras (the lowliest of the low) was introduced; these are often referred to as "outcastes" or "untouchables" of India (Kumar 2021; Kaminsky & Long, 2011).

However, the operative category that determines contemporary social structures in India is governed by the concept of *jati*. The *jatis* share basic characteristics with the *varna* system, but follow a more complex system of social stratification and rules of conduct (Deshpande 2011; Gupta 1980).[7] The relationship between a specific *jati* and its corresponding *varna* can be subject to regional variation, as *jatis* are closely tied to local customs and historical developments within specific geographical areas. Caste-based oppression is most pronounced against the lowest strata of caste hierarchies, particularly the Shudras and the Atishudras. Since the 1970s, the term "Dalit" has been embraced as a self-chosen political identity by a range of historically marginalized and oppressed groups in Indian society (Rani 2013).

The term "Dalit" in Sanskrit is derived from the root *dal*, which means "amputated, stepped on, split, broken, burst, destroyed or crushed" (Narayan 2006, 34).[8] In the nineteenth century, a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary, Jyotirao Govindrao Phule first used the term "Dalit" to describe oppressed and marginalized communities of Indian society (Ghose 2003). In 1928 B. R. Ambedkar defined Dalits as people who have been exploited socially, culturally, and politically by Brahmanical ideology in his journal *Bahishkrut Bharat* (India of the Outcaste). In the 1960s, the Dalit Panthers in India politicized the term, turning the language of their oppression into a source of pride. Finally, in the twentieth century, the term gained broad acceptance and common usage in India to highlight Dalits' sense of self-assertion and agency (Gorringe 2005).

Dalits have been, and continue to be, victimized through a structural hierarchy perpetuated by the caste system. Dalits are oppressed, exploited, discriminated against, and excluded from social, political, and cultural rights. In particular, Dalit women suffer severe oppression through the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender—that is, as members of the lower caste, as laborers subject to class-based oppression, and as women experiencing patriarchal oppression (Chakravarti 2018 [2003], 135; Paik 2014). As Tomar remarks, "three interlocking systems of caste, class and patriarchy create multidimensionality, simultaneity and intensity of oppression, which is destructive to the experiences of Dalit women" (Tomar 2013, 2).

In *Epistemic injustice* (2007), Miranda Fricker gives explicit formulation to a phenomenon of oppression experienced by marginalized subjects of society, which she calls hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when one's status and agency as an intelligible communicator are severely constrained, or when the meaning-making and meaning-sharing capacities of individuals are undermined. Although Dalit feminists did not use the term, they have long drawn attention to gender- and caste-based injustices of this type. These scholars identified the hermeneutical disadvantages and harms arising from oppression related to Brahmanical caste ideology. They also took concrete steps to address those harms by creating hermeneutical resources (autobiographies, poetry, conceptual repertoire, and so on) available to the wider public. Consequently, these hermeneutical resources serve as a crucial means by which Dalit women can understand, interpret, and communicate their experiences of harm.

Arguably, the development of conceptual resources drawn from Dalit women's lived experiences predates the 1970s. Historian Shailaja Paik (2014) suggests that as early as Muktabai Salve's 1855 essay "Mang Maharachya Dukhvisayi" (The grief of the Mangs and the Mahars), Dalit women were "constructing conceptual categories from

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their lived experiences of everyday discrimination and struggle at the margins of society" (Paik 2014, 80). However, since Muktabai's work predates the current conceptual understanding of Dalit identity, we focus on more recent examples.

Below, we provide two examples to support our claim. The first concerns the Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchies, and the second concerns the evolving norms of the devadasi tradition over several centuries. These examples serve as exemplars of hermeneutical injustice, illustrating how Dalit women both articulated and conceptualized their experiences of harm, and developed hermeneutical tools and resources to combat these injustices. Here we engage with Dalit women's autobiographical[9] narratives as primary sources to elucidate instances of hermeneutical injustice. These autobiographical narratives have been instrumental in the development of new conceptual frameworks within Dalit feminist scholarship and activism.

2.1 Brahmanical patriarchy and Dalit patriarchy

The Dalit Panthers movement in the 1970s significantly influenced Indian literature, including the emergence of Dalit women's voices and the rise of autobiography as an important literary space for self-expression and social critique (Brueck 2019; Sethi and Nayak 2020). Literature authored by Dalit women illustrates their intersectional oppression (Bama 2000; Baisantri 1999; Bama 1994/2008; Pawar 2009). In this context, we discuss an autobiography *Sangati*, by Tamil Dalit writer Bama (Bama 1994/2008), in conjunction with the autobiography of Dalit woman Baby Kamble, *The prisons we broke* (initially titled *Jina Amucha)* (1986/2008*)*. Both *Sangati* and *The prisons we broke* (originally published in Tamil and Marathi respectively), vividly describe the lived experiences of patriarchal oppression operating within the Brahmanical caste-based system. Both texts illustrate a form of epistemic injustice as conceptualized by Gaile Pohlhaus (2017) in which dominant institutions and cognitive practices (here the Brahmanical system) sustain and enforce unjust power relations, resulting in hermeneutical disadvantages for some, in particular Dalit women.

In India, patriarchal norms and practices have historical, cultural, and systemic roots. Patriarchy here refers to a set of social institutions and practices that deny women independence, thereby making them dependent on men for their sustenance and survival, and prioritize men in the allocation of resources (e.g. property, education, and healthcare) and power (e.g. decision-making authority) (Malhotra et al. 1995). "Brahmanical patriarchy" refers to a social system in which caste hierarchy (Brahmanical) and gender hierarchy (patriarchy) intersect to reinforce and justify the subordination of women. Over the centuries, Brahmanical patriarchy has played a significant role in subordinating and oppressing Dalit women.

Dalit autobiographies illustrate how the Brahmanical system is fundamentally intertwined with patriarchal oppression. As Rege claims, the caste system is dependent on patriarchy: "[it] can be maintained only through the controls on women's sexuality and in this sense women are the gateways to the caste system" (Rege 1998, WS-42). The caste system enforces strict rules compelling women to marry within their caste, punishing those who defy this norm. This prohibition on inter-caste marriages serves as a critical mechanism for preserving the caste structure. In Bama's *Sangati*, the tragic story of Esakki illustrates the brutal enforcement of this caste-based norm. The narrator's Paatti or grandmother recounts, Esakki "was butchered to death" (Bama 1994/2008, 53). Esakki's brothers, acting as self-appointed guardians of caste purity and family honor, first behead Esakki for daring to marry outside of her own caste, and then

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mutilate her pregnant body to terminate her almost full-term fetus. The brutality of Esakki's death brings her back as a "pey" or spirit who possesses girls and women, especially virgins. Although initially frightened by the tales of these spirits, the narrator, as she matures, understands that such stories serve to impose social control, conditioning girls and women to conform to caste-based marriage norms through fear and self-regulation. Highlighting the connection between patriarchal dominance and the story of peys, the narrator says:

> We need not fear peys and, what's more, neither do we need to fear men. But now we are frightened of the dark of going anywhere alone; they create terrors for you on every side, and wherever you look ... They tell us all these stories, take away our freedom, and control our movements. (58)

Esakki's story serves an important purpose; it works as a cautionary tale by inculcating fear of patriarchal retribution for girls and women who marry outside their caste, thereby ensuring that the boundaries of the caste system are not breached, and curtails female freedom as peys prey only on women.

That Dalit communities fail to resist these Brahmanical practices of patriarchal domination seems odd, as it is these communities who primarily face the brunt of the caste system. However, Bama reveals further the intricate power dynamics between upper-caste men and Dalit men, highlighting how economic leverage is used as a tool for their control and subjugation (Bama 1994/2008). The upper-caste men's control over economic resources, particularly access to employment, creates a structural dependency that limits the autonomy and agency of Dalit men. Another story in *Sangati*, of Dalit woman Mariamma, demonstrates this dependency. When Mariamma is molested by an upper-caste man but escapes his grasp, the man fabricates a story that it was Mariamma who instigated the behavior. Mariamma is humiliated and later fined by the village council for her alleged action. Due to the caste power dynamics, Dalit men within the community fail to support Mariamma, even when the upper-caste village landlord lectures, "it is you female chicks who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do hundred things and still get away with it. You girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies" (26). Commenting on the injustice that Mariamma faced, the narrator of *Sangati* states:

> When I thought of Mariamma's life history, I was filled with such pain and anger. Because of some upper-caste man's foolishness, she was made the scapegoat, and her whole life was destroyed ... I was disgusted by it. I wanted to get hold of all those who had brought her to this state, bite them, chew them up, and spit them out. (42)

The stories of Esakki and Mariamma are powerful exemplars of the intersectional oppression faced by Dalit women, illustrating ways in which Brahmanical patriarchy dominates and suppresses Dalit women. The stories also demonstrate the pervasive societal norm noted by Chakravarti (1993) that women's sexuality must be controlled and regulated by men to maintain the hegemony of the Brahmanical caste system.

Baby Kamble's *The prison we broke* also provides an exposition of how caste and patriarchy intersect to perpetuate exploitative practices against Dalit women (1986/2008). Her narrative reveals that Dalit men, influenced by Brahmanical patriarchal

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ideology, often impose harsh restrictions on the movement, education, and sexuality of Dalit women. Kamble herself describes how, like other women of her community, she faced physical and sexual torture at the hands of Dalit men. The domination and assault of women was so common that Dalit women (including her) never raised voices against it. She adds that she was not even willing to write about her physical assault because "it was the fate of most women; I wasn't an exception. So why write about it, I felt" (156).

Kamble describes how her father took pride in keeping her mother confined: "In those days, it was the custom to keep women at home, behind the threshold. The honour enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house . . . My father had locked up my aai in his house, like a bird in a cage" (5). Here patriarchy operating within Dalit communities mirrors the Brahmanical practice of confining women to the domestic sphere.

In Baby Kamble's narrative, she recounts the obligations of Mahar (a sub-category of Dalit) women if they encounter upper-caste men in public spheres, including avoiding direct interactions and chanting, "The humble Mahar women fall at your feet, Master" (52). Failure to do so precipitates severe punishments. Kamble describes an incident where a newlywed Mahar woman fails to bow down to an upper-caste man. He then calls all the Mahar women to the public sphere, shouting, "Who, just tell me, who the hell is that new girl? Doesn't she know that she has to bow down to the master? Shameless bitch! How dare she pass me without showing due respect?" (53). The mother-in-law has to beg mercy on behalf of her daughter-in-law: "No, no kind master! That girl is a new animal in the herd! Quite foolish and ignorant. If she has erred, I, her sasra, fall at your feet, but please forgive us for this crime" (53).

Kamble makes it clear that the harassment of Dalit women is structural. It works to reinforce the perception that they are inferior to their own men and the men of other, especially upper-caste communities. The harassment solidifies their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy, undermining their capacity to resist injustice. Given these constraints, Dalit women's autobiographies function as both accounts of Brahmanical practices of domination and as instruments of resistance and protest.

More recently, Dalit feminists and scholars focus on conceptualizing these experiences in scholarly terms. This includes the strategic creation of hermeneutical tools as part of the activism and resistance for the broader Dalit community. Uma Chakravarti is the first scholar to use the term "Brahmanical patriarchy" in Indian scholarly literature to capture the practices of caste- and gender-based patriarchal domination. Her ground-breaking 1993 paper "Conceptualizing Brahmanical patriarchy in early India: Gender, caste, class and state" argues that "despite their close interconnections neither scholars of the caste system nor feminist scholars have attempted to analyse the relationship between the two" (Chakravarti 1993, 579). This is the task she sets herself, saying, "I will explore here (very tentatively) the relationship between caste and gender" (579). As such, it seems appropriate to regard her work as explicitly aiming to develop conceptual resources and new knowledge about this previously ignored topic. Her adoption of the term "Brahmanical patriarchy" facilitated critical engagement with widespread practices.

Chakravarti notes that, during the consolidation of Brahmanical ideology, Hindu religious scriptures were redefined to both legitimize and reinforce patriarchal norms, with control over female sexuality being key to the subordination of women. Female sexuality was perceived as a threat that must be "controlled" and "managed" by male power in the emerging caste and class-based societies (579–81). This often-brutal control is spelled out in Dalit women's autobiographies. The Vedic scriptures made male

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family members responsible for protecting women from their alleged tendencies toward sexual promiscuity, through the custom of restricting women to the confines of their household (*purdah*). The acceptance of this ideology, however, "was not simply a matter of psychological conviction"; as Chakravarti shows, there was a "caste-patriarchal bargain" (Omvedt 2000, 187). Women in higher castes accepted a life of seclusion and subordination in exchange for certain privileges and status accorded to them within society, while lower caste women had to conform to Brahmanical caste-based ideologies without the privileges granted to upper-caste women. Brahmanical patriarchy thus manifested differently for upper caste and lower caste women.

Exploring the history of caste and gender intersections in India and developing the term "Brahmanical patriarchy" to describe these intersections allowed Chakravarti and subsequent theorists to develop conceptual resources to delineate and condemn oppressive systems. Similarly, Gopal Guru conceptualized the term "Dalit patriarchy" to describe the specific ways in which Dalit women experience exploitation and oppression arising from caste and gender intersectionality (Guru 1995, 2549).[10] He notes that Dalit women are victimized through Dalit patriarchy in two different ways. First, Dalit men, as part of their own exploitation within a caste-based society, may internalize and replicate those oppressive mechanisms against Dalit women (Geetha 2009, 108; Chakravarti 2018 [2003], 86). Second, as the social status of Dalits improves within a society, Dalit men may adopt certain "sanskritic" values and imitate upper-caste patriarchal practices of women's domination (Gorringe 2017; Deshpande 2011; Pillai-Vetschera 1999).

Fricker suggests that one suffers from hermeneutical injustice when relatively powerless social individuals or groups experience a gap in their ability to understand and articulate their experiences due to disproportionate influence and control over interpretative resources by more powerful dominant groups (Fricker 2007, 146–48). For decades, Dalit women lacked resources to understand and articulate their experiences of oppression because of the significant control that Brahmin men held over religious scriptures. These women appeared to largely accept the scriptural grounds of caste-based Brahmin ideology. However, in writing autobiographies and novels to illustrate their experiences of suffering, Dalit women began actively articulating and resisting their oppression. They were joined by scholars who introduced conceptual resources to resist that oppression. It seems accurate to describe their work as identifying and resisting hermeneutical injustice, even though their efforts predate Fricker's introduction of that term.

2.2 The devadasi tradition

Apart from a lack of specific concepts, a second source of hermeneutical gaps is the suppression of other concepts by dominant groups. We illustrate this point using the example of the devadasi tradition and its recent disruption both by Dalit and non-Dalit feminists. In this case, the relevant interpretative resources required by Dalit women to collectively understand and/or protest their situation were initially unavailable to them until breakthrough work by some of their number.

Historically the Indian tradition of devadasi involved women dedicating themselves to temple deities through various "marriage" ceremonies (Srinivasan 1985; Nair 1994; Gajwi 1999 [1981]). These devadasi women were honored as "those great women who [could] control natural human impulses, their five senses and [could] submit themselves completely to God" (Sahoo 2006, 1). Their main tasks were taking care of the temple,

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performing religious duties, and learning classical dance such as *Bharatnatyam*, which they would perform at temple rituals. As Srinivasan writes, "the devadasi represented a badge of fortune, a form of honour managed for civil society by the temple" (Srinivasan 1985, 1870).

The modern iteration of the devadasi tradition differs significantly from the historic institution. Although the practice today is still about honoring a deity, in its current form, the devadasi tradition is inextricably linked to casteism and prostitution (Deepa and Suvarna Suni 2016; Shingal 2015; Torri 2009; Tarachand 1991). In its contemporary form, devadasis, particularly women from lower castes, form a major source of recruitment to prostitution in India, both in urban brothels and in rural settings, and are often referred as "religious prostitutes" (Tambe 2009, 85).

Tambe notes that the Brahmanical caste system is particularly influential in appropriating this historical religious practice into a form of prostitution wherein the "sexual services" of Dalit women are made available to upper-caste men (Tambe 2009). Recall that Brahmanical patriarchy operates through the control of women's sexuality (Chakravarti 1993; Rege 2009). One mechanism of this control is through a practice prevalent in Hindu society called *gavgada*, which predefines specific roles and responsibilities for women across all caste categories. Under *gavgada*, the sexual labor of Dalit women, especially those dedicated as devadasis, is made available to upper-caste men. Moreover, by defining a devadasi as a *gavachi bayko* (wife of the whole village), the system creates a pseudomarital framework that ostensibly legitimises sexual access to the devadasi. Furthermore, the devadasis are systematically denied access to "respectable" work opportunities, severely limiting their economic autonomy; are not allowed to marry a mortal man; and are deterred from forming a *zulwa* relation (one involving more than just a monetary relation) with any man (Tambe 2009). These factors imposed by the Brahmanical system through *gavgada* transformed the historic practice of the devadasi tradition into its current form of prostitution.

The devadasi tradition is an example of a dominant group controlling and producing hermeneutical resources in their own interest (Fricker 2007, 148). Fricker argues that the capacity of relatively powerless social groups to adequately understand and communicate their social experiences is threatened if dominant groups disproportionately influence the available interpretative resources. Other philosophers argue that this can happen in significant ways even if members of the oppressed group have conceptual resources for describing their social experiences if what they say is systematically not heard or distorted (Medina 2012b; Berenstain 2020; Medina 2012a; Dotson 2011). In the devadasi tradition, the dominant (Brahmanical patriarchal) narratives often focus on sensationalizing or romanticizing the practice in the name of religion, while downplaying or ignoring its oppressive elements. The system of *gavgada* was historically created through Brahmanical hegemony and instilled in Dalit women, compelling them to view this system as an integral part of their identity, which they were obliged to uphold at any cost. The religious facade of the devadasi system obscures its true nature as a form of sexual exploitation that primarily benefits dominant groups, while preventing the oppressed from clearly articulating or resisting the reality of their situation.

Furthermore, the experiences of Dalit women forced into the system or who chose to become devadasis were often ignored or erased in mainstream narratives. Their voices were silenced, dismissed, and reinterpreted, leading to a lack of recognition and understanding of their social experiences in the wider domain (Chakraborthy 2000; Deane 2022; Omvedt 1983; Sharma 2018). In addition, the stigma attached to being a

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devadasi made it even more challenging for them to speak about the injustices they endured. This situation exemplifies what Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. terms "willful hermeneutical injustice" (2012), where dominant groups deliberately refuse to acknowledge or utilize alternative expressive or interpretative resources available at any given time to recognize or comprehend the experiences of marginalized people.

The situation began to change in the 1970s. There was a significant shift in the discourse surrounding the devadasi system, characterized by increased scholarly attention and heightened public awareness (Tambe 2009; Datar 1992; Gajwi 1999 [1981]; Nair 1993). Unlike Dalit women authors who wrote influential autobiographies, devadasis faced barriers in documenting their experiences due to limited access to formal education. As a result, their experiences were often preserved and transmitted through oral traditions and/or recordings made by individuals who had familial connection to the devadasi system or were actively involved in efforts to abolish the practice. Below we examine literary works demonstrating how devadasi women identified their hermeneutical disadvantages and harms, and took concrete steps to address those harms by creating new hermeneutical resources for the broader public.

In her work, "The lost life stories of Mahari-Devadasis in postcolonial India," historian Shriya Patnaik (2021) explicitly offers an account of the various forms of structural violence perpetrated against a devadasi woman named Sashimani Devi. Mahari women used folk songs as a form of resistance. One of the songs Sashimani Devi sang includes these lines:

I pray to Lord Jagannath to rid me of this strife,
My debts and miseries have encompassed my life
And nothing can save me.
No one will give us badhi (a local snack)
No one will give us beedi (local cigarettes).

Do not treat us like mindless dupes or victimized agents of reform!
In the good old days,
Everyone in Orissa,
Respected us and worshipped us
They let us live our lives on our own feet
Not fettered, not reliant on anyone but ourselves.

But today,
The Government, the police, this society
Have robbed us of our dignity
While sharing sweet words and insincere acts of charity.
Oh! Do not treat us like mindless dupes or victimized agents of reform!

Such adversities have never befallen us before!
The menacing Gora Sahab approaches,
He robs us of our seva (worship); he robs us of our meva (food)
The police come with orders to catch us
Oh! Such adversities have never befallen us before!
(Folk song as recorded by Patnaik in an interview with Sashimani Devi)

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This song reflects a significant shift in the social perception of devadasis, from a position of honor to one of marginalization. The lyrics articulate a contrast between the past, when devadasis were revered, and the present, where they face loss of dignity and autonomy. The song's narrative highlights the failure of both governmental institutions and the devadasis' own communities to protect these women from the harms of the devadasi tradition. As such, these folk songs serve as powerful expressions of exploitation and subversive agency for devadasi women.

In addition to folk songs, the oppressive experiences of devadasis and the framing of the devadasi practice as a form of *religious prostitution* was uncovered in popular Marathi literary works of the 1970s, such as Premanand Gajwi's play *Devnavri* (Wife of the god 1981); Balwant Kamble's novel *Napat* (Dishonor or discredit 1984); Rajan Gavas' novel *Bhandarbhog* (miseries of a life doomed due to her dedication to the goddess), and Narayan Atiwadkar's play *Devadasi* (1995) Many of these authors either played a direct role in the abolition of the devadasi system or come from families affected by the tradition. These texts bring the experiences of devadasis into the public sphere, elucidating the complex discursive construction of the devadasi system, and the role of dominant groups in producing and maintaining this construction.

Gajwi's *Devnavri* (1999 [1981]) critically examines the devadasi tradition and its transformation under Brahmanical influence. The text provides a nuanced exploration of what it terms *bajarbasavya* (prostitution culture), emphasizing the role of Brahmanical hegemony in reshaping the system into one that legitimizes the sexual exploitation of Dalit women without explicitly acknowledging this aspect of the practice. *Devnavri* also presents a compelling portrayal of resistance within the devadasi system, including powerful acts of retaliation, such as the desecration of the goddess Yellamma's idol, symbolizing defiance against the social and religious norms that perpetuate exploitation of devadasis.

Kamble's *Napat* (1984) offers a critical examination of the devadasi system and its impact on Dalit women. The text is dedicated to Gangabhai Yelu Salubai Kamble, the author's grandmother, who lived her entire life as a devadasi under the Brahmanical religious order. It begins by asking "selling our ('lower caste') women may benefit you ('upper castes'), but what do we gain from it?" (Tambe 2009, 86). The work uncovers the anxieties and humiliations experienced by devadasis at the hands of upper-caste men, and the struggles of Dalit women of making visible the impact of the Brahmanical system on devadasi women's lives.

Atiwadkar's *Devadasi* (1995 (1988) suggests that, while the Dalit rights movement politicized Dalit concerns, it may have overlooked or inadequately addressed the specific experiences of Dalit women, particularly devadasis. In making this argument, Atiwadkar highlights the role of Brahmanical patriarchy in the exploitation inherent in the devadasi practice.

Thus these texts offer valuable insights into how Dalit women have articulated their opposition to these exploitative practices and mobilized against systemic injustices. They expose the control over and corruption of the devadasi tradition as part of Brahmanical patriarchy and give voice to the experience and tools of resistance of the devadasis themselves.

In sum, the works of Dalit women and Dalit feminist scholars on Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchy, and on the devadasi tradition, do important work in identifying and conceptualizing significant hermeneutical injustices. They provide tools for resistance

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against dominant epistemic frameworks while actively transforming both the material and epistemic conditions of Dalit women's lives.

3. Status of experiential knowledge

In the preceding sections, we outlined the substantive work of Dalit feminists in (1) identifying harmful conceptual deficits relating to their lives, and (2) developing conceptual resources to address these deficits. Given the extent of this Dalit feminist work, its richness, and its influence on legal and social reform in India, it is unfortunate that these works are not cited, and their examples not included in the extensive recent literature on hermeneutical injustice in Anglophone philosophy. Nora Berenstain has argued that such cases should be regarded as paradigms of hermeneutical injustice—because the marginalization is so complete, the full nature of the injustice is laid bare. This is in contrast with the case Fricker used to illustrate the notion of hermeneutical injustice in *Epistemic injustice* (2007); that of Carmita Woods' role in conceptualizing sexual harassment. This example has subsequently become emblematic of hermeneutical injustice for many within the debate, despite Woods' relative privilege as a white woman from the USA. Berenstain argues that paradigm cases should instead involve intersectional and more marginalized individuals (2020). The examples of hermeneutical injustice and conceptual breakthroughs highlighted in the previous section would better meet Berenstain's demands, due to the intersectional and multiply marginalized status of Dalit women. Yet this literature has been largely ignored. In the remaining two sections of the paper, we explore *why* this work has been so neglected, and the implications for current scholarly and citational practices in Anglophone philosophy.

Given that many of the neglected works by Dalit women are autobiographical, this section examines philosophy's relationship to experiential knowledge. We argue that experiential knowledge is undervalued in Anglophone philosophy, thereby stifling insights that might be sparked by engagement with accounts of lived experience. We conclude the section by adding our voices to others who have argued that philosophy should rethink the status it accords experiential knowledge (Dewey 1988; Rorty 1981; McDermott 2007; Sanchez-Perez 2024; Gosselin 2019). In at least some areas of philosophy it should become part of the scholarly practice of the discipline to include research from and reference to sources of personal experience—including autobiography, memoirs, oral histories, and qualitative first-personal data.

In feminist epistemology first-personal and experiential knowledge are at play in discussions of subjectivity, standpoint, and consciousness-raising (Brownmiller 1975; Longino 2017; Harding 1992; Hartsock 1973). Experiential accounts helped to frame women's political actions, and forms of resistance. Teresa de Lauretis, in fact, attributes a foundational status to experience: "The relation of experience to discourse, finally, is what is at issue in the definition of feminism" (De Lauretis 1986, 5). The experiences of women as subjects living under patriarchy coupled with consciousness-raising about those experiences enabled feminists to ground their epistemology in experience.

Despite this, in philosophical accounts of knowledge, various aspects of first-personal or experiential knowledge are viewed with suspicion (Grant 1987, 2016; Phelan 2017). The knowledge that is most valued in many areas of philosophy is that produced by specific kinds of sanctioned effort or methodology. Philosophers have a very low tolerance for false beliefs, often seemingly preferring extreme forms of scepticism over the risk of forming an incorrect belief (Haack 2008; Stroud 1984; Williams 2004). Many otherwise opposing epistemological theories share a commitment to the importance of

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robust methodology and reflectiveness in achieving knowledge. Moreover, as Abigail Gosselin points out, even academics who value experiential knowledge as data may not value agents' own interpretations of their experience. Instead, they may regard academic experts in the field as better placed to analyze and interpret (Gosselin 2019, 46).

Given the role of experiential knowledge in feminist philosophy, one might expect feminist scholars to be less prejudiced against it. However, even feminist standpoint theories do not privilege first-personal accounts unless their perspective is the product of the relevant sort of critical reflective effort (Hartsock 1998, 107–08; Harding 2004, 6–7). This is an important caveat to the remarks above about experiential knowledge and standpoint theory—whilst there is an experiential dimension to standpoint theory, "mere" experience is not enough to achieve the insights scholars like Hartsock and Harding argue can come from a feminist standpoint. Thus, women's autobiographies do not necessarily represent a "feminist standpoint" as understood by standpoint theorists, just in virtue of having been written by women (nor do Dalit women's autobiographies reflect a "Dalit feminist standpoint" just in virtue of drawing on lived experience). But the requirement that a standpoint is achieved rather than "coming free" does not exclude autobiographical work. This point is made powerfully by Shailaja Paik, who offers an analysis of oral and written works from Black feminist Sojourner Truth and early Dalit feminist Muktabai Salve. She argues that they "theorized their everyday experiences by tying them to systemic phenomena—the anatomy of caste/race, class, and gender hierarchies … constructing conceptual categories from their lived experiences of everyday discrimination and struggle at the margins of society" (Paik 2014, 80). This indicates that non-academic forms of writing, including autobiography, can articulate standpoints and provide resources for mitigating hermeneutical injustice.

Despite philosophers' apparent preference for knowledge that is achieved rather than "comes free," philosophers in all areas of the discipline often rely on experiential knowledge, as well as made-up examples in their arguments. A relevant first-personal account or experience could be better suited for the purposes of these arguments than a thought experiment or convenient example from the philosopher's recent memory, yet there seems to be a widespread disciplinary reluctance to draw on relevant published autobiographical material.

The contributions of Dalit feminists—both the earlier cohort of Dalit women such as Baby Kamble, Bama, and Urmila Pawar, who wrote *testimonios,* and subsequent Dalit scholars and activists like Uma Chakravarti, Gopal Guru, Shailaja Paik, who engaged in explicit and deliberate conceptual innovation—are philosophically rich for philosophers working in social and political philosophy. Specifically, as we argue above, for those working on hermeneutical injustice and related topics, these works should be recognized as relevant sources of knowledge. This critique extends to the Indian context too, where the dominant feminist literature has either completely ignored Dalit women's unique experiences, or misrepresented them in ways that fail to capture the complexity of their lived realities (Rege 2000; Paik 2018, 2021; Tomar 2013).

The recommendations to remedy this are simple and perhaps reasonably obvious. Philosophers should cite first-personal sources including memoirs, poetry, novels, and oral histories when these sources provide insights about the topics they are writing about that are *more relevant and appropriate* than those the philosopher would otherwise make up or source elsewhere. As a rule of thumb, such sources will almost always be the most appropriate for work in social and political philosophy or applied philosophy. If there are no existing relevant first-personal sources, and yet the topic would benefit from

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lived experience insights, then philosophers should consider whether an empirical approach, such as a qualitative interview study or ethnography,[11] might be required.

How narrowly or broadly should "relevance" be understood? We have argued above that the explicit criticism of structural injustice by Dalit feminists, and their insightful efforts to develop conceptual resources that better reflect their lived realities, are highly relevant to philosophical work on hermeneutical injustice. As such, the failure of Anglophone scholars to cite Dalit feminist work in discussions of hermeneutical injustice can be regarded as a missed opportunity. Arguments in philosophy are often successors to multiple traditions, and are the stronger for picking up ideas and problems and weaving them together. Reflecting on the success of her article "How is this paper philosophy?" Kristie Dotson describes the "ideational labour" and "audience cultivation" required to write papers that receive uptake. She notes that whereas her paper "cites over 40 earlier works," these "draw on hundreds more pieces that influenced their understanding of metaphilosophical problems of diversity" (Dotson 2023, 456). Beyond this, "hundreds of conversations, essays, and talks" influenced her thoughts in the paper (456). Our ideas are always the product of more than the texts we explicitly cite. Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic injustice* cites leading work in social epistemology, and the epistemology of testimony, reflecting the academic lineage of her ideas. Even so, we might imagine the same book citing Bama, Kamble, Pawar, or others of the Dalit feminists mentioned above. Whenever a work is positioned as a successor to the conceptual breakthroughs of marginalized thinkers it has the potential to redefine the place of those earlier works in the canon, and thus resist oppression not only in theory but also in practice. Dotson notes, however, that it may be difficult to do this—a paper will only receive uptake if it lands in the right way in the ideational landscape. That is, if the argument is positioned strategically to cultivate, and resonate with, a wide audience (Dotson 2023: 461–63).

A parallel point may be made about the potential influence of citing non-academic works, such as autobiography or poetry. Some philosophers do this—for example, Justine McGill cites verses from the Soma Sutta in her analysis of how women are silenced in philosophy, providing an excellent example of how this can be done (McGill 2013). Doing so has the potential to establish new citation norms in philosophy. But there are barriers to attempting to establish a broader canon or new citation norms. Regarding Fricker's book, we cannot know whether it would have received the same uptake if positioned in the landscape as informed by and a successor to autobiographies and poetry from some of the world's most marginalized feminist writers. It is possible that the book only flourished and received the uptake it did *because* it was positioned narrowly as building upon mainstream work from dominant perspectives. For this reason, philosophers may choose to cite dominant works rather than marginalized voices. But in doing so they lose the opportunity to redefine the place of marginalized thinkers and their works in the canon. The ideational labor Dotson refers to can involve serious career-related risks for emerging and marginalized scholars. Her injunction to strategically cultivate an audience, and to ensure that work pointing back to a lineage of marginalized scholars nevertheless resonates with a wide audience, is not easily achieved. Moreover, she acknowledges that "success" in cultivation of a wide audience can come at a cost, including the risk that what resonates is not the central message of the text (Dotson 2023, 2012b).

There are several ways philosophy could better support work that draws upon marginalized thinkers and attempts to reposition those works in the canon. Yet often these strategies are difficult to implement. For example, established scholars can more

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easily challenge and reshape the canon than emerging scholars. But established scholars may be less conscious of the hegemonies at play in the discipline, and unmotivated to reshape them. Another site of action could be journals. Philosophy journals should be open to publishing papers that do not look exactly like those published in previous issues. Yet the idea of "fit" occupies a powerful place in the editorial and review process, so that editors and reviewers would have to be radical and reflective in their decision-making and feedback in order to change. It is not enough for scholars to position their works as successors to marginalized thinkers—publishers must be willing to accept these works as equally rigorous and valid as works positioned in relation to dominant traditions.

4. Epistemic exclusion: Systemic bias and the disciplinary norms of academic philosophy

As well as bias against experiential knowledge, a second potential reason for the neglect of Dalit feminist works is that cross-cultural philosophy is largely absent from mainstream philosophical discourse. Most Western Anglophone philosophers are not accustomed to engaging with works by Indian philosophers. In this section, we draw upon scholarly discussions of this prejudice to argue that epistemic exclusion helps explain the invisibility of non-Western philosophical works in Western philosophy. More specifically, we argue two things: first, systemic bias prevents the recognition of non-Western philosophies as legitimate philosophical traditions, and this issue needs to be actively addressed. Second, we contend that, even if we accept the norms of philosophy as outlined by Western philosophers, Indian philosophy, including Dalit feminist literature, undeniably falls within these boundaries.

Epistemic exclusion reflects dominant discourses and norms that determine which knowledge processes are considered "legitimate" and which scholars are recognized as credible within a discipline (Collins 2000, 1989; Crenshaw 1990; Dotson 2012b, 2014).[12] As applied to Black feminist philosophy, Dotson (2014, 2012a) proposes that two interconnected processes of bias work to create epistemic exclusion. First, racial and gender prejudices against marginalized group members, such as Black scholars, lead to them being viewed as less credible than their white counterparts. Second, there is a biased expectation that legitimate researchers within academic philosophy will follow disciplinary norms and conventions regarding research topics, methods, and publication practices, thereby reinforcing professional disciplinary boundaries (Dotson 2012b; Gonzales 2018). We suggest that these two biases, against racialized or gendered identity and against non-traditional disciplinary practices, can provide a conceptual framework for comprehending and examining the exclusions of Dalit feminists works, and more generally, non-Western scholars whose contributions have been overlooked.[13]

First, the role of systemic bias in excluding non-Western philosophies, particularly Eastern or Asian philosophies, is well-documented (Walsh 1989; Balslev 1997; Prabhu 2001; Arisaka 2000; Park 2014). Here we use the term "Eastern philosophy" or "Asian philosophy" to emphasize a presumed contrast between the philosophy of the European tradition (Western) and the non-European tradition (Eastern). Edward W. Said's seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) drew significant attention to the ways in which the term "East" is used to describe the West's often contemptuous depiction of Asia. However, the term "Eastern philosophy" or "Asian philosophy" is a broad and potentially misleading term, as it tends to oversimplify the rich and diverse array of philosophical traditions that originate east of Europe. Asia is a vast continent with

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diverse cultures, languages, and religions, making the concept of a unified "Eastern philosophy" misleading.

Further, like the term "Black", "Eastern" or "Asian" is often used as a racial and ethnic category to identify people who are "non-white" (Arisaka 2000, 2). The term "Asian" is used synonymously with non-Western or Oriental, with the associated sense of distance and inferiority. Commonly, "Asian" stereotypes portray Asians as primitive, irrational, and lacking in modernity compared to Western societies (Uchida 1998; Mihesuah 2010; Merskin 2010). Mirroring theses prejudices, philosophies originating from Eastern or Asian traditions have often been excluded as legitimate forms of philosophical inquiry (Van Norden 2017; Olberding 2017; Prabhu 2001; Park 2013).

The Eurocentric nature of philosophy in the West has been criticized by scholars who note the failure to adequately incorporate thinkers, curricula, and faculties of Eastern origin into the philosophical canon (Silius 2020; Garfield and Van Norden 2016; Raud 2006; Defoort 2001). Prabhu, for instance, writes that philosophy is treated exclusively as a Western product while non-Western philosophies are variously seen as "folklore," "religion," "wisdom," or "life orientations" (Prabhu 2001, 30). Arisaka remarks that "Eurocentrism, or in the case of philosophy, Anglo-centrism" is a persistent problem in Western academia, such that traditions and philosophies originating in the East are often ignored (Arisaka 2000, 10). The "outright denigration of Indian philosophies as philosophy proper," argues Peetush, is because they are often stereotyped as being rooted in faith and mysticism (Peetush 2021, 76). These racial prejudices toward Eastern philosophies means that they are seldom treated as *real* philosophies. This is likely one factor in the lack of engagement with Dalit feminist works.

These exclusions are exacerbated by the failure of Anglophone philosophers to engage with work unless it is published in English. We do not discuss this in detail here, but note the compounding effect of the exclusion of works published in languages other than English on already marginalized scholars. Much recent debate about "linguistic bias in philosophy" focuses primarily on biases against non-native English speakers and writers in English-language philosophy conferences and journals (Yen and Hung 2019; Chiesa and Galeotti 2018; Peters 2024; Ayala-López 2015). In their introduction to a recent special issue "Philosophy in/on translation," Alice Leal and Philip Wilson highlight the "Hierarchies among languages/cultures and their respective traditions" as the first in a list of important future topics for philosophy (Leal and Wilson 2023, 13).

Furthermore, the epistemic exclusion of Dalit women's writings from the philosophical literature reflects the pervasive influence of the Hindu Brahmanical system in knowledge production and dissemination (Nambissan 1996; Benjamin 2008; Ghose 2003). Brahmanical ideology has historically portrayed Dalits as "polluted," "impure," and inherently "inferior" (Mandal 2010). These prejudices have contributed to the marginalization of Dalit scholarship in India, viewing it as inferior and unworthy of recognition. Rather than tending to highlight the significance of such literature as has emerged, the same prejudices instead have restricted the uptake of Dalit feminism within Indian feminism, and thus reduced its uptake outside of India too.

The second bias Dotson refers to is the expectation that scholars will adhere to disciplinary norms in their research topics, methods, and publication practices (Gonzales 2018; Van Norden 2017). Lamont and Molnar suggest that academics create disciplinary boundaries or "normative frameworks" to distinguish their discipline from others (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 178). Scholars determine which methodologies and subject matter are considered acceptable in terms of fitting within their particular field of study (Gonzales and Terosky 2016; Bernal and Villalpando 2002; Jenkins 2014). Within

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philosophy, for example, despite the broad range of methods and topics that one can study as philosophy, most are underpinned by Western discourses and/or methods.

While there is no unique way or method to practice philosophy, disciplinary norms and expectations shape how philosophy is conducted and what is considered philosophy (Dotson 2012b; Haslanger 2008; Peetush 2021; Beebee 2013). These norms tend to privilege certain methods of doing philosophy over others, to the point of dismissing or ignoring modes of thinking that do not comply, and are visible in statements about the aims of philosophy. For example, in *The problems of philosophy*, Bertrand Russell (1980) claimed that the aim of philosophy is to gain knowledge. More specifically, "the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs" (90). In a similar vein, Wittgenstein (2001, 29) argues that the aim of philosophy was "logical clarification of thoughts", while Priest (2006, 202) suggests that "philosophy is precisely that intellectual inquiry in which anything is open to critical challenge and scrutiny."

These definitions have at least two things in common.[14] First, philosophy is categorized as a rigorous, theoretical, and logical enterprise that engages in critical inquiry, whether of existing beliefs, systems, or cultures. Second, the process of philosophizing can be understood not merely as a means of addressing pre-existing questions or problems, but as a generative activity that leads to the formation and transmission of new knowledge.

One might object that this rough characterization of philosophy is rather too broad. However, if we accept these definitions of philosophy, it becomes clear that many philosophies originating outside Western culture engage in those conversations that are the focus of what we call philosophy. Non-Western philosophical traditions, in particular Indian traditions, have a long and rich history of critical inquiry and rigorous examination of existing beliefs, cultures, and values (Mohanty 1988; Matilal and Chakrabarti 1994). For instance, Indian philosophies have extensively analyzed questions in metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of mind, and so forth. Specifically, the Dalit feminist literature illustrates the ways in which Dalit feminists have critiqued the existing culture and value system prevalent in Hindu society, and actively contributed to creating new knowledge, and visions for social transformation. Despite this, Indian philosophy "has remained identified with mysticism and mistakenly thought to be inseparable from religion" (Matilal 2017, 11).

There seems to be something relevant in considering that philosophy itself is open-ended and resistant to offering any final truth or solution.[15] Philosophy must be understood as an ongoing inquiry that does not carry within itself a predetermined set of techniques or rules to solve the problems (Solomon 2001; Dotson 2023). On this account, autobiographies, memoirs, or oral traditions are very much the stuff of philosophy. Such materials should be understood "as a coherent, open-ended system for constructing and transmitting knowledge" (Cruikshank 1994, 408).

In sum, consistent with the theory of epistemic exclusion, systemic biases such as racial and gender prejudices together with disciplinary gatekeeping plague the discipline of philosophy. We suggest however, that there is much to be gained by learning from diverse philosophical traditions. This provides opportunities to foster epistemic justice and ensure that "individuals, from all backgrounds, but especially marginalized backgrounds, have the opportunity to leave impressions on old and new knowledge, and especially to articulate knowledges that have long been silenced" (Gonzales 2015, 28).

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What kinds of approaches might overcome the well-recognized challenge of disciplinary norms faced by non-Western philosophers including Dalit feminists? The need for change has been well articulated by scholars including Struhl (Struhl 2010) and Dotson (2012b), who identify both the current exclusionary nature of philosophy and the potential disciplinary significance of combining Western and Eastern philosophies. Given these and other critiques, including those in non-academic outlets such as the media and blogs, there is an urgent need to diversify academic philosophy.

A first step is to acknowledge and recognize the works of philosophers from diverse historical and cultural traditions. We are not suggesting that the current dominant framework of Western academic curricula be replaced with the ideas of non-Western philosophers. Rather we suggest that the existing framework be complemented by non-Western philosophies for solving both existing problems in the Western philosophical canon and "hitherto unsolved problems possibly raising issues never raised before anywhere" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 22). To this end, the academic approach of *comparative philosophy* that draws on culturally diverse traditions has the potential to change the present homogeneity of academic philosophy.

Comparative philosophy is not "a branch of philosophy nor a distinct philosophical method" that has been recently introduced within the academic sphere (Ganeri 2016, 135). Comparison is indeed a fundamental aspect of philosophical thinking. As Moeller remarks, "philosophy had always been comparative: Aristotle had already compared himself with Plato and other Greek philosophers he knew of; medieval Christian philosophy had compared itself with the Greeks" (Moeller 2018, 31). Furthermore, comparative studies are neither comparisons between different philosophers of Western or Eastern origin, nor is there an attempt to compare entire intellectual philosophies, which is a fairly impossible task (Salve 1991). Comparative philosophers work on philosophical problems by engaging in dialogue with works of thinkers who fall outside the broad umbrella term of the "West" to promote inclusivity and intellectual progress (Chakrabarti and Weber 2015, 1; Raud 2006; Salami 2015; Whyman 2017).[16]

The approach of comparative philosophy could address the two biases identified in this section. First, explicitly engaging with the works of non-Western scholars could undermine systemic biases arising from racialized stereotypes about non-Western philosophy. Engaging with scholarship arising from outside the Anglosphere has the potential to stimulate novel ways of thinking about existing and emerging philosophical problems, and to inform new ways of conceptual analysis. For example, in her article, "Building bridges: Articulating Dalit and African American women's solidarity," Paik made efforts to put Dalit feminists' work in conversation with that of Black feminists (Paik 2014). This work develops and illustrates the power of new tools for viewing intersectional marginalisation—what Paik calls "working margin to margin" (Paik 2014, 77), a method with potential to "allow the disparate communities to retain their uniqueness as well as to strategically engage or dissolve certain differences to express solidarity" (Paik 2014, 76). Second, such engagement would challenge the disciplinary norms that currently limit the scope and methods of academic philosophy. Under a comparative philosophy approach, the onus should no longer be on non-Western scholars to prove themselves according to Western norms. Rather the burden should be equally spread, with the expectation that Western philosophers must strive to understand how their scholarship might make sense (or not) to non-Western philosophers. An added benefit of comparative philosophy is that this approach has the potential to reposition the role of experiential knowledge in epistemology, thereby addressing another barrier to the uptake of non-Western content. This is pertinent given

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that our analysis shows how engaging with first-person accounts of oppression was central to the ensuing conceptual scholarship of Dalit feminists.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have linked the apparent ignorance of and lack of engagement with Dalit feminist scholarship on epistemic injustice to broader issues in philosophy. Despite providing compelling examples of epistemic injustice and developing resources to name and address them, Dalit feminist work is virtually unknown in Western philosophy. One reason for this is the low status accorded to experiential knowledge in epistemology, which instead values knowledge acquired in specified and verifiable ways. Another set of reasons is to do with systemic bias against non-Western philosophy, which draws on unfavorable stereotypes, and the privileging of existing disciplinary norms. Given this state of affairs, it is hardly surprising that Dalit feminist scholarship has remained largely invisible. Yet we can imagine that, had Western epistemologists engaged with this work, we would have had richer paradigmatic examples of epistemic and hermeneutical injustice, and more robust intersectional accounts, linking the experiences of Dalit women with those of Black and other minority groups.

The problem of exclusion is multifaceted; thus, it is unlikely that there is a simple solution for overcoming these barriers. However, promoting more inclusive citation practices and embracing comparative philosophy offer potential for addressing biases and challenging epistemic norms. We acknowledge the potential difficulties of trying to change philosophy in these ways. The language and cultural barriers are not insignificant; some ways of thinking do seem incommensurate. This would undoubtedly be a slow process, requiring significant effort and change across academic philosophy, from revising curricula, to implementing diversity criteria for appointments, to educating thesis examiners and reviewers. However, the potential benefits are considerable in terms of a richer and more inclusive discipline than the current one.

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Notes

1 For more on historical social movements in India see: Jogdad 1991; Joshi 1986; Murugkar 1991; Omvedt 1995.

2 Prominent autobiographies written by Dalit women include: *Jina Amucha* by Babytai Kondiba Kamble (translated as *The prisons we broke* in 2008); *Aaydan* by Urmila Pawar (translated as *The weave of my life* in 2009), Bama's *Karukku* (translated in 2000); *Raatradin Amha* by Shanta Bai Danaji Dani (translated as *For us these Nights and Days* in 1990); and *Antasphot* by Kumud Pawade (published in Hindi in 1981).

3 A *testimonio* "is a genre commonly associated with Latin American atrocity narratives" and typically "documents of atrocities and suffering, bringing one into contact with the victimised" (Nayar 2006, 84).

4 Throughout the article, we use the phrase "Dalit feminists" to encompass both Dalit women and Dalit feminist scholars and activists (both Dalit and non-Dalit) who write extensively on the experiences and challenges faced by Dalit women.

5 It is important to note that the struggle of Dalit women is fundamentally rooted in their resistance against the oppressive Brahmanical system that has dominated Indian society for centuries. Their primary aim has been to challenge and dismantle this entrenched system. However, in the course of this struggle, they have

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effectively identified and addressed new hermeneutical deficits that arise from their unique experiences of oppression.

6 The *Manusmriti* is an ancient religious prescriptive text that provides extensive dicta on laws pertaining to each class, caste, and gender. For more details, see Doniger and Smith (1992).

7 Dipankar Gupta makes an important link between caste and *jatis*. He writes, "The crucial distinction between *varna* and *jati* is that, whereas *varna* is a system of differentiation in the epoch of the *Asiatic mode of production*, which was characterized by *general exploitation*, the *jati* system developed later in the epoch of *feudalism* and was characterized by *localized exploitation* in a closed village economy, where the ruling class lived off the land" (Gupta 1980, 266).

8 We thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting that we offer a more detailed background to the term "Dalit" and for recommending some sources.

9 Autobiography has been a common way for Dalit women writers to first enter the literary field. Similarly, Valerie Smith notes that slave narratives were the "earliest genre in which large numbers of Afro-Americans wrote and the common point of origin of much black fictional and nonfictional prose" (Smith 1987, 1).

10 We note that consensus is lacking on the conceptual validity of the term "Dalit patriarchy." Arya writes that the concept "Dalit patriarchy" is flawed and misleading and it yields no advancement toward a gender justice for the most marginalized. For a critical review of the term and concept of "Dalit patriarchy," see Arya 2020.

11 In recent years, some philosophers have engaged with ethnographic methods to enrich their philosophical inquiries and broaden the scope of philosophical research. See Nersessian 2012; Andersen and Wagenknecht 2013; Nersessian and MacLeod 2022; Mansnerus and Wagenknecht 2015; Hardesty 2018.

12 Black feminist theorists such as Crenshaw and Collins have engaged with the concept of epistemic exclusion in relation to the works of women of color since the 1980s. Since Dotson's introduction of the concept, it has been applied to study exclusion and marginalization of Black feminist philosophers in academia and work settings. For more, see Settles et al. (2021, 2022).

13 A further bias lies in the coloniality of knowledge production, which has shaped and continues to shape views about what constitutes "proper" philosophy (Derrida 2009; Addison 2009). Discussion of this important topic is beyond our scope in this paper.

14 These definitions are offered here for the purposes of illustration; we do not take them to apply universally, and they are not even intended as an exhaustive list of possible disciplinary expectations.

15 See Haslanger (2008) and Jenkins (2014) for interesting critiques of academic philosophy which, they claim, operates on established standards and guidelines that inadvertently marginalize or exclude feminist perspectives.

16 For more on comparative philosophy, see also Wong 2024; Krishna 1986; Garfield and Van Norden 2016; Chakrabarti and Weber 2015.

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Swati Arora has completedher PhD in Philosophy from Macquarie University. She completed her Master of Research in Philosophy from the University of Sydney in 2021. Her research interests include feminism, ethics, and social epistemology. Much of her recent work looks at issues of epistemic injustice, epistemic exclusion, and the pervasive influence of Eurocentrism in knowledge production.

Katrina Hutchison is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Macquarie University. Her research focuses on topics in feminist epistemology, moral psychology, and bioethics. Much of her recent work looks at issues of epistemic injustice and gender bias in careers, and on the ethical challenges associated with surgical innovation and medical devices.

Wendy Rogers is Distinguished Professor of Clinical Ethics at Macquarie University, Sydney, where she holds a joint appointment between the Schools of Medicine and Humanities. Her work spans a number of major topics in bioethics including feminist ethics, vulnerability, research ethics, surgical innovation, disease definition and overdiagnosis, transplant ethics, and ethics of emerging technologies. She is lead editor of the 2023 *Routledge handbook of feminist approaches to bioethics* and joint editor of *Vulnerability: New essays in ethics and feminist philosophy* (OUP 2014).

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