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## Discursivity in Critical Perspectives of Intersectionality in Literatures across the World

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper deconstructs the broader concepts of intersectionality as a framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw which specifically analyzes how various forms of inequality such as racism, sexism, classism, etc. overlap, and reinforce each other to create unique experiences of marginalization. Here, oppression serves as the overarching term for the interlocking systems of power and disadvantage that affect people across all these categories simultaneously. Although context of violence against women of color is the background of this, it acts as an umbrella term of including Gramsci's theory of hegemony which involves the leadership of a dominant class over allied groups, achieved through intellectual and moral leadership; the ideological struggle is essential for establishing a collective will that transcends individual class interests; and the concept of passive revolution. As an extension, this accommodates gender theory examines the relationship between gender roles and sexuality, rooted in feminist theory as outlined by Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. The paper also includes a comprehensive exploration of ecofeminism, a theoretical framework and social movement that connects the oppression of women, nature, and animals. In this regard, well-known literary writings from across the globe like Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Y. B. Mangunwijaya's *Rara Mendut*, Tamura's *Miira no Kuchibeni* and Indian writings like Meena Kandasamy's *Ms. Militancy* (2010), and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* have been discussed with reference to vulnerability and resistance as well.*

**Keywords:** *Neo-Marginalization, hegemony, ideological struggle, feminist theory, vulnerability and resistance*

### **1. Introduction:**

“Tribes” in the Tribal Literature and the Reality of Gender, Class, Caste and Religion.

Deconstructing intersectionality in literature involves analyzing how authors represent the complex, interlocking systems of power such as race, gender, class, and sexuality that shape characters'

lives and narratives, moving beyond single-axis, monolithic perspectives. It functions as a critical, multi-level tool to expose how marginalized individuals experience compounded, unique forms of discrimination.

The hue and cry echoes across the world regarding reflections on the tribes, class, caste, religion, gender, majority, and minority in terms of socio-cultural-political and literary studies. Mostly, they present the suffering and vulnerability owing to several factors in the one hand and their consciousness and resistance on the other. But, in reality, there is no such identified categories as such coming from the river banks or forests or white, black or brown; rich and poor; rural or urban; privileged or unprivileged and so on those who can be called marginalized category. The concept has been changing steadily and maybe various tenets of neo-marginalization come up for critical focus. Whereas there are visible consciousness of class, caste, gender and communities across the world and at the same time, there are emerging categories going beyond this norm those who are cosmopolitan and hybrid categories who do not believe in this owing to daily consumerism, struggle for survival and proxy empiricism of the dominant factors of knowledge and power.

Intersectionality in literature is a critical framework examining how overlapping social identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability intersect to create unique, complex experiences of privilege or oppression for characters. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, it analyzes literature to understand how multiple, interlocking systems of power shape narrative, character, and systemic inequality. Major aspects of intersectionality in literature include analysis of the text beyond single-axis as it moves past looking at only one factor (e.g., just gender) to analyze how identities compound, such as "gendered racism" faced by characters. It highlights how characters from marginalized groups (e.g., Black queer women) experience distinct forms of discrimination not faced by white women or Black men alone; and challenges dominant, universalized narratives that often assume a white, male, or heterosexual default, offering a more nuanced view of power dynamics.

Rooted in Black feminist thought and activism, it emphasizes the interconnected nature of structural inequalities. Worth saying that intersectionality in literature has given rise to many subgenres of literary writings such as literatures of protest and anger; racial, political and cultural consciousness; partition; refugee; war, trauma and displacement; class consciousness; nationalistic literature; slave narratives; literature of the marginalized; literature of freedom, resistance and rights; memory literature; neorealism in literature, and so on.

What's more, contemporary literature's engagement with intersectionality examines how modern authors harness their creative vision to craft stories that challenge power imbalances, social inequities, and the unethical exploitation of individuals, groups, and even the natural world for personal or institutional benefit. Critics from diverse theoretical lenses—especially Marxists, feminists, poststructuralists, postcolonial scholars, Dalit thinkers, and ecofeminists offer incisive analyses of

these themes, treating literature as a potent instrument for societal critique and change. Consequently, today's writers raise voices of resistance, unmasking exploiters and victimizers who cling to "might makes right" and foster socio-cultural hegemony (Antonio Gramsci) to evade scrutiny. This drives contemporary authors to embrace literary activism (Amit Chaudhuri's Mission Statement, Scroll.in, 2014), wielding their pens to foster open democratic discourse on creativity that's absent from mainstream platforms. Central to this theme are works that boldly interrogate power structures abusing their authority to oppress individuals, communities, the environment, and Earth's shared commons (Garrett Hardin, 1968). Marginalized groups, the working class, and nature itself serve as sparks for these writers, illuminating harsh truths slyly ignored by mainstream media and narratives that romanticize power elites to serve narrow interests.

## **2. Gramsci's Theory of Counter Hegemony and Ideology (1929-35):**

Gramsci's ideas connect with race, gender, and other identities by showing how various subordinations (cultural, economic) blend into a unified "common sense." This occurs through a dominant class's intellectual and moral guidance over allies, fostering ideological battles to build a shared will beyond narrow class loyalty. His notion of passive revolution describes gradual societal shifts that spark major changes while upholding core power structures. Organic intellectuals embody a rising class's interests, forging fresh perspectives (like anti-colonial leaders). Subaltern groups those sidelined by ruling hegemony that is fight for visibility. A war of position flips cultural and ideological fights in civil society institutions (churches, schools, media) to reshape views and construct alternative societies.

### **2.1 Literary Representations on Intersectionality of Gramscian Hegemony:**

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Africa) illustrates cultural hegemony in postcolonial settings, where British colonizers erode Igbo traditions via churches and schools—not just force, but by capturing minds, especially among the clan's outcasts. It shows the colonizer's "war of position" supplanting local hegemony. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (India) uses Gramsci to depict characters like Jemubhai embracing British ways for status, revealing how the oppressed internalize dominance, normalizing power imbalances. George Orwell's *1984* (British), a dystopia, fits a Gramscian view of the Party's control through engineered consent and twisted "common sense," locking in ideology. Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (British) examines "subaltern" dynamics and racial hegemony's cultural gears in colonial Rhodesia, where a white minority upholds rule via an accepted racial "common sense" shared by rulers and ruled. Claire G. Coleman's *Terra Nullius* (Australian) draws on Gramsci's "integral state," blending consent with coercive violence against Indigenous people.

## **2. Gender Theory / Emergence of Queer Theory (Simone de Beauvoir, John Money, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault): 1949-1970:**

Gender theory probes links between roles and sexuality, emerging from feminism. Foucault revealed how norms around sexuality hardened through societal classifications. Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" underscores social construction. Judith Butler's performativity idea posits gender and sexual identities as enacted and disruptible, not innate. Foucault's ideas equip analysis of intersecting categories (race, gender, class, sexuality) shaped by discourse and regulatory power.

### **2.1 Power as a Network of Relations (Anti-Essentialism):**

Foucault dismissed power as a top-down monopoly (like sole patriarchy). He saw it as a "viscous network of polymorphous relations" flowing from all directions. This matches intersectionality's view of interlocking oppressions (racism, sexism, classism) working together. Scholars apply it to map how marginalized people navigate overlapping power streams.

### **2.2 Discursive Construction of Subjectivity:**

Foucault held that discourse—language and knowledge shaping "normal" and "true"—forms subjects. Intersectionality unpacks how stereotypes (e.g., "angry Black woman," "submissive Asian") fuse to forge distinct, damaging social roles. Foucauldian tools reveal "ethnicized" or "racialized" gender, proving identities as fluid products of ongoing regulation.

### **2.3 Disciplinary Power and Normalization:**

In *Discipline and Punish* and sexuality studies, Foucault detailed how institutions (schools, prisons, hospitals) enforce norms and standardize conduct. Intersectionality, especially in Nordic and feminist research, uses this to critique how minority identities get sidelined in textbooks and laws. Researchers highlight "Wahid" in a Danish school, labeled "troublesome" for his clashing traits (male, Turkish heritage, style) against the white, middle-class "normal."

### **2.4 Governmentality and "Governing Intersectionality" :**

Foucault's governmentality describes steering populations via calculation and management. It explains states tackling diversity through "governing intersectionality"—crafting and curbing differences. Neoliberal regimes treat traits like race, gender, and sexuality as data points, masking regulation as "inclusion."

### **2.5 Genealogy and Critique:**

Foucault's genealogy tracks how discourses arise from power-knowledge practices. Applied to intersectionality, it probes structures enabling claims about it, treating it not as fixed theory but as a contextual tool for political critique.

## **3. Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Other' :**

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) cast women as "the Other," framing gender as constructed and patriarchy systemic—key seeds for intersectionality, though universalizing gender. She linked sexism to racism and classism, comparing women's "Otherness" to Jews, Black people

under racism, and colonized groups. Oppression, she said, stems from human designs, not nature. Her push for universal independence aids analysis of groups reclaiming agency across identities. Despite limits, her social view of "woman" anchors later intersectional feminism.

#### **4. Judith Butler's Theory of Vulnerability:**

Judith Butler's vulnerability framework, in "Vulnerability in Resistance" (2016) and "Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly" (2015), relies on intersectionality to explain uneven vulnerability despite its universality. Neoliberalism, state force, and norms amplify precarity for bodies marked by race, class, gender, and nationality. She distinguishes universal precariousness (embodiment's fragility) from precarity—politically heightened risks for the marginalized. Precarity spotlights intersectional exposure to violence and neglect. Butler reframes vulnerability as resistance's basis: public gatherings by the most vulnerable perform solidarity, transforming shared precarity into collective power and challenging exploitative systems.

#### **5. Literary Representations of Intersectionality across the World:**

##### **5.1 United States of America:**

Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" (1851) calls out white feminism's blindness to Black women's slavery-gender burdens. Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South* (1892) positions Black women as pivotal change-makers. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* traces gender, race, and class in the U.S. South. Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) time-travels through race, gender, and power on slave plantations, linking past to present. Patricia Hill Collins' "Black Feminist Thought" (1990) offers the "matrix of domination" for interlocking oppressions. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Lola Leroy* (1892) deploys sentimental rhetoric against racist-sexist tropes, affirming Black women's moral power in Reconstruction homes. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) charts "mestiza consciousness" amid race, gender, and border identities.

##### **5.2 African Countries:**

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* dissects colonialism, gender, and poverty in Zimbabwe. Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* champions intersecting identities (race, gender, sexuality) as empowerment. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* navigates race, gender, and nationality globally.

##### **5.3 Asian Countries:**

Y. B. Mangunwijaya's *Rara Mendut* (Indonesia, 1973) captures a woman's fight against feudalism, colonialism, and Javanese patriarchy. Tamura Toshiko (Japan) in *Miira no Kuchibeni* (1913) depicts women trapped between patriarchal families and male publishing worlds.

##### **5.3.1 Subaltern Studies Framework/ "Dalit Feminist Standpoint" (Sharmila Rege) - Early 1980s**

Indian literature spotlights caste, gender, class, and religion's "matrix," contesting elite feminism's oversights and "double marginalization." Key works include Bama's (Tamil) *Karukku*

(1992), an autobiography on Dalit-Christian-womanhood discrimination in faith and schools; Meena Kandasamy's (English) *Ms. Militancy* (2010) and *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), wielding Dalit feminism against caste-patriarchy violence; Baby Kamble's (Marathi) In *The Prisons We Broke* (1986), on intra-Dalit patriarchy plus caste traps; Arundhati Roy's (English) *The God of Small Things* (1997), subverting caste-gender love rules, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), weaving in queer-trans politics; Mahasweta Devi's (Bengali) *Draupadi* (1978), merging tribal gender and state violence via mythic reclamation.

#### **6. Contemporary Literary Genres Relevant to Intersectionality:**

Slum narratives are complex; they are both sites of extreme vulnerability due to poverty, health risks, and the threat of eviction and, simultaneously, vibrant economic hubs and resilient communities that support a large portion of the urban informal economy. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Slum* by Katherine Boo (2012) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning, in-depth investigation into life in Annawadi, a slum near Mumbai's airport. It highlights the struggles of residents amidst rapid economic growth, focusing on corruption, ambition, and the fragility of life. *Shantaram* by Gregory David Roberts (2003) is a novel based on the author's own life, featuring a, Australian fugitive who lives in and operates a health clinic within a slum in Mumbai. *A People's History of Heaven* by Mathangi Subramanian (2019) is yet another novel set in a fictional Bengaluru slum, focusing on a group of young women and their community fighting against demolition and forced displacement. *City of Joy* by Dominique Lapierre (1985) is a well-known book detailing the lives of people in a slum in Kolkata, highlighting themes of hope and human resilience in extreme poverty. Similarly, *Planet of Slums* by Mike Davis (2006): A non-fiction analysis that argues that urban growth in developing nations is creating a "planet of slums," focusing on the systemic issues of housing and poverty.

Queer ecologies in literature intersect queer theory with environmental studies, dismantling heteronormative, binary, and anthropocentric views of nature to highlight interdependencies, non-reproductive sexualities, and "queer" natural systems. Key themes include exploring nature as inherently queer, utilizing non-human imagery to challenge societal norms, and examining the impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities. Texts like Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008) use graphical representation to explore queer desire alongside environmental themes, rejecting traditional gender and ecological roles and challenge normative nature of narratives. In terms of decolonial and indigenous perspectives, both Eka Kurniawan's *Man Tiger* (2004) and *My Father's Garden* (2018) by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar explore indigenous and non-hierarchical, "queer" perceptions of nature.

Intersectionality in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction examines how overlapping systems of oppression—such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability—shape the experiences of characters during and after a societal collapse. Rather than acting as a "great equalizer," the apocalypse

in modern narratives often exacerbates existing prejudices, forcing marginalized groups to navigate intensified violence while challenging the patriarchal, white-centric, and heteronormative structures that survive the end of the world. Octavia Butler's *Parable Series* (1993) addresses the intersections of race, gender, and socio-economic class in a collapsed America. Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010) explores intersections of race, gender, and war. Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) examines the false promise of a post-racial America in the context of a zombie apocalypse. Intersectional apocalyptic fiction serves as a "critical social theory," using the lens of the apocalypse to dismantle existing social orders and imagine alternative futures.

## 7. Conclusion:

A broader interpretation of intersectionality moves beyond its original, foundational focus on the double-bind of race and gender discrimination experienced by Black women. Contemporary interpretations, often referred to as an "analytical sensibility," view intersectionality as a comprehensive framework for understanding how all social categories—including class, sexuality, age, disability, nationality, and religion—intersect to produce unique experiences of both oppression and privilege. Intersectionality is no longer viewed as a static formula but as a dynamic, "work-in-progress" framework. It can be context-dependent having the impact of a particular identity factor (e.g., being a migrant) varies significantly depending on the presence of other factors (e.g., gender, class, or country of origin). Also, it can be based on situational privilege or oppression which allows the recognition that a person can be both privileged and oppressed simultaneously, depending on the context.

A broader interpretation of intersectionality in terms of animal rights often termed Intersectional Animal Advocacy or Critical Animal Studies that extends Kimberlé Crenshaw's original framework beyond human social categories to include non-human animals. It posits that the exploitation of animals is not a separate issue, but is interconnected with systems of oppression like racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and imperialism. What's more, intersectionality in ecofeminism intersects with issues of race, class, and global development, addressing the exploitation of marginalized groups and the environmental impacts of capitalism and militarism. Animal Rights highlights the connections between feminism and animal rights, opposing the exploitation of animals in industries and promoting vegetarianism as part of ecofeminist praxis. *The Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair. While primarily focused on human exploitation, this novel demonstrates how the brutal, dangerous, and inhumane conditions of the meatpacking industry are inseparable from the suffering of animals and the capitalist exploitation of poor, often immigrant, workers. *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker which talks about the oppression of Celie is often highlighted through analogies to animal exploitation, linking her domestic imprisonment and forced labor to the treatment of livestock, showing how gendered violence intersects with a speciesist mindset. *The Lives of Animals* (1999) by

J.M. Coetzee. Through the character of Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee compares the atrocities of the Holocaust and industrialized factory farming to the misogynistic objectification of women, arguing that the patriarchal "management" of bodies (both human and animal) stems from the same desire for domination.

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